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Folklore (FLR) 236: Magic in the Middle Ages

Syllabus

Read this whole syllabus for a complete description of how this course operates!

This course considers the period often considered the most “magical” historical period, the Middle Ages. Looking at the practices of medieval western Europe, particularly Britain, we will examine how medieval culture defined magic, what they hoped to achieve by practicing or forbidding magic, and the ways in which magic reflects the medieval understanding of the universe. Along the way we will investigate the medieval and magical origins of parts of two sometimes controversial modern American holidays, Hallowe’en and Christmas. We will also examine the role of magic in stories — the origin of modern fantasy and superhero narratives — and reflect on what that suggests about our relationship to the world. Finally, we will look at some of the legacies of medieval thought about magic, from modern practices such as throwing coins in fountains to “new religions” such as Wicca and neo-paganism. The study of medieval magic will allow us to understand the role of magic in both the medieval and the modern world and give us the tools to give informed opinions about modern controversies.

This course fulfills the Arts & Letters requirement at the UO.

All texts are available online, most on the course Canvas site. All tests are also online, and there is no need for proctoring (tests are open-book).

Expected Learning Outcomes for this class:

After this class you should be able to:

- Identify, explain and analyze the role of magic in culture and the ways in which it reflects cultural views, anxieties, and worldview
- Identify, explain and analyze the understanding of magic and the supernatural in the Middle Ages
- Identify, explain and analyze continuities in understanding of magic, superstition, and the supernatural between the Middle Ages and the modern period
- Fend off supernatural dwarfs (results not guaranteed)

If you have a documented disability, you’re invited to let me know, and we’ll discuss accommodations for this class in conjunction with Disability Services.

Ominous warning section!

Plagiarism or academic dishonesty will cause you to fail this course. Please review the university policies on academic dishonesty at:

<http://pages.uoregon.edu/tpayne/EG595/plagiarism.pdf>
<http://researchguides.uoregon.edu/citing-plagiarism/plagiarism>

This intensive four-week course is wholly online!

That means that you will need a reliable computer (a desktop or laptop, *not* your phone) and a reliable internet connection. You will need to be online at least four days a week, ideally 5-6, for the duration of the course. You are required to develop a backup plan for access to computers and the internet in case your primary internet fails. Please locate your nearest public library *now* and ascertain its hours so you can go there if you need backup computer or internet access. Quiz, assignment, and discussion deadlines *cannot* be extended for internet problems — so do work before the last minute!

(Note: if you are taking this course from China, I should have already communicated with you about special challenges; e-mail me if you have Chinese internet problems and we will work around them.)

I am not an expert on internet glitches or Canvas problems and unfortunately cannot help with these — for problems with online access, contact the UO Libraries Center for Media and Educational Technologies (CMET), at:
<https://library.uoregon.edu/cmet>
 Canvas support: 541-346-1942 or LMS-support@ithelp.uoregon.edu

Announcements:

So that you get all announcements sent out about the course, set your notification preferences for Announcements to "Notify Me Right Away." Do this by logging into Canvas and clicking on "Profile" on the left, then on "Notifications," and then go down the list of settings to "Announcements" and click on the left-most checkmark to the right of "Announcements."

Browsers:

Note this information on browsers. If you are taking a quiz with an unsupported browser and your internet goes down, your answers will not be saved. So use a supported browser for Canvas.

Canvas supports the last two versions of every browser release. We highly recommend updating to the newest version of whatever browser you are using. Canvas supports the following versions of popular web browsers:

Internet Explorer 11 and Edge

Chrome 50 and 51

Safari 8 and 9

Firefox 45 and 46 (Extended Releases are not supported)

Flash 20 and 21 (used for recording or viewing audio/video and uploading files)

Respondus Lockdown Browser

Some supported browsers may still produce a banner stating *Your browser does not meet the minimum requirements for Canvas*. If you have upgraded your browser but you are still seeing the warning banner, try logging out of Canvas and deleting your browser cookies.

Grading:

The maximum number of points is 200

Ungraded survey: 5 points

Five short writing assignments: total 36% of grade

Writing assignments 1-5 (do 4 out of 5): 15 points each

Writing assignment 6: 20 points

Six quizzes: total 40% of grade

Quizzes 1, 2, 3 and 5 = 10 points each

Quizzes 4 and 6 = 20 points each

Discussion contributions: 24% of grade

(six modules, 8 points each)

Then you get 1 extra bonus point for finishing all assignments.

