ENGL 2322: English Literature to the 1780s

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Office Hours: MWF: 10:05-12:15
TTh: 10:55-12:25

Required Texts/Materials
You can find most of what you need in any edition of The Norton Anthology of English Literature (as long as it covers origins to the 18th century; many editions are split into two volumes). However, I have supplied PDF (posted under “Course Documents” on Blackboard) for most of the semester’s readings. A few texts that are readily, widely available both in print and online (e.g., King Lear) are not included in this file.

Course Description
The course requires a substantial amount of reading. Class discussions of the readings will consider how they reflect their time and culture and also, in many cases, epochal shifts in the making; but an even more emphatic focus will be upon these works as literary creations—that is, as stories crystallizing a purposive view of human life and truth. Quizzes over the content of readings will occur daily. A final exam will assess the student’s understanding of textual influences and cultural transformations much more broadly. Two papers combining a grasp of relevant historical, cultural, and artistic factors with a high degree of personal judgment will also be required (in response to several options offered below). The final exam will be completed in a setting of the student’s choosing within a window of several hours and submitted electronically.

Course Objectives
A survey is literally an overview: the apparent objective of a survey of British literature would be to skim through as much of that literature as the allotted time permits. In looking over too many things, however, one can overlook most of them. A gripping panorama needs certain specific points of interest where the eye may linger. Our course has such points. The cultural envelope of the English-speaking parts of Great Britain before the eighteenth century was especially porous. People on the fringe of these Anglophone areas spoke Celtic tongues, whose lore was of extreme antiquity. English itself evolved from a Germanic language imported from the continent; and the Normans, who eventually dominated the German immigrants preceding them across the Channel, grafted their own version of the French language and French culture upon existing traditions. Underlying both the German and the Norman influences was a degree of Christian teaching and classical learning transmitted, for the most part, in Latin. Finally, as the inspiration of the Renaissance made its way from the Mediterranean to northwestern Europe, it did so not infrequently through the works of Italian authors.

In order to create a superior survey with meaningful reference points to major cultural influences, therefore, this course will invite you to compare and contrast what you read in English texts with a select few works of other cultures that impacted (often quite directly) those texts. Part of understanding English literature involves understanding what it shares with European literature; yet to understand it as distinctly English, one must also know enough of the surrounding literary traditions to detect significant differences. To these ends, your readings in the PDF prepared expressly for this course include supplemental excerpts from Celtic, Italian, and French authors.

A final objective (and perhaps the preeminent one) is to present these enduring texts as works of art. We shall emphasize the “story” quality of our readings even as we relate it to the relevant times and customs. That is to say, we shall note how certain events are highlighted or exaggerated and linked in a certain concatenation in order to project a sense of human life’s essential struggle and purpose. Stories
always imply that time has a particular meaning, and their events might be said to represent the expression and tint of life’s portrait (if we think of a narrative as a painting). Such will be our approach in this class.

**Student Learning Outcomes**

Having completed this course, the student will be able to identify at least a dozen major works of British literature preceding the Romantic Period (“identification” meaning an unprompted recall of title, author, and approximate historical period, as well as major details of content such as leading characters). The student will further be able to explain with superficial competence the essential connections between English literature of these centuries and the literature of surrounding cultures, including the phases of broad cultural evolution that characterized a shift from oral traditions to a text-based literacy. The student will further possess a general grasp how English literature emerged as somewhat different from its neighboring traditions. Finally, the student will be able to infer with some degree of attention to textual clues the values purveyed or implied in an artistic narrative that give its progression suspense, drama, and coherence.

**Student Rights and Responsibilities**

An updated statement may be found at [http://www.uttyler.edu/catalog/10-12/1491.htm](http://www.uttyler.edu/catalog/10-12/1491.htm).

**Methods of Grading**

**Class Participation/Daily Quizzes (40%):** The bulk of the work in any survey class consists merely of reading a large volume of material. That poses a particular challenge in the first half of the English Lit Survey, because the English used by virtually all of our authors has grown quite archaic. I have striven to keep assignments down to about 20 pages per session, or 30 at most.

The other side of this bargain is that I expect you actually to read. The only way I can reasonably keep track of your attention to that task is to quiz you at every meeting—which I intend to do. Quizzes will be given on 3x5 index cards upon which you will record brief answers to a few questions (usually five short answer, maybe eight or ten if true/false). You will not be expected to spell alien names properly or to memorize obscure details: my queries will focus on significant but fairly obvious facts about a story’s plot, a treatise’s argument, and so forth.

Each quiz is generally worth ten points, so by semester’s end about 300 points are possible. I shall not arrive at your grade by working out a raw percentage, however: tallies are always somewhat curved in your favor (since questions are occasionally made very challenging just so that I may identify “how much is too much). The cut-off for an A may fall around 210, for a B around 180, and so forth. On the other hand, quizzes may not made up due to late arrival or casual absence. (If you have been genuinely ill or feel that you have a legitimate excuse, make-up exercises are possible—but you must take the initiative in requesting them.)

