

English 261g: English Literature to 1800 Anthony Kemp

Spring 2023

Monday, Wednesday 2:00-3:20

Room: Mark Taper Hall of Humanities 115

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Course Description

A study of the development of English literature from its origins to the Renaissance. The course will examine the development of the language itself, and of literary forms, but will particularly emphasize an understanding of the cultures of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, their material and intellectual conditions of existence. Through the literature, and through art and other physical artifacts, we will attempt to comprehend (perhaps even empathetically) cultural worlds that are in many ways utterly estranged from modernity, and to respond to their brilliance, harshness, and strangeness. Rather than attempting a relatively superficial survey of many extracts, we will drill a limited number of deep cores into English medieval and early-modern culture. Welcome to the real Middle Ages and Renaissance!

Learning Objectives

1. Reflect on what it means to be human through close study of human experience throughout time and across diverse cultures. The period we will be studying had cultural practices, beliefs, values, even feelings, very different from our own. Is there a common humanity we share? How different were the minds and physical, lived experiences of the past from our own?
2. Cultivate a critical appreciation for some of the most profound and innovative forms of human expression: the Chaucerian tale, the verse romance, the religious epiphany, the Shakespearean comedy, the Petrarchan and the metaphysical sonnet.
3. Understand and engage critically with the cultural and intellectual movements that these works propose, examine, oppose. Thought, like matter, is clumpy. As matter tends to constellate into planets, stars, solar systems, galaxies, so ideas tend to constellate into movements and forms. By the end of the course, the student will be able to read Middle English (in Chaucer's London dialect), and will understand and be able to give accounts of the following concepts: heroic culture, courtly love, chivalry, vengery, cuckoldry, mysticism, the great vowel shift, Renaissance, Reformation, the Petrarchan, the sonnet, Petrarchan blazon, pastoral (or Arcadian) poetry, metaphysical poetry.
4. Learn to read and interpret actively and analytically, to think critically and creatively, and to write and speak persuasively. With this in mind, we will write two substantial long-form papers. I will give extensive written instructions on what works and what does not. The goal is to learn from the first paper, in order to improve your thinking and writing substantially in the writing of the second. Every student should budget at least one hour to go over your first paper with me.

Required Reading

Geoffrey Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales* (Middle English), Penguin 014042234X

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight (trans. Marie Borroff), Norton 0393930254

Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*, Penguin 0140446737

William Shakespeare, *The Merchant of Venice* (Arden Shakespeare), Bloomsbury 1903436813

William Shakespeare, *Measure for Measure* (Arden Shakespeare), Bloomsbury 1903436443

Richard Sylvester, *English Sixteenth-Century Verse*, Norton 0393302067

Schedule

January

M 9: Introduction

W 11: Chaucer, "The General Prologue"

M 16: Martin Luther King Day

W 18: "The Miller's Tale"

M 23:

W 25: "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale"

M 30:

February

W 1: "The Friar's Tale"

M 6:

W 8: "The Pardoner's Tale"

M 13:

W 15:

M 20: Presidents' Day

W 22: *Gawain and the Green Knight*

M 27:

March

W 1:

M 6: Julian of Norwich, *Revelations of Divine Love*

W 8:

M 13: Spring Recess

W 15: Spring Recess

M 20: *The Merchant of Venice*

W 22:

M 27: *Measure for Measure*

W 29:

April

M 3: Thomas Moore

W 5: Thomas Wyatt

M 10: Walter Raleigh

W 12: Fulke Greville

M 17: John Donne

W 19:

M 24: Andrew Marvel

W 26:

May

M 8: Final Exam 2-4

Evaluation

This syllabus is subject to revision, particularly in matters of schedule. The reading list will be supplemented by handouts. There will be two papers (5 pages minimum each; some students choose to write papers of 10-20 pages), and midterm and final examinations, each piece of written work accounting for 25% of the final grade. Papers should conform to the written instructions that will be provided to each student. Examinations are objective and test knowledge of the texts and of the concepts presented in class. Students need to attend every class meeting, unless excused by exceptional circumstances. No student may anticipate or omit the final examination.

