Course Description

Chaucer, Shakespeare, and Milton wrote for broad popular audiences. They addressed issues of pressing concern to many, then and now: power, religion, gender, sexuality, dis/ability, identity. Their works continue to be read because they still reveal something important about what it means to be human—able to create meaning and meter, feel love and despair, know and doubt reality. Students are invited in this course to consider major works of early English literature closely in order to discern what meanings authors shape, how they use literary form to satisfy or complicate and inflect those meanings, how they address their cultural moments as well as, potentially, our own. We shall touch on corruption in the church, civil wars, sexual revolutions, the construction of theatres, the rise of the middle class, the invention of printing, and innovative experiments in verse and narrative forms.

Course Goals

1. Gaining a firm historical grounding in English literature from its beginnings to 1800, and probing the connectedness of this cultural inheritance to our own time.
2. Improving your ability to interpret complex literary works and to explain your interpretations in writing.
3. Encouraging you to develop historical empathy and the ability to interpret literary works of the past, works from cultures other than your own.

Course Requirements

Close reading quizzes 20 % of final course grade
Online quizzes 20% of final course grade
Other writing 10 % of final course grade
Essays (5 pp, 7 pp) 50 % of final course grade (20, 30)

Assignments

**Essays:** Essay prompts will invite you to develop close readings of assigned texts. In this class, the essays should demonstrate what you’ve learned both as a reader and as a writer. Essays will not require research—in fact, I’d much prefer to read just what you think. The first essay is about 5 pages, the second about 7. My response to your first essay will be designed to help you improve your performance on the second.

**Online quizzes:** In order to discuss the formal features of literature, we need a shared language of terms for describing verse forms, genres, rhyme schemes, and the like. Four online quizzes will ask you to demonstrate your command of the terminology needed to discuss the literature. The quizzes will be out of class and may be taken multiple times. The point of the quizzes is to encourage your review of material and enhance your ability to use terminology correctly.
Close reading quizzes: These will be periodically offered throughout the term to help you develop your close reading skills. You might be asked to do a close reading of a passage, of a paragraph, or even of a sentence from the texts we read.

Other writing: Some assignments will ask you to respond creatively to the literature: perhaps to imitate a verse form, or to write in a particular style. Other assignments will ask you to assess your progress as a reader, writer, and thinker.

Participation: I take it for granted that you should participate—to develop your speaking skills, check your comprehension, and ensure that the discussion covers your areas of interest. You do not get set points for this, but your participation will improve your learning and life skills. If I think at the end of the term that particular students have demonstrated learning in this area, this will be acknowledged in course grades.

Course Policies

1. If you require extra time or any other adjustments in order to fulfil course expectations, please let me know in the first few weeks of the term.
2. If you must miss a class, please let me know in advance. It would be smart as well to arrange early in the term to trade notes with a classmate in case you have to be absent.
3. I expect that the work you turn in will be entirely your own, written specifically for this course. Plagiarism will result in a failing grade for the assignment, possibly for the course.
4. Please show respect towards yourself, your instructor, and your classmates during our class meetings: turn your cell phone off, keep your laptop closed unless you have a specific and relevant need for it, and stay for the entire class period unless you’re genuinely unwell.

Required Materials

Norton Anthology of British Literature, 8th edition

Schedule

All readings are from the Norton Anthology of English Literature unless otherwise specified. An asterick (*) flags a reading of some difficulty and length, to alert you that you will need to budget extra time for that class preparation.

Week 1

Introduction to course
Riddles 5, 7, 9, 11, 14, 25, 26, 30a, available online at http://www.technozen.com/exeter/1-10.htm

Week 2

*Beowulf* (in Seamus Heaney’s translation)

Week 3

From ‘Ancrene Wisse’, 157-159
Marie de France, ‘Lanval’, 141-155
*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, 160-213

Dhar | English Literature before 1800 Syllabus
Week 4

Chaucer, *The Miller’s Prologue and Tale*, 239-255
Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale*, 256-284

Week 5

Julian of Norwich, from *Showings*, 371-382
*Everyman*, 463-484

Week 6

More, *Utopia*, 521-589
Askew, from ‘The First Examination’, 628-630
Foxe, from *Acts and Monuments*, ‘[The Death of Anne Askew]’, 631-632

Week 7

Elizabeth I, ‘Speech to the Troops at Tilbury’, 699-700
Shakespeare, sonnets, 1058-1076

Week 8

Spenser, *Fairie Queene*, Book 1, 714-856
Sidney, from *The Defense of Poesy*, 953-974

Week 9

Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*, 1022-1057
Donne, songs and sonnets, 1260-1281; holy sonnets, 1295-1299

Week 10

Shakespeare, *King Lear*, 1139-1224

Week 11

Lanyer, from *Salve Deus Rex Judaeorum*, 1314-1319
Wroth, from *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, 1457-1461
Herbert, from *The Temple*, 1605-1624

Week 12

Week 13

Bradstreet, ‘The Author to Her Book’, ‘For Deliverance from a Fever’, ‘Some Verses upon the Burning of Our House’ (texts will be handed out in class)
Cavendish, ‘The Poetess’s Hasty Resolution’, 1773-1775
Pepys, from The Diary, 2133-2142
Locke, from ‘An Essay Concerning Human Understanding’, 2151-2155
Behn, from Oroonoko, excerpts

Week 14

Dryden, ‘Mac Flecknoe’, 2111-2117; ‘Epigram on Milton’, 2120
Pope, The Rape of the Lock, 2513-2532
Johnson, ‘[A Brief to Free a Slave]’, 2849-2850
Cowper, ‘The Castaway’, 2895-2897
Conclusion to course