Verbal participation, finally, will be credited to your account. In the past, I have observed that active, informed, helpful participation in class discussions has often raised a student’s score on this part of the grade by a full letter.

**Two Essays** (40%, or 20% each): I ask that you write two essays in the course of the semester. The parameters of both are essentially as follows: a length of about four pages (1,000 words—but you may always write more), use of effective references to relevant events in the texts under discussion, and intelligent analysis on your own part rather than research imported from a scholarly source. These assignments, I stress, are not research papers, and your grade will suffer if you attempt to make them so. I to discover through them whether you can analyze literary works objectively and resourcefully without pilfering the ideas of others. On the other hand, when expressing your own judgments, take care not to toss about unsupported opinions. Always demonstrate the strength of your assertions by referring (not in long citations, but in brief, well-chosen highlights of detail) to the specific texts at issue.
Below are your options. Choose any TWO topics from among these eleven. (In a few cases, the same question offers you alternative approaches to handling a text: do not write on both alternatives to fulfill your essay requirement.) You may submit both essays well before the deadlines given below in the Schedule.

1) What values are projected by the three texts, Beowulf, The Death of Aife’s Only Son, and Pwyff? That is, as stories, what are they telling us about how reality works and what mankind’s proper place is within the cosmic mechanism?

2) Described the world projected by Chaucer and Boccaccio. According to them, what might we expect to find in the typical human life—what successes, failures, goals, inconsistencies, etc.?

3) Owain and Sir Gawain both imply several messages about the typical person’s life even as they spin their heroic tales (i.e., these romances are allegories). Describe the world of courtly romance at what you believe to be its deepest level of truth. (For instance, are monsters really flesh and blood creatures? What is the essence of heroism?)

4) Explain how the imaginary world of The Faerie Queene is essentially the same as that of Everyman; OR explain how Spenser’s world, though full of textual material inspired by Ariosto, is profoundly different from the Orlando Furioso’s.

5) The figure of Doctor Faustus belonged to the Middle Ages. Explain what Marlowe’s play preserves of the medieval worldview by comparing its assumptions with those made in Everyman.

6) On the surface, King Lear appears to have nothing in common with Orlando Furioso—yet the assumptions made by Shakespeare and Ariosto about human nature in constructing their artistic universes are extremely close. Describe these assumptions.

7) Despite several obvious differences, Doctor Faustus and Paradise Lost could both be said to tell stories about egocentric individuals who refuse to seek forgiveness for their self-consumed choices. Are Marlowe and Milton, then, recounting the same story from a moral perspective? If not, how does it differ in the two instances?

8) If Montaigne and Bacon were both writing a story about a few dozen castaways having to coexist on a remote desert island, how do you think that story would unfold, based upon your reading of their views? Would it be the same story, or would it have significant differences?

9) Donne and Herbert both write frequently about intensely personal struggles to achieve spiritual intimacy (though the former seems to bestow greater energy upon his amorous than his metaphysical searches). What is the essential “story” of this search? Does it have significant differences in the two poets?

10) Contrast Swift’s vision of the perfect society in Gulliver’s Travels, Book 4, with More’s in Utopia. Note the similarities first, and then describe the essential differences; OR explain how Swift’s and Cyrano’s methods of representing outlandishly fantastic worlds differ in the use they make of those worlds. (That is, what different lessons about real life are implied?)

11) Rasselas and Candide are also two fantasies of adventurous travel, appearing in print within months of each other. Compare and contrast them: in terms of their fundamental message about life, are they more alike or different?

12) Gray and Goldsmith both tell or suggest stories that end in haunting loneliness. Trace the basic stages in these narratives. What are their most significant differences?

**Final Exam (20%):** This will consist of four short essays. More accurately, each “essay” might in fact be no more than a long paragraph: you needn’t supply introductory and concluding sections. Below are listed twelve significant topics that we will cover in the course of the semester. I will select eight items from this list on April 30, publish my selection on Blackboard by 9 a.m., and allow you until 9 p.m. to pick your four preferred topics from the eight and email your answers. An additional item or two may be added to the topics during the semester. Between now and the end of April, you should know what essentials to include in your brief discussions if you come to class regularly class and pay attention.

