
Early British Literary History: *Beowulf* to 1785

Description

This course is a survey of British literature from the first major epic, *Beowulf* (8th-10th centuries), to the Romantic period. Yes, that's a thousand years in fifteen weeks. Its primary aim is to give students a sense of the history of British literature from its origins in the early medieval period through the end of the Enlightenment. We'll approach these works through three generic and thematic sets: epic; satire and the social; lyric love, wit, and faith. The rationale here is that by reading medieval, Renaissance, Restoration, and eighteenth-century works in the same genre students will be better able to discern the differences between the literatures of these broad periods and identify shifts in subject, emphasis, tone, theme, and form. This course asks you to become a critically informed respondent not just to individual literary works, but to a specifically literary history (not just a history that influences or provides the subject matter for literature). In practice that means that you'll be writing historical analyses of how literature and the literary alter as concepts (which is a slightly different prospect than writing about any given self-contained work). By the end of this course, you'll be able to narrate how literature develops over this long historical period, especially how it becomes the sort of thing one studies as a significant cultural object. You'll also be able to humiliate interlocutors who think that self-reflexivity, meta-narrative, and other literary innovations started in 1918.

Reading

Epic

Beowulf

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*
John Milton, *Paradise Lost*
Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*

Satire and the Social

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*
Thomas More, *Utopia*
Ben Jonson, *Volpone*
Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

Lyric Love, Wit, and Faith

Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*
Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*
John Donne, *Songs and Sonnets/Divine Poems*
John Wilmot, Earl of Rochester, "Upon Nothing"
Aemilia Lanyer, "A Description of Cook-ham"
Ben Jonson, "To Penshurst"
Andrew Marvell, "The Garden"
Anne Finch, "A Nocturnal Reverie"
"The Dream of the Rood"
Julian of Norwich, *A Book of Showings*
Margery Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe*
George Herbert, *The Temple*
Richard Crashaw, *Carmen Deo Nostro*

Texts

The Norton Anthology of English Literature, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 10th ed., Vol. A, B, C (W.W. Norton & Company, 2018)

Requirements

Three literary history papers, two exams, two recitations.