**Getting Medieval on New York City**

New York City is a wormhole that relativizes American space-time “in a New York minute.” Founded at the close of the Middle Ages, the City is quite medieval, boasting the Cloisters, several cathedrals, and the remains of saints. These medievalish relics collapse distinctions between historical periods. In this course, we will read contemporary and pre-modern literature in order to explore how assumptions about temporality structure identity categories (especially those having to do with sex, gender, race, religion, and “the war on terror”). And we will “get medieval” on New York, transgressing those norms through first-hand experiences of the City.

Robert Glück

Fukuyama “The End of History?”

Zizek Cloisters

Cathedrals

Metropolitan Museum

Saints Relics

Columbia and Morgan Libraries

Edgar Allan Poe

Oscar Wilde, *De profundis*

gay as historically contingent

modernity and radical Islam

St. Ann’s Armenian Catholic Cathedral (12th Street)

*After Hours*

The Life of Saint Alexis

A.W. Strouse

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English, 4406

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Judy Pryor-Ramirez, Director CESJ

Eugene Lang College, the New School

65 West 11th Street, room 353  
New York, NY 10011

Dear Judy Pryor-Ramirez,

I am writing to apply to teach in the Reading New York City Program at Eugene Lang College. I am a poet and an advanced doctoral candidate in English at the City University of New York, where I study and teach medieval literature. My research (published in some of the top journals in my field) considers medieval poetry from a queer perspective, and my creative practice (including a book of poems and a forthcoming collection of stories) engages historicity through a queer lens. My philosophy of teaching is largely shaped by my undergraduate education at Eugene Lang.

My teaching specializations are in medieval poetry, linguistic history, and queer theory. I teach using many of the same methods employed by my most effective professors at Lang. Lang taught me that real learning means actively creating knowledge. Students in my classroom become immersed in the “dead” languages that we study (like Old and Middle English), and they bring the languages to life by speaking and writing in them. Learning to think inductively and independently, students rigorously construct for themselves the “rules” of the language. One of my recent evaluators called my class on Chaucer “easily the best I have seen in the past nine years I have been teaching,” and another reviewer commended my “roll up your sleeves” approach, saying that it keeps students’ “books and their minds open.”

In a recent article, I proposed the need for a “queer” pedagogy that situates scholastic norms in a dialectical relationship with transgressions of those norms. Following that theory, I aim to teach students how to master the rules, in order that they can creatively and productively subvert them. In the course that I propose to teach at Lang, “Getting Medieval on New York: On the Queerness of Time,” students would examine how normative time structures categories of identity.

Students would explore temporal norms through readings of queer medievalist Carolyn Dinshaw, who has shown how gender and sexuality are bound up in formulations of “modernity.” Students would consider, too, how the contemporary “War on Terror” has been licensed, protested, and theorized through invocations of the “medieval” (a term applied to diverse phenomena like Islam, anti-Semitism, and torture). Students would investigate medieval stories about time-travel and about time-queers (like the fourteenth-century *Book of Margery Kempe*); and they would place these stories alongside twentieth-century queer literature that takes the Middle Ages as a frame of reference (like Robert Glück’s *Margery Kempe*). Students would immerse themselves in New York’s medieval artifacts through a tour of the Cloisters Museum, through fieldtrips to the city’s many Gothic cathedrals and shrines, and through visits to the medieval, shrine-like monuments that memorialize contemporary acts of violence. By “getting medieval” and queerly touching these relics, we would reformulate the temporal norms that constrain our conceptions of sex, gender, race, and religion.

My own work explores these issues creatively (as with my forthcoming *My Gay Middle Ages*). And I engage these issues academically (as with my dissertation project, which considers how medieval theorists “queered” phallologocentric norms through interpretations of the Old Testament commandment to circumcise). This course similarly would reach around the disciplinary boundaries that separate “creative” and “academic,” so that students would write both academically and creatively about their time-travelling experiences. Such a course would complement Lang’s course offerings in Religious Studies, Gender Studies, Literary Studies, History, and Philosophy.

Yours,

A.W. Strouse

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M.Phil. in English, CUNY Graduate Center (2012)

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