1) Why are shamanic figures so prominent in oral traditions?
2) Why do stories from pre-literate traditions seldom describe the private thoughts and feelings of characters?
3) Why does romantic love not appear as a major theme in pre-literate tales?
4) Why are medieval romances so often allegorical, and usually in a rather rough, uneven fashion?
5) How do courtly and popular romances differ?
6) In general, how did Spenser’s epic alter Ariosto’s material?
7) What is implied by Shakespeare’s having King Lear utter such profound insights in his madness?
8) What did Bacon clearly borrow from Montaigne in converting the essay into an English genre? What differentiates Bacon’s essay style from the Frenchman’s?
9) Why is it natural that the strained imagery of the Metaphysical Poets would appear in the seventeenth century, as scientific thought was rapidly advancing?
10) What are some ways in which Milton tried to transport the ancient genre of epic into his contemporary world?
11) Why does loneliness become such a prominent theme in the eighteenth century, and how is that loneliness portrayed?
12) How does the French imagination, as seen in Cyrano and Voltaire, differ from the English imagination as modeled by Gulliver’s Travels?

**Schedule of Assignments**

Assignments are to be prepared by the date when they are listed below: e.g., a reading assignment for January 27 will be discussed on that day: it’s not assigned as homework for January 29. Most readings may be found in the PDF located under “Course Documents” on Blackboard. The page numbers in parentheses obviously refer to that PDF (but please note: some of these numbers may be slightly off, since I am steadily upgrading the file. Always confirm that the assignment you’re reading has the same title and author as that in the syllabus). A few assignments require you to find your own text, which should pose no problem: in all such cases, several versions are readily available both in print and online, and the sections to be read will prove easy to identify.

**January**

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<th>Date</th>
<th>Assignment</th>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Introduction to course.</td>
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<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td><em>The Tragic Death of Conna</em> (pp. 2-4).</td>
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<td>20</td>
<td>Selections from <em>Beowulf</em> (pp. 5-25).</td>
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<td>22</td>
<td><em>Pwyll Prince of Dyved</em> (pp. 27-40).</td>
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<td>27</td>
<td><em>Owein, or The Countess of the Fountain</em> (pp. 51-67).</td>
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<td>29</td>
<td><em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em>, Books I-II (pp. 75-87).</td>
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**February**

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<td>3</td>
<td><em>Sir Gawain and the Green Knight</em>, Books III-IV (pp. 87-100).</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Selections from Boccaccio (pp. 103-111).</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>“Prologue” from Chaucer’s <em>Canterbury Tales</em> (pp. 112-129).</td>
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<td>12</td>
<td>Finish selections from Chaucer (“Nun’s Priest’s Tale,” pp. 129-142).</td>
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<td>17</td>
<td><em>Everyman</em> (pp. 143-165).</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Selections from More’s <em>Utopia</em> (pp. 166-180).</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Selections from Ariosto’s <em>Orlando Furioso</em> (pp. 195-215).</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Spenser’s <em>Faerie Queene</em>, Book I, Cantos 1-2 (find your own text: recommended copy at <a href="http://www.archive.org/stream/spensersthefaeri15272gut/15272.txt">http://www.archive.org/stream/spensersthefaeri15272gut/15272.txt</a>).</td>
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**March**

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<td>3</td>
<td>Marlowe’s <em>Doctor Faustus</em> through the visit to the Pope in Rome and pranks with Dick and Robin (find your own text: recommended at <a href="http://www.gutenberg.org/files/779">http://www.gutenberg.org/files/779</a>).</td>
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<td>5</td>
<td>Finish Marlowe’s <em>Doctor Faustus</em>, beginning with short speech by Chorus; first essay must be submitted by this date.</td>
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<td>S P R I N G</td>
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<td>B R E A K.</td>
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<td>19</td>
<td>Shakespeare’s <em>King Lear</em>, Acts IV-V.</td>
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<td>24</td>
<td>Selections from Montaigne and Bacon (pp. 216-226).</td>
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<td>26</td>
<td>Selected poetry: Donne, Herbert, and Marvell (pp. 227-241).</td>
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<td>31</td>
<td>Milton’s <em>Paradise Lost</em>, Book I (find your own text: recommend you select preferred format.</td>
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April
2  Milton’s *Paradise Lost*, Book 4.
7  Selections from Cyrano’s *Voyage to the Moon* (pp. 243-259).
9  Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Part I, chapters 1, 5, & 6; Part II, chapter 1 (find your own text: recommended copy at [http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/829](http://gutenberg.org/ebooks/829)).
14  Swift’s *Gulliver’s Travels*, Part IV, chapters 1-4, 8-11.
16  Selections from Voltaire’s *Candide* (pp. 269-276).
21  Selections from Johnson’s *Rasselas* (pp. 277-286) and poems by Gray (pp. 291-296).
23  “The Ruined Village” by Goldsmith (pp. 297-305); **second essay must be submitted by this date.**
30  **Final Exam** posted on Blackboard by 9 a.m., submit electronically (or bring to my office or Lit & Lang Office: BUS 207A or 236) by 9 p.m. Do not come to classroom.