In recent years, the study of English literary and cultural texts has embraced the impulse to examine the borders between medieval and Renaissance. Scholars have scrutinized the terms as designating both historical periods and conceptual categories; they have examined the assumptions and analytical frameworks that these terms have invoked and sustained. Their work bears fruit in new accounts of relationships between literary texts and cultural practices that move beyond notions of difference and dependence, rupture and continuity, to underscore a more complex historiography, one that pursues diachronic notions of repetition, reinvention, appropriation, renewal, revival, survival, and reciprocity. Assuming neither the foundational status of the medieval nor the cultural superiority of the early modern, this new literary historiography investigates how pre- and early modern texts mutually animate each other. Early readings will focus on theories of periodization. Participants will then examine topics, genres, and reading strategies that chart pathways between medieval and early modern.

Schedule: Thursdays, 1 – 4:30 p.m., 22 September through 8 December 2011, excluding 27 October and 24 November.

At present, this syllabus primarily includes those materials that we’ll consider as core or essential readings for each session. This list is subject to revision as all of us discover new materials, and as our conversation turns in particular directions.

The document site provided for our seminar by the Folger Institute will contain all or virtually all of the secondary readings that I’m designating as required. In a few cases, the document site will also contain primary readings. For the most part, though, seminar participants will be responsible for acquiring or finding access to the primary readings from their own personal or institutional libraries. The primary readings that I’ve identified, with one or two exceptions, are canonical and therefore readily available. Generally, specific editions of the primary works will not be a matter for concern. There will be a reserve shelf for our seminar in the Folger Library; this will include usable and/or standard (not rare) editions of all of the primary works that currently appear on the
following list. For each of our seminar sessions, we will make use of the wonderful resources of the Folger collections, examining items germane to the topics and readings for the day.

There will be no writing assignments for this seminar. Participants will make presentations on their current research, as it relates to the main topics of the seminar.

The brief overview of each session provided below is meant simply to suggest possible directions for investigation and discussion. I encourage additional suggestions for issues we might pursue.

**Session 1**
**Sept 22 Introduction: Why Periodization?**

How and why do scholars imagine the Middle Ages and the Renaissance (yes, we’ll consider terminology) as historical periods and conceptual categories? Where does the interest in these matters come from? Why do these questions matter?

C.S. Lewis. “De Descriptione Temporum: Inaugural Lecture from the Chair of Medieval and Renaissance Literature Cambridge University, 1954.”

**Session 2**
**Sept 29 Liturgies**

How has liturgy figured in medieval and early modern literary studies and how can the examination of liturgy shape our conceptions of med/Ren periodization? What are the relationships between liturgy and literary production?

**Primary Works:**
John Skelton, “Phyllyp Sparowe”
Sir Phillip Sidney, *An Apology for Poetry*
Session 3
Oct 6 Hybrid Forms

This session will focus on an examination of rare materials, especially service and prayer books from the Folger collections that illustrate the liturgical entities and themes discussed in session 2. Some possible foci: the mixing of religious ideologies (traditional and reformed); materialities (manuscript/print); languages (Latin/English). Reading assignments will be relatively light for this session, to catch up from the previous week and/or get a head start on significant reading for the next two sessions.

Primary Works:

Secondary Reading:

Session 4
Oct 13 Antiquarians I: English Language and English History

How do early modern antiquarians like Matthew Parker contribute to conceptions of historical and literary periodization? How do the material labors of recovery and preservation make the ‘medieval’ possible, especially in the case of England’s Anglo-Saxon past? How does awareness of that past figure in imaginative literature of the sixteenth century?
**Primary Works:**

**Secondary Reading:**

For this session, the seminar will welcome visiting scholar William Sherman, Professor of English at University of York (UK) and a Folger Library Fellow.

**Session 5**
**Oct 20  Antiquarians II: Compilation, Evidence, Saints’ Lives**

How do habits and persuasions of early modern antiquarians like Robert Cotton create the English Middle Ages? What kinds of sources count in that endeavor? What happens to medieval narratives of saints? How might antiquarian modes of discerning England’s medieval past apply to artifacts like the Chester plays? (This last question provides a segue to our next session.)

**Primary Works:**
Ranulf Higden, *Polychronicon*. The Folger has the 19th century 9 vol. edition by Rev. Joseph Rawson Lumby for the Rolls Society (DA25 .B5 no. 41). The first volume of this edition is available and downloadable from Google Books—probably your simplest point of access. Since this edition contains Higden’s Latin text with two facing page English translations, it is not the easiest thing to read in electronic format. Skim the editor’s introduction and read the first chapter (skim chapter 2 if you have time)
Saints’ Lives, Medieval and Early Modern: For the medieval, please read a few lives from the *South English Legendary* (your choice) appearing on the TEAMS online archive: [http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/tmsmenu.htm](http://www.lib.rochester.edu/camelot/teams/tmsmenu.htm)
The saints’ lives on this site can be found in these collections: *Middle English Legends of Women Saints* (ed. Reames) and *Saints’ Lives in Middle English Collections* (ed. Whatley with Thompson and Church). Since we will be focusing on female saints’ lives, read the life of St. Frideswide in Reames—and, if you have a chance, the life of Mary Magdalene in the same collection. But the lives of male saints in the Whatley collection are suitable too.

Life of Saint Winifred from Folger MS V. b. 224


**Secondary Reading:**


**Oct 27  Free Week**

**Session 6**

**Nov 3  Performing the Bible**

How do traditional and evangelical conceptions of the Bible and biblical reading inform the production of scripturally-based theater in the sixteenth century? How does theater function as a form of vernacular scripture? How do different relationships between text and performance speak to modes of scriptural reading?

**Primary Works:**

*Chester Mystery Cycle,* Post-Crucifixion plays (Harrowing of Hell, Resurrection, Emmaus, Ascension, Pentecost; and if you have time Prophets of Antichrist, Coming of Antichrist, and Last Judgment)

Secondary Reading:

Session 7
Nov 10 Performing Allegory

What happens to allegorical drama across the med/Ren period, and how is our understanding of this change complicated by unique witnesses such as the Castle of Perseverance and Respublica? What non-dramatic sources and influences can help us to ask new questions about these works?

For this session, the seminar will welcome visiting scholar Gail McMurray Gibson, Professor of English at Davidson College and Folger Library Fellow.

Primary Works:
The Castle of Perseverance
Respublica
Sackville and Norton, Gorboduc (selections)
Thomas Middleton, The World Tossed at Tennis

Secondary Reading:
Henry Spelman. The History and Fate of Sacrilege. 4th ed. London, 1895. Chap. 1, section one; chap. 6 (on Norfolk monasteries).
Nov 17 Performing Saints I

How does biblical saint Mary Magdalene encode ideologies of feminine devotion and of religious and theatrical embodiment across the med/Ren period? What are the implications of such ideologies for the histories of spirituality and of theater?

Primary Works:
Digby Mary Magdalene
Lewis Wager, Life and Repentance of Mary Magdalene (in White, Reformation Biblical Drama—on reserve)

Secondary Reading:

Nov 24 Thanksgiving

Session 9
Dec 1 Performing Saints II

What constitutes gendered sanctity and martyrdom across the med/Ren period? Why do virgin martyrs matter? How does theater reinvent the medieval virgin martyr for early modern audiences? In what ways do dramas of the saints perform the different confessions?

Primary Works
Osbern Bokenham, “Life of Saint Dorothy.”

Secondary Reading:


**Session 10**
**Dec 8** Presentations; Wrap-up and Directions for the Future