

**Circa 1400 (c.1400)**  
**Spring 2009**  
**E399: Special Topics in Medieval Literature**

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**Office Hrs: By appointment**

### **SYLLABUS: C.1400**

The most common method of internationalizing a curriculum usually involves creating courses which introduce the intellectual and cultural productions of hitherto underrepresented, or even overlooked, nations/states/races/ethnicities into the typically Western-heavy undergraduate course of study. In doing so, we seek to add breadth of mind—and we benefit immensely from the demonstration that every idea has global currency, and that every subject grows in richness when international points of view are explored.

In “c.1400” we will deepen and complicate our insulated, Eurocentric understanding of history itself by focusing upon one period in time, and exploring its aesthetic production in contemporaneous cultures around the world. In a snapshot of important literary productions produced around the year 1400 one notes these works’ shared interest in issues of social and political hierarchy and their relationship to “belief” of all types.

This course will explore the relationship between the social and the divine, c. 1400, in seminal verbal primary texts composed in Europe, Japan, Africa, and the Middle East. Our texts will be derived from such diverse disciplines as literature, philosophy, religion, geography, and political science. Our readings, in translation, will include selections from the following:

#### **TEXTS**

*The Analects*, Confucius, (China, 6thc BCE), Penguin Classics edition  
*The Arabian Nights*, (Syrian manuscript, 14<sup>th</sup> century), Norton Critical Edition, 2007  
*Essays in Idleness*, Yoshida Kenko, (Japan, c.1350), Cosimo Classics, 2005  
*The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (England, 1386-1400), Norton Critical Edition, 2005  
*The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio (Italy, 1353), Signet Classics, 2002  
*An Arab Philosophy of History: Selection from the Prolegomena of Ibn Khaldun of Tunis*,  
Ibn Khaldun (Tunis, 1332-1406), Darwin Press, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed., 1987  
*Sundiata*, oral composition (c.1300, Africa), Longman, 2006  
*The Tale of the Heiki*, (Japan, 1371), course packet  
*The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, Ibn Battutah (Morocco, 1325-1354), Macmillan, 2003  
*The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, (Europe, 14<sup>th</sup> c.), Dover thrift editions, 2006  
Course Packet on reserve

#### **Course Requirements:**

There will be two formal essays and several informal writing assignments. There will be a midterm and final examination. This is a discussion-based course. Meaningful participation in class discussion is essential to successfully completing the course. Other requirements may include: quizzes, class presentations, and viewing a film outside class.

### **Class Participation:**

Class participation includes attendance, in-class group activities, homework, and (most importantly) contributions to class discussion. A discussion class is a community in which the participation of each member matters a great deal: if you are unprepared or absent, you are not only missing an opportunity to enhance your own learning, but you are also failing to fulfill your obligation to the class as a whole. This means that you should be in class and prepared every day. Reading assignments are to be completed prior to the date scheduled--unless indicated, the entire text should be read prior to first day of class discussion. In-class activities cannot be made up, and unexcused absences will affect your grade. More than six absences, for whatever reason, will cause you to fail the course.

### **Papers:**

You will write two formal, 6-8 page critical analyses this term in which you will explore more deeply and independently the issues under discussion. These essays should be focused, well-organized, polished pieces of writing that deal in a perceptive way with texts discussed in this class. Papers will be marked down one full letter grade for each day of tardiness unless you have a documented emergency or illness.

### **Informal Written Responses:**

You will be assigned a written, informal response to each text we read. Your overall grade on these responses will constitute an important component of your Class Participation grade. These responses will not be formally graded, but instead will be marked as either “satisfactory” or “unsatisfactory.” A satisfactory response is one that is at least 2 typed, double-spaced pages long, that responds in a specific and meaningful manner to the assigned prompt and that is reasonably well written. An unsatisfactory response is one that is too brief, that is inattentive to the texts or to material covered in class, that is carelessly written, or that does not engage in a serious-minded way with its topic. These responses will be collected at fairly regular but unannounced intervals. Late papers will not be accepted.

<b>Grading:</b>	Paper #1	20%
	Paper #2	25%
	Midterm	20%
	Final	25%
	Participation	<u>10%</u>
		100%

## **SCHEDULE OF READINGS**

### **Week 1**

Introduction to course  
Geography lessons: “The globe in c.1400”

### **Medieval Europe: “Class” and the Culture of Divinity**

### **Week 2:**

Discussion: Medieval European Christianity material culture, readings from course packet TBA

### **Week 3**

*The Decameron*, Giovanni Boccaccio (Italy, 1353), tales 1-25

### **Week 4-5**

*The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer (England, 1386-1400): *The General Prologue*, *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*; *The Merchant's Tale*; *The Second Nun's Tale*

### **Week 6**

*The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (Europe, 14<sup>th</sup> c.), full text

## **The Middle East and Africa: Nation and the Divine**

### **Week 7**

Discussion: Islam in its own image. Readings from Course Packet TBA

### **Week 8**

*The Arabian Nights*, (Syrian manuscript, 14<sup>th</sup> century), pp. 1-202

### **Week 9**

*The Prolegomena*, Ibn Khaldun (Tunis, 1332-1406), full text

### **Week 10**

*Sundiata*, oral composition (c.1300, Africa), full text

### **Week 11**

*The Travels of Ibn Battutah*, Ibn Battutah (Morocco, 1325-1354), pp. 1-154

## **East Asia: The Socio-Philosophical State of Being**

### **Week 12**

Discussion: Religion, Philosophy, or Culture?

*Analects*, Confucius, Section 1

**Week 13**

*Essays in Idleness*, Yoshida Kenko, (Japan, c.1350), full text

**Week 14**

*The Tale of the Heiki*, (Japan, 1371), Course Packet