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Office Hours: Wednesdays, 3:00–5:00PM or  
 via Skype by appointment  
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## HIST 97B: Encounters of the Third Kind: Exploring the Unknown in Medieval and Early Modern Europe

Wednesdays, 12PM-2:50PM | Bunche 5288

Humans are curious creatures always driven to explore the world around us. This course examines the role of travel narratives and adventure stories in shaping Western ideas and fantasies of peoples, lands, and possibilities beyond Europe. We will be comparing actual accounts of explorers with descriptions of journeys to fantastical worlds in order to understand the role of the real and imagined, the perceived and conceived in the construction of cultural and spatial boundaries.

**The Question:** What do Western (European) accounts of non-Western places and peoples (real or imagined) reveal about Western society and the intellectual culture of medieval and early modern Europe?



**Course Materials:** This course is designed to help history majors refine their critical analysis, synthesis, and research skills. Class time will be devoted to collective analysis of primary sources, discussion of methodology, consideration of narrative structure, and formal presentations of research findings. Students are not expected to have prior knowledge of medieval or early modern European history. Relevant historical background will be provided by the instructor each week.

There is one **REQUIRED BOOK:** *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville*, trans. C.W.R.D. Moseley (New York: Penguin Books, 2005).

All other required texts are available **online** through the course website. The readings are divided into **WEEKLY PACKETS** and located under the appropriate week heading. Students are required to download and complete the reading packets each week before class.

During class meetings, students will be expected to discuss the readings critically and creatively. Students must have the **readings on hand in class** (printed or via electronic device). If you do not have the readings available, I reserve the right to dismiss you from class.

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**Course Requirements:** Please visit the course website for guidelines on these assignments.

*Homework assignments can be found in back of each week's reading packet!!!*

- 20% Weekly Homework and Participation (*Two absences is an automatic fail*)
- 5% Paper Proposal and List of Secondary Sources: Week 5 (May 3)
- 20% Annotated Bibliography: Week 7 (May 17)
- 5% Research Presentation: Week 9 (May 31)
- 25% Paper Outline or Rough Draft and Bibliography: Week 9 (May 31)
- 25% Final Paper and Bibliography: Finals Week, Wednesday, June 14 by midnight

Weekly assignments are due in hard copy at the beginning of class.

Annotated bibliographies and final Papers should be submitted via Turnitin.com

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### Late Assignments

If you intend to be absent (*you are allowed 1 absence*), you must e-mail me your homework assignment by 12:PM on its due date.

Late assignments will NOT be accepted without medical or other valid documentation.

Late assignments may always be submitted for instructor feedback. No credit will be given.



**Week 1 (April 5): Introduction: Negotiating Difference**

Why study history through the lens of travel and travel writing?  
 What is culture?

**Readings:**

Encounter with the pagans:

- Adam of Bremen, *History of the Archbishops of Hamburg-Bremen* (1073–1076)

**Week 2 (April 12): Encounters on the Periphery of Europe and Beyond**

European encounters with “other” peoples and cultures took on many forms: trade, pilgrimage, crusade, war, diplomacy, missionary work, colonization, exploration, etc. Such encounters with "otherness" led to attempts to explain and interpret the origins and nature of ethnic and cultural (linguistic, religious, and social) differences. Europeans were curious about who these people were and where they had come from. How did European travelers portray “other” peoples? What do they admire? What do they criticize? Does the type of encounter (mercantile, missionary, exploration, etc.) affect the language of representation?

**Readings:**

The Mongol Empire:

- *The Journey of William of Rubruck to the Eastern Parts of the World* (1253–1255)

The Levant:

- *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1357–1371), Prologue, chapters 1, 3–4, 7, 10, 15; pp. 43–46, 49–54, 63–67, 76–80, 104–110

**Homework:**

1. “Using YRL” Worksheet
2. “Making Evidence Meaningful:” Writing Workshop #1

**Week 3 (April 19): Encounters in the East**

Is China the last frontier? What happens in the lands beyond the known world?

