

Course Syllabus



English 201

Images, Idolatry and Iconoclasm: Late Medieval to Early Modern

Professor James Simpson

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Spring Term, 2022

M 3-5, Barker 269

Office Hours:

Wednesdays, 2-4, Barker 207

As from the week beginning 31 January, we will meet in-person, in Barker 269

Course Description

Fear of idolatry is a recurrent feature of Western culture. The Christian image threatens to short-circuit the flow of spirituality between humans and God, just as images of the ancient, pagan gods threaten dangerously to preserve the energies of those lascivious and vengeful deities. And images, whether secular or religious, are always potentially threatening to literate

culture: they compete with words, and seem to possess a much more immediate power to mesmerize the imagination. The Protestant Reformation in particular targeted images as the enemy to a true religion of the Word. Legislation in England determined the wholesale destruction of religious images (iconoclasm) between 1538 and 1644. On the other hand, many writers and artists, both secular and religious, look to the image for salvation of sorts. Guided by these perceptions, we will be looking to a range of pre- and post-Reformation texts and contexts. The course will be equally divided between late medieval and early modern texts. Students without Middle English should feel entirely at ease to take this course: all texts will be presented in reader-friendly editions.

Seminars: Beginning week 3, one short response paper (2-300 words), developing an idea relevant to week's work, will be required of each student. Each student should come to each session prepared to share the idea of the short paper as a verbal (not read) presentation lasting no more than 3-4 minutes.

Texts: All foreign language texts will be read in translation; Middle English texts will be read in the original, but in reader-friendly editions. Students will have access to a Harvard virtual classroom (METRO), which facilitates acquisition of rapid Middle English reading competence.

Images: Each week's seminar will have one dedicated image, supplied.

Reading: Most of the texts are either relatively short, or will be presented in readable sections. No preliminary reading will be required for the first introductory seminar. Thereafter reading of primary texts will be required for all seminars, with one required secondary work (listed under "Paratext") suggested a week ahead. A dedicated reading list is available for each week's seminar on the course web site (under Files); apart from primary texts and the paratext, however, these extra texts (listed under "Secondary") are for further reference, and not required reading for the seminar. A further reading list of some relevant general primary and secondary texts is supplied below.

Requirements:

- Attendance at seminars and informed participation in discussion (10%)
- Weekly papers (10%)
- One 1,500-word mid-term paper, due 5pm, Friday 11 March (25%)
- One 4,000-word final paper, due 5pm, Wednesday 11 May (55%)

Texts unavailable online

Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, trans. Frances Horgan (Oxford : Oxford University Press, 1994), lines 1-4058

NB: Not all Chaucer texts may be available in the Benson Riverside edition (see references in weekly reading lists). If so, they will be supplied in a new edition, co-edited by James Simpson.

SYLLABUS (for detailed reading lists and references for each week's texts, see Course website, under Files)

Week 1, Seminar 1, 24 January: Introduction

Week 2, Seminar 2, 31 January: Iconoclasm, the Psyche and the Revolution

Homily against the Peril of Idolatry (Part 1, pp. 105-114, and Part 3, pp. 132-169, in 1683 edition (first published 1563), posted).

Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book 2, canto 12

Fulke Greville, "The Manichaeans did no idols make"; "In night when colours all to black are cast"

Week 3, Seminar 3, 7 February: The Pre-Reformation Image 1: Moving Images and Divinity

Julian of Norwich, *Showings*, Vision 1, Long Text, Part 1.1-9

The Book of Privy Counseling (posted)

Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*, Book 1.11.79 (posted)

Dante, *Paradiso* 33

Nicholas Love, *Nicholas Love's Mirror of the Blessed Life of Jesus Christ* (citation, posted)

Week 4, Seminar 4, 14 February: The Pre-Reformation Image 2: Moving Images Sexual Desire

Ovid, "Echo and Narcissus," *Metamorphoses*, 3.339-510 (posted)

Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*, lines 1-4058 (i.e. the section by Guillaume de Lorris)

Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, "Pygmaleon and his Statue," 4.371-450 (posted)

Week 5, 21 February: PRESIDENT'S DAY HOLIDAY

Week 6, Seminar 5, 28 February: The Pre-Reformation Image 3: Moving Images and Grief

Virgil, *Aeneid*, Book 1.418-519 (any edition of Virgil)

Chaucer, *Book of the Duchess*

Chaucer, *House of Fame*, Book 1

Week 7, Seminar 6, 7 March: The Pre-Reformation Image 4: Images and the Polytheistic Gods

Augustine, *The City of God*, 4.8-10; 4.30-31; 7.18 (posted)

Parys, William. 'Life of Saint Christina' (posted)

Chaucer, *Knight's Tale*

Lydgate, *Troy Book*, Book 2.5392-5940 (pagan idols section) (posted)

Week 8, 14 March: SPRING RECESS

Week 9, Seminar 7, 21 March: The Pre-Reformation Image 5: The Image and Social Media

Thomas Hoccleve, *Series: Complaint, Dialogue with a Friend, Lerne to Dye*

Thomas Hoccleve, *Regement of Princes*, 4964-5019 (Chaucer image)

Week 10, Seminar 8, 28 March: Pre-Reformation Idolatries

Chaucer, General Prologue, Portrait of the Pardoner (posted)

Chaucer, *Pardoner's Tale*

The Croxton Play of the Sacrament

Week 11, Seminar 9, 4 April: Responding to Iconoclasm: Still Life in the The Art Gallery

Edmund Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, Book 2, canto 9

William Shakespeare, *The Winter's Tale*, Act 5

Week 12, Seminar 10, 11 April: A Final Iconoclastic Push

John Milton, *Nativity Ode*

John Milton, *Eikonolastes*, excerpt (posted)

John Milton, *Samson Agonistes*

Week 13, Seminar 11, 18 April: Projects drawn from EEBO or other sources

Week 14, Seminar 12, 25 April: Projects drawn from EEBO or other sources

