English 201: Survey of British Literature I

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Office: G 489
Office Hours: MW 4-5; TR 8:30-9:20
Class: MW 2:30-3:45 / G 221

Course Description:
The first half of a two-part survey required for all English majors, English 201 treats outstanding British texts from the eighth to the seventeenth century. Given the breadth of the course, our experiences of these texts will be necessarily introductory, even while we strive to historicize our readings as best we can. Our approach will be that of a seminar in which all students conscientiously prepare, attend, and critically engage with course readings. Each student, thus, should consider that s/he has a tacit contract with the class to prepare, attend, and engage conscientiously.

Course Objectives:
1) to critically engage (in speech and in writing) and interpret, formally and informally, major canonical British literature from its beginnings to the seventeenth century;
2) to analyze a given text within its cultural context;
3) to formulate and articulate a critical thesis
4) to synthesize and apply secondary scholarship to your interpretation of course texts;
5) to identify, articulate, and interpret recurrent genres, themes, motifs, and theoretical issues with regard to any course text(s);
6) to synthesize, formally and informally, the major developments in British literature from its beginnings to the seventeenth century.
7) to introduce representative British authors and texts in their cultural and historical contexts;
8) to sharpen your critical reading, writing, and thinking skills through discussion, analysis, and argumentation of issues in the readings;
9) to prompt you to reexamine your assumptions about the British literary tradition.

Required Texts:

ISBN 0-393-96150-8
*E-Reserve Readings (as noted in syllabus), downloadable from library homepage
[Note: Not all e-reserve readings are assigned; see reading/writing schedule, below]
Course Requirements:

As opposed to a lecture, our class will be a hybrid of lecture and seminar, with students responsible to attend, contribute, and react to the readings and to each other’s formal and informal arguments. To this end, you will need to record your responses to each of the readings, and to come to class prepared to comment and question. Because of this seminar approach, your regular attendance and conscientious preparations are crucial. Any more than two absences will likely lower your overall grade.

Grade Guidelines:

Each student will write two presentation papers, each one single-spaced page on given issues in the readings (30%); a midterm (30%); and a final examination (30%); also, each student will keep a journal of informal, weekly responses to journal prompts (10%).

Presentation Papers:

Each of you will be assigned to a presentation “group” (A, B, C, or D), meaning only that the members of each group independently prepare formal papers for the same class date. These very short papers (one page, single-spaced) are to be written, presented, and then submitted for a grade, on the dates designated. Every student will write two, each addressing an audience of fellow scholars who are familiar with the readings. The brevity of the assignment dictates a bare-bones argument. In most cases, you will begin by setting forth a sharp critical position on the given issue, and follow with selected textual evidence in support of your position, and a brief conclusion. The thesis should be as pointed and controversial as your conviction allows. I strongly urge you to avail yourself of The Writing Center (G 332; X-2636) well before the due date. I will evaluate these papers for the incisiveness of the analysis and for their observance of formal criteria for essays.

Response Journals:

Journal entries, always due on the week’s first class meeting, must respond critically and thoughtfully to the journal prompt for the week. Entries should be approximately one double-spaced, word-processed page of writing in which you engage with the given prompt critically and substantively. Be sure to bring journal responses to class; you will be asked to share them. Toward the end of term, I’ll assign grades, based on your apparent level of critical engagement and conscientiousness in responding to prompts.

Characterizations:

All students will be asked to volunteer to characterize assigned readings; that is, you will be responsible to 1) very briefly distill the thesis or key points of the day’s reading; 2) assert your own critical response to that thesis; 3) relate the reading to our class discussion. Be responsible to volunteer at least twice during the term. These are to be informal and very brief synopses, intended only to provide the class with a quick point of departure for the class, along with your critical reaction.
Policies:

- Please be sure to keep all returned, graded work in a safe place; also, keep copies/back-up files of all formal writing and journal entries.
- By the second week of class, formally designate one of your classmates as your contact person—i.e. the person who will be responsible to supply you with any missed notes, announcements, assignments, or handouts.
- Please notify me as soon as possible about any special accommodations you require,
- Feel free to contact me with questions; take advantage of my office hours (see above).
- Ours is a Blackboard-linked course; you will need to read your Naz e-mail to keep up on course communications.
- Students must be scrupulous in ascribing proper credit to sources; see below:

**Academic Honesty:** Because your student handbook and several other readily available sources discuss plagiarism and its consequences, I will assume your understanding of the law, unless you indicate otherwise. Essentially, you must give credit when you use the ideas or even the words of a source. In our course, use MLA style for documentation. If you ever have questions about whether to cite a source, you should err on the side of caution. Also, you should consult me, the Writing Center, and/or the library Reference Desk.

