

**British Literature I: From Anglo-Saxon to Neoclassical
ENG 231 / Fall 2011**

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MWF 8:00-8:50
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Course Description

In this course, we will survey the English literary tradition from the Anglo-Saxon period until the late eighteenth century. Considering some of the major works of literature from these periods, along with a few of their lesser-known counterparts, we will explore several major genres, including narrative fiction, lyric poetry, and drama.

By the end of this course, students should be able to

- 1) describe the differences between Old, Middle, and Modern English [Chaucer Activity, Final Exam];¹
- 2) identify a number of canonical works of early English literature [Final Exam];
- 3) closely read passages of prose and poetry, attending to diction, imagery, and form in order to understand both the stated and implied meanings of the text [Dramatic Interpretation, Short Papers, Poetry Recitation];
- 4) critically discuss the treatment of various issues (e.g. class and community, women's roles, the status of the hero) in selected literary texts [Short Papers, Final Exam];
- 5) analyze specific passages of literary texts and use them in support of an original thesis [Short Papers]; and
- 6) appreciate the variety of voices and concerns that emerge in British literature from the medieval period through the eighteenth century [no specific assignment—just discussion and engagement with the texts].

In addition, it is my hope that—even if you never read another work of early British literature again—this course will give you some of the skills to enjoy reading *any* literature at a deeper level.

Course Books

Greenblatt, Stephen, Ed. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Package 1 (Volumes A, B, C), 8th ed. New York: Norton, 2006.

Shakespeare, William. *Othello*. Folger Shakespeare Library edition. New York: Simon & Schuster, 1993.

Any additional materials will be distributed in class.

Expectations

I expect you to come to class on time. Frequent tardiness will affect your attendance record.

¹ Listed in brackets following each item are the assignments that are designed to help you meet that goal.

Absences: If you must miss class for any reason, let me know as far in advance as possible. If you miss more than three classes—**for any reason**—your grade may begin to go down and drop farther for each subsequent absence. **Eight absences will lead to an automatic F for the course.**

Participation: While I will occasionally lecture on literary movements and the like, this class will be taught primarily through discussion. Please prepare for class by doing all of the assigned readings and making some notes on issues of interest to you. I encourage you to mark up your texts, underlining significant words and phrases so that you can find them more easily during discussion. Trying out your ideas in class is an excellent way to push your thinking further than you might be able to do on your own—which can be invaluable when it comes to thinking through a paper topic.

Assignments for this course are described on page 5 of the syllabus.

Grades will be determined according to the following rubric:

Short Papers (3 total; 4 pgs/150 pts each)	450
Chaucer Activity	100
Dramatic interpretation	100
Poetry recitation	50
Final exam	150
Quizzes	50
Participation	100
Total	1000

A = 900-1000, B = 800-899, C = 700-799, D = 600-699, F = 0-599.

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty constitutes a major breach of the trust that exists between the instructor and the student. It includes passing off another's ideas as one's own, any attempt to gain information about a test or exam prior to the test or exam date without the instructor's consent, and providing unauthorized assistance on a test, exam, paper, or other assignment to another student. Copying text directly off of the Internet or rewriting materials found on-line in one's "own words" but without proper attribution constitute cheating. Cheating on any assignment—no matter how seemingly trivial—will result in a failing grade for this course. Students who fail for academic dishonesty will not have the option of withdrawing. If you are in doubt about what plagiarism means, or about how to appropriately document sources in your work, please contact me; I will be happy to help.

Learning Center

The Learning Center, located on the first floor of Alumni Hall, provides academic services to all Eureka College students. Consultations are available in the subjects, including math and writing. Study groups, individual academic counseling and course-specific tutoring are also available by contacting Jason Zimmerman at x6520 or jjzimmerman@eureka.edu. *I highly recommend that you use the Writing Tutors at the Learning Center (a free service offered to Eureka students).*

ADA Statement

Any Eureka College student with a disability or other special circumstances requiring accommodations or other consideration in order to successfully complete the requirements of this course is requested to identify himself/herself to the instructor and discuss the matter privately. This

disclosure should be made within the first week of the course so proper accommodations can be made.

Course synopsis (subject to change)

Please read the headnotes to each author/text.