**Readings:**

- T and O Maps
- *The Travels of Sir John Mandeville* (1357–1371), Chapters 17-19, 21-23, 26, 30-31; pp. 115–126, 131–145, 156–160, 167–177
- *The Travels of Marco Polo* (1276–1291)

**Homework:**

1. “Making Evidence Meaningful:” Writing Workshop #2
2. Choose a paper topic; receive instructor approval by midnight Wednesday, April 19 @ midnight

**Week 4 (April 26): Encounters in the West**

Adventurers and explorers of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries were highly influenced by the writings of their predecessors. For example, Christopher Columbus was familiar with the travel narratives of John Mandeville and Marco Polo. In what ways are early accounts of encounter in the Americas colored by European preconceptions and beliefs about foreign lands and peoples?

**Readings:**

- excerpts from the Journal of Christopher Columbus, first voyage (1492)
- Letter of Dr. Chanca on the Second Voyage of Columbus (1493)
- Bartolomé de Las Casas, *In Defense of the Indians* (c. 1548–1550)
- Michel de Montaigne, excerpt from “Of the Cannibals” (1570–1592)

**Secondary Source:**

Klarer, Mario. “Cannibalism and the Carnavalesque: Incorporation as Utopia in the Early Image of America.” *New Literary History* 30:2 (1999): 389–410.

**Homework:**

1. Secondary Source Review #1
2. Bring your primary source to class or demonstrate its availability online

**Week 5 (May 3): Journeys to the Afterlife**

Europeans were just as curious about the worlds that await them in the afterlife as the world around them. Visions of the afterlife were a popular narrative genre. These visions usually took the form of a journey through heaven, hell, and purgatory and were influenced by the eschatological concerns of the day. What do these accounts of voyages through the afterlife reveal about the intellectual culture and Christian worldview of the Middle Ages? Are there any parallels between the travel narratives of explorers and adventures that we have been reading and vision literature?

**Readings:**

- *St. Patrick's Purgatory* (1180)
- Canto V from Dante Alighieri's *Inferno* (1313–1321)
- Review: <http://danteworlds.laits.utexas.edu/circle2.html>

**Homework:**

1. Reading Response #1
2. **[DUE: RESEARCH PROPOSAL + LIST OF SOURCES]**

**Week 6 (May 10): No Class! Work on bibliography****Week 7 (May 17): Dream Journeys**

Dream visions were a common literary device used by medieval authors to reveal knowledge or truth not available to the dreamer in a normal waking state. Most medieval dream visions follow a set pattern: the narrator recounts his



experience falling asleep, dreaming, and waking. In the course of the dream, the narrator, often with the aid of a guide, makes his way through an imagined landscape. The characters that he encounters offer him new perspectives that could provide potential resolutions to his waking concerns. The subject of dream visions varies widely. Some dreams lead the narrator through the afterlife (*Pearl*), others provide a glimpse into the erotic (*Romance of the Rose*; Shakespeare's *A Midsummer's Night Dream*) or offer potentially subversive social commentary (Chaucer). How do dream visions use imagined landscapes to represent and debate the major social and philosophical issues gripping medieval Europe?

**Readings:**

- *Pearl* (14<sup>th</sup> century)
- Geoffrey Chaucer, *The House of Fame* (1380)

**Homework:**

1. **[DUE: ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY]** via [Turnitin.com](https://www.turnitin.com)

**Week 8 (May 24): Imagined Voyages and Utopias**

“The grass is always greener on the other side!” It is part of the human condition to imagine lands and places where people are not riddled with the same difficulties and concerns as us. These are places where people live in peace and security, and engage in activities that bring pleasure and joy. How did Europeans envision other worlds, that is, fictional lands substantially different from our own? Were their imaginative projections always positive? What do accounts of voyages to imagined or idyllic lands reveal about the intellectual culture of medieval and early modern Europe?

**Readings:**

- *The Voyage of Bran* (8<sup>th</sup> century)
- *The Land of Cockaigne* (mid 14<sup>th</sup> century)
- Thomas More, *Utopia* (1516)

**Homework:**

1. Reading Response #2

**Week 9 (May 31): In-class presentations and research progress reports****[DUE: OUTLINE OR ROUGH DRAFT + BIBLIOGRAPHY]**

Note: If you choose to submit an outline rather than a rough draft, your outline should be no less than 10-pages. That means your outline should be as detailed as a rough draft but present your information in bulleted form.

**Week 10: One-on-One Instructor Meetings**

Sign up sheet will be passed out Week 9

**Finals Week (Wednesday, June 14):****[DUE: FINAL PAPER + BIBLIOGRAPHY]**

Please submit your final draft via Turnitin.com by Wednesday, June 7 by midnight.