Reading / Writing Schedule

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Notes</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>M 8/28</td>
<td>Introduction</td>
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<tr>
<td>W 8/30</td>
<td>Syllabus, purchase of texts; Nunberg, “The Persistence of English” (xli-lv); “The Middle Ages to ca. 1485” (Introduction) (1-18); journal prompt #1</td>
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<td>M 9/4</td>
<td>Labor Day: No Classes;</td>
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<td>W 9/6</td>
<td>“Dream of the Rood” (21-23); Beowulf, Introduction through line 85 (23-31); Dockray-Miller, “The Feminized Cross of The Dream of the Rood”; journal prompt #2</td>
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<td>M 9/11</td>
<td>Beowulf, lines 189-661 (31-41); journal prompt #3</td>
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<td>W 9/13</td>
<td>Beowulf, lines 662-1250 [our stopping point] (41-55); Acker, “Horror and the Maternal in Beowulf”; Presentation A: The meaning of the monstrous in Beowulf*</td>
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<tr>
<td>M 9/18</td>
<td>Marie de France, <em>Lanval</em>, ll. 1-347 (105-112); Journal Prompt #4</td>
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W 9/20  *Lanval*, conclude; Presentation B: Significance of the faerie world in *Lanval*


M 10/2  *SGGK*, Part 3 (144-162); Weiss, “The Play World and the Real World: Chivalry in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*”*

W 10/4  *SGGK*, Part 4 [conclusion] (162-173); Presentation C: Sexuality and ritual in *SGGK*

M 10/9  Geoffrey Chaucer, Introduction (173-176); *The Canterbury Tales,* Introduction (176-178) General Prologue (178-198)

W 10/11 General Prologue, continued; presentation D: Identity as performance in *CT*

M 10/16  The Man of Law’s epilogue (215-216); Wife of Bath’s Prologue (216-235)

W 10/18  Wife of Bath’s Tale (235-244); Leicester, “Of a Fire in the Dark: Public and Private Feminism in *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*”*

M 10/23  The Miller’s Prologue and Tale (198-215); Presentation A: “Auctoritee” and power in *CT*

W 10/25  *Midterm Exam* *

M 10/30  Mallory, from *Morte Darthur* (294-314); Presentation B: Love and war in *Morte Darthur,* Julian of Norwich, from *A Book of Showings* (276-281)

(10/30: Last day to withdraw without an F)

W 11/1  The Sixteenth Century, Introduction (315-336); Wyatt, Introduction and poems (339-343)

M 11/6  Marlowe, Introduction (436-437); *Doctor Faustus,* Scenes 1-5 (459-477)

W 11/8  *Doctor Faustus,* conclude; Bartels, “”Demonizing Magic: Patterns of Power in *Doctor Faustus*”*; Presentation C: Imperialism in Marlowe

M 11/13  Shakespeare, Introduction (492-493); Sonnets (494-506); ); Fussell, “Structural Principles: The Example of the Sonnet”*; explication in groups

W 11/15  Sonnets, continued: Spenser, Amoretti (430-432); Wyatt, “The long love that in my thought doth harbor,” (340); Surrey, “Love that doth reign and live within my thought,” (344)

(***November 20-24: Thanksgiving Break: No Classes***)

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M 11/27  The Early Seventeenth Century 1603-1660, Introduction (577-596)

W 11/29  Donne, Introduction (599-601); poems: “The Flea” (602); “Song” (603-604); From Devotions upon Emergent Occasions: “Meditation 17”; Presentation D: Religion and Enlightenment in 17th-Century poetry


W 12/6  “Lycidas”; Last Day of Class

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Journal Prompts

Week 2: What is meant by “The English Literary Tradition”? Is such a concept meaningful in the 21st century? Is the requirement of such literary-historical courses as English 201-202 advisable for the post-modern scholar of English literature?

Week 3: What evidence can you find of tension between the pagan past and Christian present in Anglo-Saxon poetry? How successfully is such tension resolved in DR and in Beowulf?

Week 4: What does Beowulf suggest about Anglo-Saxon notions of alterity? About the Anglo-Saxon concept of nature?

Week 5: How do attitudes toward heroism and the monstrous differ between Beowulf and SGGK? What implications?

Week 6: What is the significance of the quest in SGGK? Are we to interpret G’s quest as a failure or a success? Explain.

Week 7: How significant is the pilgrimage trope in CT? Why Canterbury? Why St. Thomas Becket’s shrine?

Week 8: To what degree is the Wife of Bath merely a patriarchal projection of male anxieties about the female?

Week 9: To what extent do CT’s pilgrims conform to medieval stereotypes? To what degree do they transcend those types? How do you account for the latter phenomenon?

Week 10: What is the relationship between secular and religious life in the late middle ages? How can characters like Chaucer’s Wife and Miller coexist with devout religious practitioners like the Parson? And how can we reconcile the existence of mystics and recluses like Julian of Norwich with the increasingly secular culture of Chaucer’s fourteenth-century England?
Week 11: What do you see as the source of Faustus’ desire? What does Faustus’ plight suggest about Marlowe’s England?

Week 12: Analyze the sonnet as a subgenre: What is its appeal? Why do you think this Italian import became so popular among English Renaissance poets? What makes the form unique?

Week 13: What is the relationship, if any, between religious devotion and erotic love in Donne’s poetry? Can they be reconciled?