- W 8/24 Introduction; “Caedmon’s Hymn”
F 8/26 Intro to the “Middle Ages” volume of *NAEL*, pp. 1-7; “The Wanderer,” “The Seafarer,” and “The Wife’s Lament”
- M 8/29 *Beowulf*, pp. 29-61
W 8/31 *Beowulf*, pp. 61-80
F 9/2 *Beowulf*, pp. 80-100
- M 9/5 – **No class (Labor Day)**
W 9/7 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (pp. 160-192)
F 9/9 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (pp. 192-213)
- M 9/12 Continue discussion of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*; introduction to Middle English
Paper 1 due
W 9/14 Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*, “General Prologue,” lines 1-412
F 9/16 Read the rest of the “General Prologue”
- M 9/19 Group work
W 9/21 **Chaucer activity due (in-class presentations)**
F 9/23 *Canterbury Tales*, “The Wife of Bath’s Prologue” (pp. 257-275)
- M 9/26 *Canterbury Tales*, “The Wife of Bath’s Tale” (pp. 275-284)
W 9/28 In class: Baba Brinkman; conclude Chaucer discussion; Marie de France, “Lanval”
F 9/30 – **No class (Homecoming)**
- M 10/3 Shakespeare, sonnets, all selections (pp. 1060-1076); selected sonnets on which to focus will be assigned in class
Paper 2 due
W 10/5 Review selected sonnets (assigned in class)
F 10/7 Shakespeare, *Othello*, Acts 1-3
- M 10/10 *Othello*, Acts 4-5
W 10/12 Conclude *Othello*; introduce Marlowe
F 10/14 Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, scenes 1-7
- M 10/17 Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, scenes 8-13
W 10/19 Discuss dramatic interpretation assignment; group work
Paper 3 due
F 10/21 Group work
- M 10/24 **Dramatic presentations:** Shakespeare groups

- W 10/26 **Dramatic presentations:** Marlowe groups
 F 10/28 – **No class (Fall Break)**
- M 10/31 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 1
 W 11/2 *Paradise Lost*, Book 4
 F 11/4 *Paradise Lost*, Book 9
- M 11/7 Conclude discussion of Milton
 Paper 4 due
- W 11/9 John Donne, “The Flea,” “The Good Morrow,” “Song (Go and catch a falling star),”
 “The Canonization,” “A Valediction: Of Weeping,” “A Valediction: Forbidding
 Mourning,” “The Ecstasy,” “The Funeral,” “The Blossom,” “The Relic”
 F 11/11 John Donne, “Holy Sonnets,” all selections; “Good Friday,” “A Hymn to Christ,”
 “Hymn to God My God, in My Sickness” “A Hymn to God the Father” (pp. 1295-
 1302)
- M 11/14 Amelia Lanyer, all selections (pp. 1313-1323); Andrew Marvell, all selections (pp.
 1695-1716) except “Upon Appleton House”
- W 11/16 **Poetry recitations (in class)**
 F 11/18 Aphra Behn, *Oroonoko* (pp. 2183-2200)
- M 11/21 *Oroonoko* (pp. 2200-2216)
 W 11/23 – **No class (Thanksgiving)**
 F 11/25 – **No class (Thanksgiving)**
- M 11/28 *Oroonoko* (pp. 2216-2226)
 Paper 5 due
- W 11/30 Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*, Cantos 1-2 (pp. 2513-2521)
 F 12/2 *The Rape of the Lock*, Cantos 3-5 (pp. 2521-2532)
- M 12/5 Conclude discussion of Pope
 Paper 6 due
- W 12/7 Exam review

The final exam will be on Tuesday, December 13, at 10:30 am in the A-V Room.

Assignments

- **Short Papers**

During the course of the semester, you will write 3 papers of at least 4 pages each on selected texts. I will give you six different paper assignments; you will select which three papers you wish to write. Be advised, however, that, on the final exam, you will have to write about at least one text that you have not written on in your papers. It is your responsibility to keep track of how many papers you have written. See below for more information.

- **Chaucer Activity**

This assignment involves presenting a character and analyzing the language of a passage from the “General Prologue” of the *Canterbury Tales*. Specific guidelines will be provided in class.

- **Dramatic interpretation**

This group assignment will ask you to consider several different possible interpretations of a scene from one of the two plays that we will read. You will then perform one version of your scene before the class and present your reasons for making the interpretive decision(s) that you made. Your presentation should focus on a discussion of the different ways in which your scene could be interpreted and your reasons for performing it in the way that you did. Specific guidelines will be provided in class.

