

SD '00

Prer

English 404: British Literary History
MWF at 2:00 in Eiben 207
Student Consultations before and after class

Dr. Loretta Petrie
Home 734-7019

Text: *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Vol. 1, seventh edition.

This course surveys British literature from the Anglo-Saxon period to roughly 1750; the emphasis, however is on the earlier works. The primary objective is to guide you to an understanding of how British literature developed through the centuries. To understand that development, you will need to know some historical background and something of English language development as well as studying the major literary works. As the course unfolds, you should begin to see how modern literature, both English and American, has grown out of these early works.

Requirements: regular attendance, punctuality, participation	10%
three quizzes (5% each)	15%
reading journal	40%--due end of term
comparative term paper or creative journal	20%--due April 7

Reading Schedule: Please read the introduction to each period and to each literary work as well as reading the literature. These should be read before class discussion since you will be expected to participate and eventually to lead discussion.

The following schedule may need adjustment.

- Jan. 21: "The Dream of the Rood," p. 26; "The Wanderer," p. 99; "The Wife's Lament," p. 102.
- Jan. 24, 26, 28: "Beowulf," p. 29ff.
- Jan. 31: "The Anglo-Saxon Chronicle," p. 110; "History of Kings of Britain," p. 115; "Myth of Arthur's Return," p. 124 (3 versions). Beginning of "Sir Gawain and the Green Knight," p. 156ff. continued on Feb. 2 and 4.
- Feb. 7: Quiz #1. Collect journal for first comments.
- Feb. 9: Prologue to "The Canterbury Tales", p. 215.
- Feb. 11: The Miller's Prologue and Tale, p. 235.
- Feb. 14: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, p. 253.
- Feb. 16: The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale, p. 281.
- Feb. 18: The Nun's Priest's Tale, 296.
- Feb. 23: Middle English Lyrics, p. 349ff.
- Feb. 25: The Second Shepherds' Play, p. 391.
- Feb. 28: Excerpt from *Morte Darthur*. p. 419.
- Mar. 1: Quiz #2.

EN 404--Period Journal
Pages

Due Date:

APRIL 7

Minimum of

7

First choose a specific year in which you believe something significant occurred. You might choose 1066, the date of the Norman Conquest, or 1611, the year the King James Bible was published, or 1485, the year Sir Thomas Mallory's Morte D'Arthur was published (and the date usually considered the break between the English Middle Ages and the English Renaissance). Your year should be one from roughly 450 A.D. up to and including 1660 A.D., the year Charles II was restored to the throne.

Next choose the persona you want to become. This can be a real person like Geoffrey Chaucer or Sir Walter Raleigh or Queen Elizabeth I; or it can be a fictional person like an actor in Shakespeare's company, a doctor during a year of bubonic plague, or a witness to the beheading of Sir/St. Thomas More. Simply choose someone you can imagine yourself being.

Next, you will need to research the year carefully and the biography of your person if he/she really lived. If your persona is fictional, you may need to research occupation, or lifestyle, or locale during the period. As you read, make notes that would be useful in presenting a detailed and accurate account of your interests during the year you have chosen. For example, in the year 1588, the year of the Spanish Armada's defeat, Marlowe's Dr. Faustus was first acted and it is believed Shakespeare was already in London and beginning to write plays. Were you a British seaman of the period, real or imaginary, you could very well be a theatre-goer as well; perhaps you watched the queen as she travelled from London to Windsor; maybe you were stricken with an illness that required leeches or bleeding. You decide.

Keep a complete bibliography of your sources of information. (That becomes your last page and it should be in correct bibliography form.) You will not need notes unless you want to comment on what you are writing.

Remember to try to speak in a voice your character would use. You need not try to duplicate the language of the time (no attempts at old English please), but you may if you think you can carry it off. Be careful of chronology. (You can't possibly live to witness the assassination of Beckett and then visit his shrine with the Canterbury pilgrims.)

Good luck in your journey through time! Your prospectus is due on Sept. 26.

EN 404: Guidelines for Comparative Paper

Due Date: April 7

Length: Minimum of five double-spaced pages, standard format.

Your paper should compare and contrast two of the works we have studied using something the two works have in common as your starting point. You may add a third literary work if you wish--and that work may be contemporary but need not be. You can, if you want, make passing reference to other works that are relevant or use works within our periods that we have not studied such as plays by Shakespeare. The object is to explore the ways in which traditions develop, genres change, ideals are adapted to the times. Be sure to narrow your focus.

Here are some possibilities:

- sonnet sequences--comparing subject matter
- epics--Beowulf, The Faerie Queene, Paradise Lost ; the focus could be on central characters, ideals evident, major conflicts
- narratives relating to King Arthur and his court: Gawain and the Greene Knight, Malory's Morte d'Arthur, The Faerie Queene
- conceptions of hell or demons: Dr. Faustus, Paradise Lost
- pastoral tradition including Sidney, Spenser, Milton's work
- pastoral tradition versus presentation of shepherds in The Second Shepherds' Play
- changes in comedy from Second Shepherds' Play, Shakespeare, to Way of the World

Some possible titles to give you ideas:

- The Changing Role of Women in British Literature
- Soldier, Courtier, Scholar
- Demonic Characters
- King and His Men (Beowulf, Arthur)
- Satire from Chaucer to Swift
- Utopia and Mock-Utopias
- Monsters and Dragons

Your paper will be graded according to the depth and detail of your argument. You are not only trying to convince your reader that your understanding of the literature is valid, but to make the literature come alive in your writing.

You may need to quote important phrases or passages occasionally, but the bulk of your paper should be your own thought on the topic. If you quote extensively, your paper will need to be longer.

READING JOURNALS

A reading journal is a continuous record of your thinking about the literature assigned for this course. Because you can't write about every aspect of even a short selection, you should write about what interests you, stirs your imagination, or puzzles you. Formulate your own questions and then try to answer them: what values are important to these people? what can I learn about their culture? Can I learn anything about the poet? If you start with something like this, you are bound to raise even deeper questions.

The purpose in keeping such a journal is to give form to your thinking. Reading literature cannot be a passive activity like watching television. You must activate your imagination and reasoning powers. Until you write down your thoughts, they are often circular or repetitious. The process of writing forces you to articulate what you think and feel, much as writing the story, poem, or play expresses what the writer thinks and feels about his or her subject. (Not many women writers in the early centuries.) Journal writing will prepare you to write for quizzes, papers, and examinations; it will involve you more deeply in the reading and class discussion.

Journal entries need not be typed or revised. You can scratch out, even misspell if you must. Just remember that the journal must be legible; if I can't read it, you have wasted your time. The journal does need to be thoughtful, does need to develop your response in detail. Your journal grade will take into consideration the depth and detail of your thinking, the sensitivity of your responses, and your ability to put these into language. There is no point in repeating what the editor, the class, or some critic says about the literature. I certainly know what I have said; please don't repeat to me my own response. Write what *you* think.

Here are some possibilities:

- Describe the speaker (or the hero) of the poem/story.
- What is the problem? the conflict? How is that resolved?
- Describe the opponent. What makes the hero a match for him?
- Compare and contrast two different characters or two different settings.
- Trace a motif or set of images running through the literature.
- Disagree with some comment made in class and explain why you disagree.
- How does an Old English hero like Beowulf differ from one in the Middle English period?
- What part does religious belief play in this poem or story?

You should have a journal entry for each day of class. If you are in doubt about what you are doing, let me look at a few early entries. Otherwise, I will collect the journals for initial comment on the day of our first quiz.