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## Early British Literary History: *Beowulf* to 1785

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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 Romantic period. Yes, that's a thousand years in fifteen weeks. Its primary aim is contained in the title: 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 groups, paired with pivotal concepts: epic and analogy; satire and irony; lyric and apostrophe. 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 an informed reader of not only individual literary works, but a specifically literary history (not just a history that influences or provides the subject matter for literature). That will require you to read quite a lot, so please plan ahead. 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 and that *Beowulf* is just like *Game of Thrones*.

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### Reading

#### Epic/Analogy

*Beowulf*

Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*

John Milton, *Paradise Lost*

Alexander Pope, *The Rape of the Lock*

#### Satire/Irony

*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*

Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*

Thomas More, *Utopia*

Ben Jonson, *Volpone*

Jonathan Swift, *Gulliver's Travels*

#### Lyric/Apostrophe

Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*

Mary Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*

John Donne, *Songs and Sonnets/Divine Poems*

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*

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### Texts

*The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, gen. ed. Stephen Greenblatt, 11<sup>th</sup> ed., Vol. A, B, C (W.W. Norton & Company, 2024). ISBN: 978-1-324-07280-5. Paper copy. No e-book or other electronic substitutions.

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### Requirements

Three short answer and essay exams; three memorizations/recitations; one literary historical report (15 pages); an oral defense of your report; no phones, laptops, or tablets in class.