Come prepared to plunge in, discuss and learn!

Estimated workload:

This is an intensive 4-credit class, equal to a class that meets three times a week for a ten-week term. You will need to spend time viewing the videos, reading the lectures, doing the reading, writing the assignments, participating on the discussion boards, and studying for and taking the quizzes. Please plan to put in the time accordingly, and plan ahead to give these assignments the time necessary. On the plus side, what could be a more interesting way to spend your time!

How the course works

The course is divided into six *Modules* (units). Modules 1, 2, 3 and 5 are short.

Modules 4 and 6 are long. The detailed Schedule below spells this all out precisely.

The modules will go like this:

First week: modules 1 (Mon-Weds) and 2 (Thurs-Sun)

Second week: modules 3 (Mon-Weds) and half of 4 (Thurs-Weds)

Third week: end of module 4 (ends Weds), module 5 (Thurs-Sun)

Fourth week: module 6 (Mon-Sun)

Plan to put in some work every weekday, taking only two days maximum off per week.

It is important to keep up and do each module's work within the designated time period. This allows everyone to discuss the module's material at the same time. You will also need to take each module's quiz *before the end of that module* — another reason it is vital to keep up!

For each Module, you will do the following:

1. View the video (weeks 1 and 2 only)
2. Read the short "Lecture"
3. Do the assigned reading (articles and chapters of books)
4. Write and turn in the writing assignment. **You may skip one writing assignment (except not module 6's writing assignment).**

5. Participate in the discussion board: minimum of 1 substantial observation and two substantial responses to others' comments
6. Take the quiz

I suggest that for week 1, you divide your workload this way:

Monday (first module of the week): watch the video, read the "Lecture," read the assigned texts, start on writing assignment

Tuesday: Finish and submit writing assignment. Visit discussion board, post your first observation, read others' observations (post a response if you want).

Wednesday: Visit discussion board, read, post remaining responses. Study material again and take quiz.

Thursday (second module of the week): watch the video, read the "Lecture," read the assigned texts, start on writing assignment

Friday: Finish and submit writing assignment. Visit discussion board, post your first observation, read others' observations (post a response if you want).

Saturday: Visit discussion board, read, post remaining responses. Study material again and take quiz.

Sunday: Take a break! Relax!

Note: again, you may *skip one writing assignment* from modules 1-5. If you do not skip one writing assignment, I will count the four highest grades only. You may not skip the final writing assignment (for module 6).

Discussions

For the discussions you must post a substantial original observation in answer to the question (maximum 3 points), and then at least 2 substantial responses to others' comments (maximum 2 points for each of 2 comments, plus 1 extra bonus point possible for true awesomeness). Responses such as "Yeah" and "Nice comment!" do not earn any points. Be polite and civil — no flaming! Rules of civilization apply!

Finding course materials

The easiest way to find the course materials on the Canvas course site is by going to the course home page, which will list all the Modules with their assignments listed in the order you should complete them.

You may also get at the various components of the course (quizzes, lecture files and video files, reading files, assignments, and discussions) by clicking on the relevant term on the menu on the left side of the course home page on Canvas.

Note that all times specified are Pacific (U.S. West Coast) times. Plan accordingly if you are in a different time zone!

Schedule

First Week**Module 1: Monday-Wednesday, June 20-22****What is Magic? Why try to use it?**

What to do—

All of the following are found on the course site on Canvas.

1. Take the 10-question Survey that helps you assess whether an online course is right for you. You get 5 points for answering this survey no matter what your answers are.
2. Watch the video: “What is magic? Why try to use it?”
3. Read the short lecture: “Introducing Medieval Magic”
4. Reading (on Canvas):
 - Richard Kieckhefer, “The Common Tradition of Medieval Magic” (from *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 56-64)
 - Catherine Rider, “Common Magic” (from *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, pp. 303-31)

Take notes and think about the material as you go.

5. Write and turn in the writing assignment (200+ words). The question is: “Judging from the two articles on common magic read for this module, and any other information in the module you find relevant, what kinds of things did medieval people hope to accomplish by using magic? Use a number of specific examples in your essay.”

