

EN 322: British Literature I

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Course Description

*For out of old feldes, as men seyth,
Cometh al this newe corn fro yer to yere,
And out of olde bokes, in good feyth,
Cometh al this newe science that men lere.*

– Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, 22-25

This course offers an introduction to the literature of the English Middle Ages and Renaissance. You will read great works of literary art originally written in languages unrecognizable today—Old English and Old French—and you will learn to read Chaucer’s Middle English more or less as he wrote it. The course proceeds in a broadly chronological trajectory from the earliest English poetry to the daring magnum opus of the seventeenth century, Milton’s *Paradise Lost*.

As we trace the course of this literary history, we will be particularly attentive to the role of class, gender, and race in the formation of an English literary canon. We will also observe how literature registered and participated in the political, economic, and religious upheavals that helped produce the modern world. But as we map these transformations, we will see how forms and genres persist across time. The texts we read will challenge modern binary oppositions—we will see how sacred and profane coexist in one work, and the same author can be innovative and conservative by turn.

This course is intended to introduce you to some of the core practices of the discipline of English, and teach you certain fundamental facts of literary history. First, you will learn to close-read poems, prose, and drama, much of it challenging to a modern reader. We will hone these skills together in lecture, discussion, and writing exercises. Second, you will learn the characteristic forms and concerns of a wide range of genres still in use today, including the epic, satire, and the love lyric. Finally, though this class focuses on writers considered canonical today, we will also spend time with lesser-known writers whose work shows the depth and diversity of early English literature.

Required Texts

- *The Norton Anthology of English Literature, Vol. 1*, 9th ed., gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt (New York: Norton, 2012) ISBN 978-0-393-91247-0.
 - NB: The Norton is also available in separate smaller volumes; if you opt for those, you need only purchase A and B (ISBN 978-0-393-91249-4 and 978-0-393-91250-0).

Course Assignments

- **Papers – 40%** Two short papers, 4-6 pages long. Prompts will be provided at least two weeks in advance.
- **Reading responses – 10%** Two short exercises intended to help you prep for the papers.
- **Creative exercise – 5%** Your choice of dramatic performance (group or solo), poetic recitation, or an original literary composition, due before the end of the semester.
- **Midterm – 15%**
- **Final – 20%**
- **Participation and attendance – 10%** Come to class prepared to raise questions and engage with the views of others. I will provide discussion prompts as necessary.

Course Policies

Attendance is mandatory; missing more than three classes will automatically lower your final grade.

Late work will lose a third of a letter grade per calendar day – that is, if you hand in a B+ paper a day late, it becomes a B; two days, a B-, and so on. When you turn in papers, please email me a copy as well as submitting a hard copy.

No make-up or late exams will be given without a documented emergency. If you need an extension, please request it in advance. You must complete all assignments to pass the course.

Laptops, phones, and tablets should be put away during class. If this rule presents a hardship, let me know as soon as possible so that we can work out an alternative arrangement.

I will be available via email, and you should be as well. Discussion questions, essay prompts, and other course information will be made available via Blackboard and your BU email account, so check your email! (If another account works better, let me know at the beginning of the semester.)

For my part, I'll try my best to answer all emails promptly: within 24 hours during the week, 48 during weekends. I'm happy to field logistical queries and answer basic questions over email, but conversations about papers are always more productive in person. If you can't make the set hours, email me and set up an appointment.

This class is intended to be as welcoming and inclusive as possible. If you would like to request accommodations, please tell me privately as soon as possible and make formal arrangements via the Office of Disability Services if you have not already done so. If there are concerns you need to share, or need assistance in case of emergency, please inform me immediately. This course will necessarily deal with some upsetting content; I encourage you to speak to me privately if issues arise.

Academic honesty is expected. Plagiarism will not be tolerated. If you plagiarize, you will get caught. Consult the College of Arts and Science Academic Conduct Code for clarification of official standards, policies, and processes. You are not expected to use outside sources in the writing for this class, but I'm always happy to answer questions about the appropriate use of sources.

