

MEST M502 Colloquium in Medieval Studies (Meets with CMLT C523)

Topic: Constructions of the Other in Medieval Literature

Time: TR 1:00-2:15

Instructor: Rosemarie McGerr



Negotiating differences between people plays an important role in developing individual self-consciousness, as well as in building communities. At the same time, unexamined assumptions about the significance of differences can be destructive to individuals and communities: constructing the Other in order to suggest the superiority of the Self often involves the demonization or dehumanization of people, which one group can use to justify destruction or exploitation of these “inferior” Others. Literature can provide a tool for direct or indirect Othering, but literature can also serve as a forum for raising questions about the assumptions underlying constructions of Otherness. This course gives students an opportunity to explore representations of the Other in lyrics, narratives, and drama from different times and places in medieval Europe, from the 10th through the 15th centuries. In each case, we will look at how the text constructs Otherness or questions such constructions -- and what implications result for construction of the Self.

Readings will include *The Song of Roland*, *The Song of the Cid*, *Yvain* by Chrétien de Troyes, *The Lais* by Marie de France, *Parzival* by Wolfram von Eschenbach, *The Romance of Silence* by Heldris of Cornwall, *The Divine Comedy* by Dante Alighieri, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* by the Pearl-Poet, and *The City of Ladies* by Christine de Pizan; lyrics by Jews, Christians, and Muslims; and drama for the court and the city.

Early in the semester, students will prepare a 2-3 page paper that explores a recent critical or theoretical discussion of Othering in relation to one of our assigned readings. By mid-term, students will choose a research project that involves comparative analysis of the issue of Otherness in two medieval literary works or one medieval work and one non-medieval work. Students will prepare an abstract and preliminary bibliography (2-3 pages) for the project soon after midterm and turn in the completed paper (22-25 pages, including notes and bibliography) at the end of the semester.