

CALIFORNIA INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY  
Division of the Humanities and Social Sciences

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Hum/En 5  
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Section 2  
Fall 2008  
Tuesday 2:30-4  
Thursday 2:30-4  
128 Baxter

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