This syllabus is subject to change – I will keep you updated if and when it does, but if you have any questions, please don't hesitate to ask them in class, in office hours, or over email.

Schedule of Readings

- Jan. 18 Introduction
1. The Old English Epic
- Jan. 23 *Beowulf* ll. 1-1798
Jan. 25 *Beowulf* ll. 1799-3182
2. Anglo-Norman Literature
- Jan. 30 *Ancrene Wisse* and Marie de France, *Milun*
Feb. 1 Marie de France, *Lanval* and *Chevrefoil*
Reading response 1 due
3. Beginning the *Canterbury Tales*
- Feb. 6 Begin Chaucer, *General Prologue* to *The Canterbury Tales*
Feb. 8 Finish Chaucer, *General Prologue*, *Miller's Prologue*
4. Chaucer's Comedy of Desire
- Feb. 13 Chaucer, *Miller's Tale*
Feb. 15 Begin Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue*
Paper 1 due
5. Gender, Freedom, and Sovereignty in the Late Middle Ages
- Feb. 20 *No class – Monday schedule*
Feb. 22 Chaucer, *Wife of Bath's Prologue* (cont'd) and *Tale*
Selections from *Book of Margery Kempe* (pp. 424-38)
6. Sacred and Profane in Medieval Drama
- Feb. 27 **MIDTERM** (in class)
Mar. 1 *Second Shepherd's Play*
- Spring Break*
7. The Sixteenth-Century Lyric I
- Mar. 15 Wyatt (with Petrarch), pp. 648-54; Howard, pp. 662-63 & 666-67
8. The Sixteenth-Century Lyric II
- Mar. 20 Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella* 1, 15, 20, 27, 34, 45, 47, 71, 106
Shakespeare, *Sonnets* 3, 18, 23, 73, 116, 130, 146

- Mar. 22 Queen Elizabeth 1, "Verses Written with a Diamond," "The doubt of future foes," "On Monsieur's Departure"
 Marlowe, "Passionate Shepherd" (p. 1126)
 Raleigh, "The Nymph's Reply to the Shepherd" (p. 1024)
 Spenser, *Amoretti* 34, 54, 75
 Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* 16, 40

9. The Drama of Reformation

- Mar. 27 Spenser, *Faerie Queene*, "A Letter of the Authors" and Book I, canto 1
 Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, scenes 1-3 (pp. 1127-37)
- Mar. 29 Finish Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (pp. 1137-63)
Reading response 2 due

10. The Seventeenth-Century Lyric

- Apr. 3 Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus* 25
 Donne, "The Flea," "The Good-Morrow," "The Sun Rising," "The Relic,"
 "Elegy 19"
 Marvell, "Bermudas," "To His Coy Mistress"
 Raleigh, "The discovery of... Guiana," pp. 1030-33
- Apr. 5 Mary Herbert Sidney, *Psalms* 52 and 139
 Donne, *Holy Sonnets* 5, 7, 10, 11, 13, 14, 17
 Herbert, *The Temple*, "The Altar," "Prayer (1)," "Jordan (1)," "Jordan (2),"
 "The Collar," "Love (3)"
 Lanyer, from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, pp. 1431-36

11. Jacobean Revenge Tragedy

- Apr. 10 Webster, *Duchess of Malfi*, Acts 1-3
- Apr. 12 Webster, *Duchess of Malfi*, Acts 4-5

12. *Paradise Lost* I: The Epic of Satan

- Apr. 17 *Paradise Lost*, Book 1
Paper prospectus due
- Apr. 19 *Paradise Lost*, Book 2

13. *Paradise Lost* II: Eve and Adam

Apr. 24 *Paradise Lost*, Book 3.1-55; Book 4

Apr. 26 *Paradise Lost*, Book 8.250-end; Book 9
Paper 2 due

14. *Paradise Lost* III: “The World was all before them”

May 1 *Paradise Lost*, Book 10.1-234; Book 12

May 9 **FINAL EXAM** (3-5 pm)