Dirty, Sexy, Middle Ages
Senior Seminar ENG 461-02

Wednesdays, 4:00-6:45 p.m.
Spring 2015
Dr. Meredith Clermont-Ferrand

When we think of the Middle Ages, the period in Europe between 550-1485, we imagine a time where society and literature were dominated by the joyless routines and overbearing doctrines of the Christian church.

As you can see, that was not so! In this course we will read medieval poetry, drama and prose that exposes the often unseen and unexperienced medieval interest in all that was dirty and sexy.

Medieval writers loved to make their audience laugh. Moreover, since the average medieval person lacked a formal education, their humor was earthy, bawdy, and naughty. The average medieval person also loved to hear his government criticized through humor in drama and poetry.

In this course we will explore how medieval writers created narrative, humorous, sexually charged spaces and the ramifications of those disruptive narratives for the hegemony. Building on the work of Bakhtin and using literary theories such as Queer, Marxist, New Histori and others, we will examine and reframe how scatological humor, political satire, sexualized romances and anti-clerical drama were simultaneously celebrated, marginalized and hybridized as part of medieval culture.

The first semester introduces you to the subject matter—medieval literature and literary theory and requires you to write a proposal for an extended academic research essay on the naughty, sexy, politically charged topic of your choice.