Major British Authors

Hum/En 5, “Major British Authors,” is an introduction to selected works from the British canon, from the medieval period to the nineteenth century. The class will feature close readings of texts, including both plays and poems, with an emphasis on the analysis of literary structures and motifs.

September 30
Organizational meeting and introduction to the course.

October 2-9
Chaucer (1340?-1400)
The Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* (1387?)
The Knight’s Tale

October 7
**First Paper Due**  Topic to be announced ~500 words.

October 14 –21
The Miller’s Tale, The Reeve’s Tale
The Wife of Bath’s Prologue and Tale, The Merchant’s Tale

October 23
**Second Paper Due** - 1000 words on Chaucer.

October 23 – October 30
Shakespeare (1564-1616), Comedy

*A Midsummer Night’s Dream* (1595-96) and/or *Twelfth Night* (1600-01)

November 4 – November 13

The Metaphysical Wit of John Donne (1572-1631)
*Songs and Sonnets*, pp. 3-52.
Selections from Donne’s prose sermons and also works by other poets.

November 13
**Third Paper Due** - 1250 words on Donne.

November 18 – November 25
Shakespeare (1564-1616), Tragedy
*Othello* (1604)

November 27  Thanksgiving recess.
December 2-4
Charles Dickens (1812-70)

Hard Times

December 4

**Final Paper Due** - 1250 words on Shakespeare.

**Final Exams** – December 10-12

PAPERS

Each student is to write four papers: due October 7, October 23, November 13, and December 4. Papers are to be turned in on these dates, unless you have arranged with me in advance for an extension. Grades will be Pass or Fail, with (sometimes) a shadow grade attached.

The final grade in the course will be based on the four assigned essays and participation in class discussions. Students who do not attend the class on a regular basis should not expect to pass.

ASSIGNMENTS

1. Topic to be announced. **(October 7)**

2. Compare one of the assigned Canterbury Tales with the character of its teller portrayed in the general prologue. How do the themes, attitudes, and rhetoric of the tale relate to the character of the teller? Be sure to consider the possibilities of an ironic relationship. **(October 23)**

   or

   Compose an imaginary “letter home” from one of the pilgrims or a sequence of entries in a diary of one of the pilgrims. The object in such an assignment is to capture creatively the personality of the pilgrim, as well as commenting on other pilgrims—their personalities, actions, or stories. **(October 23)**

3. Explicate Donne’s “A Lecture upon the Shadow.” Be sure to deal with not only what the poem is saying, but how it is saying it. How are the metaphors structured? What is the tone of the poem (i.e., the speaker’s attitude toward his subject), and does it change in the course of the poem? Be sure to indicate clearly the relationships between the main image (shadows) and the subject (love) of this “lecture.” **You may choose a different Donne poem to explicate if you wish, but whatever poem you choose, pay close attention to the language.** **(November 13)**

4. Discuss Iago’s strategy with which he traps Othello. Consider carefully at least one scene between Iago and Othello and pay close attention to Iago’s language and Othello’s reactions to it. How does Iago succeed in implying more than he explicitly says? What in Othello’s language indicates his entrapment in Iago’s vision? **(December 4)**

   or

   An essay on *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* or *Twelfth Night*. Topics to be announced. **(December 4)**

Guidelines for Papers

Papers will be graded on intellectual content and on their conformity to the conventions of standard English syntax, sentence structure, spelling, and grammar. Papers evincing severe deficiencies in the norms of English composition will be awarded a grade no higher than D+. For the conventions of standard English, see the Harbrace College Handbook, Joseph Williams’s *Style*, or any other basic guide to English Composition. I encourage you to let me help you with your writing. Also, writing tutors are available to meet with you to discuss your essays. Papers should be computer-printed and double-spaced. Hand-written papers may be submitted only with prior approval of the professor. Pages must be numbered. Hand-written numbering is permitted. **Reminder:** The Hixon Prize is awarded each year for outstanding writing in freshman humanities.
General Prologue

Here beginneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.

Whan that Aprill with hise shoures>sote> showers/sweet
The droghte of March hath perced> pierced
to the rote,
And bathed every veyne in swich licour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
Whan Zephirus eek> also/breath
Inspired hath in every holt> field
and heeth>
The tendre croppes,> shoots
and the younge sonne
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours yronne,>
run
And smale fowles> birds
maken melodye
That slepen al the nyght with open ye
(So priketh hem> them/their hearts)
Nature in hir corages)>:
Thanne longen> long/go
folk to goon> on pilgrimages,
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,>
foreign shores
To ferne halwes>, shrines
couth in sondry londes,
And specially from every shires ende
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,>
go
The holy blisful> blessed
martir for to seeke,
That hem hath holpen> helped/sick
whan that they were seke.>
Bifel that in that seson> season
In a day,
it happened
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
Redy to wenden> go
on my pilgrimage
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
At nyght was come into that hostelrye>
in
Wel nine and twenty in a companye,
Of sondry fold, by aventure> chance
yfalle
In felawship,> companionship
a and pilgrimes were they alle
That toward Caunterbury wolden> wished to
ryde.