



THE NEWBERRY

*Center for Renaissance Studies*

## *Lives and Deeds*

### *Writing Biography in the Middle Ages*

Led by **Jonathan Lyon**, *University of Chicago*

**Fridays, January 9 to March 13, 2015, 2:00 to 5:00 pm**

This seminar will focus on a pair of common genres of literature in the Middle Ages, “lives” (*vitae*) and “deeds” (*gestae*), in order to introduce students to medieval biographical writing. Participants will read not only saints’ lives, which have attracted a great deal of scholarly interest in recent decades, but also the lives and deeds of less saintly kings, queens, nobles, popes, bishops, and abbots. All course readings will be in English. However, the group will occasionally work with the original Latin texts in class in order to identify which specific Latin terms (descriptive adjectives, for example) appear in key passages participants want to compare and contrast.



The seminar has two main goals:

- First, participants will analyze and discuss what kinds of personal qualities are emphasized in each of these texts. While we cannot necessarily rely on these sources for reliable biographical details about their subjects, we can use them to enhance our understanding of what medieval authors considered to be positive and negative traits, behaviors and actions in the members of their society.
- Second, participants will explore the individual authors’ biases and rhetorical strategies with the aim of analyzing the goals and agendas of medieval writers of biographical texts. In the process, we will work to build a complex picture of the uses of biographical forms of writing during the Middle Ages.

**Application deadline: November 3**

Enrollment is limited. Register online at [www.newberry.org/renaissance](http://www.newberry.org/renaissance). To earn optional credit you must also enroll in either a Newberry course at your campus (available at several Chicago-area schools) or an independent study. Contact the Center for Renaissance Studies consortium faculty representative at your home institution for your university’s policies and to apply for travel reimbursement. Enrollment fees are waived for consortium members.

[www.newberry.org/renaissance](http://www.newberry.org/renaissance)

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