- **Poetry recitation (14 lines minimum, with expression)**

Reading aloud and memorization are undervalued arts. For those of you who wish to go into fields where oral presentation is important (education, business, or really just about anything else), recitation is vital, and memorization is an excellent mental exercise. Enjoy your performance! (And yes, you must memorize your poem.)

- **Final exam**

The exam will both test your basic knowledge of the texts that we have read this semester and include two essays, at least one of which will be on a text that you did not write about in any of your short papers. A portion of the exam will also focus upon proper identification and comprehension of works, so it is important to read attentively throughout the semester.

Short Papers

You are required to write 3 short papers, each at least 4 double-spaced pages long (there is no upper page limit). You may write 4 papers if you wish, in which case I will drop your lowest grade. The purpose of these papers is not to prove to me that you’ve read the works, although of course you will need to have done so—keep plot summary to a minimum. Each paper should answer the prompt with an **original thesis** supported by well developed analysis and specific examples from the text (cite ALL of your support, please—even if you aren’t quoting directly). **Do not simply repeat what we have said in class**; your papers should contain original insight and analysis. If you wish to refer to something that we discussed in class, cite it with a footnote (e.g. ¹ Karen Smith pointed this out in class on November 4).

Note: **One (and only one) of your papers MUST be a close reading of a poem.** This assignment can be fulfilled through SP 3, SP 4, or SP 5.

Papers may be submitted electronically or in hard copy. They are due in class on the date specified. Late papers will not be accepted unless I have explicitly made an exception. Exceptions will only be granted ahead of time (i.e. not on the date that a paper is due) and for extraordinary circumstances.

- **Short Paper 1:** Due Sept. 12, on *Beowulf* and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*
Look closely at the descriptions of Beowulf and Sir Gawain. What do these descriptions tell us about the authors' views of heroism and/or masculinity? How do these views tie in to the worldviews expressed by each poem? What do they tell us about a crucial difference or similarity between the poems?
- **Short Paper 2:** Due Oct. 3, on *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale* and *Lanval*
Both the Wife's *Tale* and *Lanval* depict female characters who hold some form of power over men. Are they actually making a claim for women's rights and authority in a male-dominated (or patriarchal) society, or are these women acting in the service of men/patriarchy?
- **Short Paper 3:** Due Oct. 19, on Shakespeare's Sonnets OR *Othello* and *Doctor Faustus*.
 - 1) Perform a close reading of one or two of Shakespeare's sonnets (choose poems that we did not discuss in class). For each poem, first, briefly explain its literal meaning; then, look closely at the language. Work through it very slowly. How does the language support or pull against the literal meaning of the poem? What do the specific images and word choices add to the poem? If you write on two poems, you may also wish to draw some connections between them.
 - 2) Compare the fall of the hero in *Othello* and in *Doctor Faustus*. What causes their descent? Are there crucial differences in how Shakespeare and Marlowe choose to structure their
- **Short Paper 4:** Due Nov. 7, on *Paradise Lost*
 - 1) How does Milton create a sense of the gravity of the loss suffered when Adam and Eve eat of the fruit? What does this tell us about his view of God and/or what humans ought to be?
 - 2) Discuss Satan's character. What is the purpose of Milton's making him so complex, especially in Book 1, where we might actually feel sympathy for him? Does this characterization support Milton's purpose in writing *PL*, or does it undermine it?
- **Short Paper 5:** Due Nov. 28, on *Oroonoko* OR poetry
 - 1) Perform a close reading of one or two poems by Donne, Lanyer, or Marvell (choose one that we did not discuss in class). Guidelines for performing a close reading are in SP 3 (1).
 - 2) Compare the treatment of race in *Oroonoko* and *Othello*. Does Behn succeed in creating a more sympathetic portrait of the "Other" than Shakespeare does? Why or why not?
 - 3) How are the characters in *Oroonoko* constrained by their circumstances? What does that suggest about what colonialism can do to one's humanity?
- **Short Paper 6:** Due Dec. 5, on *The Rape of the Lock* OR poetry
 - 1) See (1) under SP 5.
 - 2) What is the point of Pope's satire in *Rape*? Of whom or what is he making fun, and why? Can we read this as constructively advocating something new in terms of gender and/or social roles, or is it purely critical?