(See the online writing assignment sheet for more specifics.) It should be submitted in a Word file (.doc or .docx) to me via the Canvas site. It is due **Wednesday, June 20, at 11:59 pm Pacific time**. But I recommend doing it earlier, as outlined above, because there are other things to do afterwards!

6. Read the guidelines for discussions above. Then go to the Discussion section of Canvas, where you will already be enrolled into your Discussion Group.

This week only, start by making a post introducing yourself: your name, your major, where you are taking this class (for instance, "I'm at home in California" — this part is optional), and something interesting about yourself (for instance, "I once appeared as an extra on Doctor Who"). Then you may go on to answer the discussion question, or you may answer the discussion question in a separate post. This discussion board closes **Wednesday, June 20, at 11:59 pm Pacific time**.

7. In preparation for the quiz, you may wish to take the optional, ungraded Practice Quiz (5 questions).

8. Study the materials again and take the actual quiz. The quiz is *timed*, has 10 questions, and will take 15 minutes. It is open-book, because how could I keep you from looking stuff up? But it is designed to go fast enough that you will not have time to look stuff up. Do not start this quiz until you have studied all the material, are ready, and have 15 uninterrupted minutes. The quiz cannot be repeated or stopped in the middle, so you need to be ready for it the first time around! It is due **Wednesday, June 20, at 11:59 pm Pacific time**. So start before the last minute!

Module 2: Thursday-Sunday, June 23-26**An Introduction to Magical Beings and Creatures**

What to do—

All of the following are found on the course site on Canvas.

1. Watch the video: "Banishing Supernatural Creatures"
2. Read the short lecture: "The Magical and the Human"
3. Reading:
 - Jacqueline Simpson, "On the Ambiguity of Elves" (from *Folklore* 122 (2011), 76-83)
 - Walter Map, *Courtiers' Trifles*, pp. 27-31, 149-59, 345-49
 - "Brownie" (from Katherine Briggs, *Encyclopedia of Fairies*, pp. 46-49)
 - Charm against a Sudden Stitch

Take notes and think about the material as you go.

4. Write and turn in the writing assignment (400-600 words). The question is: "What patterns do you see in how humans interacted with magical beings? Choose one or two patterns or themes and analyze a number of examples from the reading, video, etc. You might wish to look at themes such as when things go wrong between humans and supernatural beings; or the ways in which supernatural beings approach humans; or how human men interact with supernatural women; or the characteristics of the fairy world or 'Otherworld' — or any other ideas you find interesting."

(See the online assignment for more specifics.) It should be submitted in a Word file (.doc or .docx) on the Canvas site. It is due **Sunday, June 26, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

5. Now discuss the discussion topic on the discussion boards in your assigned groups.
6. Study the materials again and take the actual quiz. The quiz is *timed* and will take 15 minutes. As always, it is open-book, but don't count on having time to look stuff up. It is due **Sunday, June 26, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

Second Week

Module 3: Monday-Wednesday, June 27-29

Everyday Magic

What to do—

All of the following are found on the course site on Canvas.

No videos from now on!

1. Read the short lecture: "Magic in Everyday Life"
2. Reading:
 - Stephen Wilson, "House, Work, and the Land" (from *The Magical Universe: Everyday Ritual and Magic in Premodern Europe*, pp. 3-24)
 - Richard Kieckhefer, "Charms: Prayers, Blessings, and Adjurations" (from *Magic in the Middle Ages*, pp. 69-75).

Take notes and think about the material as you go.

3. Write and turn in the writing assignment (400-600 words). The topic is "From the reading and other material for this module, identify several examples of the law of similarity and the law of contagion, and discuss how they operate in these examples. Specify where you got each particular example from, for instance, 'Wilson, p.

42.'" It should be submitted in a Word file (.doc or .docx) on the Canvas site. It is due **Wednesday, June 29, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

4. Now discuss the discussion topic on the discussion boards in your assigned groups.
5. Study the materials again and take the actual quiz. The quiz is timed and will take 15 minutes. It is due **Wednesday, June 29, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

Module 4: Thursday-Wednesday, June 30-July 6 Magic and Religion: Contradiction, or Good Partners?

