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## Literary History of Britain: *Beowulf* to the Civil War

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### Description

This course is a survey of British literature from the first major epic, *Beowulf* (8<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> centuries), to the last, John Milton's *Paradise Lost* (1674). Its primary aim is to give students a clear sense of the history of British literature from its origins in the early medieval period through the end of the English Renaissance. As opposed to the tried and true chronological march through this long period, however, we will read works from the medieval and Renaissance period in three thematic sets: epic evil; satire and the social; lyric love, desire, and faith. The rationale here is that by reading medieval and Renaissance works, in a variety of genres, on similar themes, students will be better able to discern the differences between the literatures of these two broad periods. In addition to providing an introductory survey of early British literature, the primary goal of this course is to make you a *sophisticated reader* of and a *critically engaged respondent* to literature. That means that we'll be examining *how* these texts mean and *how* they function, not just *what* they mean. Finally, since I am committed to the proposition that understanding literature requires that one be able to write thoughtfully about it, we will focus considerable attention on how to write intelligently and seriously about early British literature.

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### Readings

#### Epic Evil

*Beowulf*

Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus*

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

#### Satire and the Social

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Thomas More, *Utopia*

Ben Jonson, *Volpone*

#### Lyric Love, Desire, and Faith

Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*

Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*

Robert Herrick, *Hesperides*

John Donne, *Songs and Sonnets/Divine Poems*

Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings*

Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*

Thomas Carew, *Poems*

Aemilia Lanyer's and Ben Jonson's  
country-house poems

George Herbert, *The Temple*

Richard Crashaw, *Carmen Deo Nostro*

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### Texts

*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 9<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol. A: The Middle Ages and Vol. B: The Sixteenth Century and the Early Seventeenth Century (W.W. Norton & Company, 2012)

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### Requirements

Six short analysis papers, one midterm exam, and one final examination.