What to do—

All of the following are found on the course site on Canvas, except where noted.

1. Read the short lecture: "From Magic to God, from Fairies to Demons"
2. Reading: (extra long this time, but there is a week to do it, and then next week's is much faster!)
 - Ronald Hutton, "The Legacy of Shadows" (from *Pagan Religions of the Ancient British Isles*, pp. 284-305) (this selection breaks off in mid-chapter — you can stop reading around p. 304)
 - Keith Thomas, "The Magic of the Medieval Church" (from *Religion and the Decline of Magic*, pp. 25-50)
 - Catherine Rider, "Charms, Prayers, and Prophecies: Magic and Religion" (chapter 2, pp. 46-69) and "Channeling the Stars and Summoning Demons: Magical Texts" (chapter 5, pp. 109-128), from *Magic and Religion in Medieval England*. These are *not on Canvas*, but are available online through the Knight Library. Go to the library homepage (<http://library.uoregon.edu/>), sign in as a student, and do a search under "Title" for *Magic and Religion in Medieval England* — you will get a link that will take you to the entire book, which you can read online, or download for two weeks.

Take notes and think about the material as you go.

3. Write and turn in the writing assignment (400-600 words). The question is: 'What distinguished "magic" from "religion" (in this case, the Christian religion) in the Middle Ages? Answer this in two parts: a) how a churchman would have answered it, b) how an ordinary person would have answered it. Use specific examples from the reading in each part.'

(See the online assignment sheet for more specifics.) It should be submitted in a Word file (.doc or .docx) to me via the Canvas site. It is due **Wednesday, July 6, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

4. Now discuss the discussion topic on the discussion boards in your assigned groups.
5. Study the materials again and take the actual quiz. This quiz is longer than the others and worth more points — 20 questions and 20 points, where most other quizzes have 10 questions and are worth 10 points. The quiz is timed and will take 30 minutes. It is due **Wednesday, July 6, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

Third Week

Module 5: Thursday-Sunday, July 7-10

Witches, Hallowe'en, and a little bit of Christmas

What to do—

All of the following are found on the course site on Canvas.

1. Read the short lecture: "Witches, Hallowe'en, and a Little Bit of Christmas"
2. Reading:
 - Ronald Hutton, "Samhain," "Saints and Souls" and "The Modern Hallowe'en" (from *The Stations of the Sun*, pp. 360-85) (all in the same file on Canvas)
 - "Witchcraft" (from *The Cambridge History of Magic and Witchcraft in the West*, pp. 371-80) (a rather dense selection!)
 - "This Just In! What 'The Night Before Christmas' Really Reveals about Santa," on my history blog: <https://pastisaforeigncountry.wordpress.com/>
 - Nisse and Tomtes: <http://www.ingebretsens.com/culture/traditions/legend-of-nisse-and-tomte>

Take notes and think about the material as you go.

3. Write and turn in the writing assignment (400-600 words). It should be submitted in a Word file (.doc or .docx) on the Canvas site. It is due **Sunday, July 10, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**
4. Now discuss the topic on the discussion boards in your assigned groups.
5. Study the materials again and take the actual quiz. The quiz is timed and will take 15 minutes. It is due **Sunday, July 10, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

Fourth Week

Module 6: Monday-Sunday, July 11-17

Modern Magic: Survivals, Revivals and Neo-Paganism

Note that this is a seven-day module ending on Sunday!

What to do—

1. Read the short lecture: "The Long Sweep of Magic"
2. Reading:
 - Ralph Merrifield, "Survivals, Revivals and Reinterpretations" (from *The Archaeology of Ritual and Magic*, pp. 46-62)
 - Readings on Wicca and Neo-Paganism

Take notes and think about the material as you go.

3. Write and turn in the writing assignment (600+ words). There is a choice of topics; see the course Canvas site for details. It should be submitted in a Word file (.doc or .docx) on the Canvas site. It is due **Sunday, July 17, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**
4. Now discuss the discussion topic on the discussion boards in your assigned groups.
5. Study the materials again and take the actual quiz. This quiz is longer than the others and worth more points — 20 questions and 20 points, where most other quizzes had 10 questions and were worth 10 points. The quiz is timed and will take 30 minutes. It is due **Sunday July 17, at 11:59 pm Pacific time.**

