Holding a Mirror up to Nature: A Survey of Early British Literature

With the rediscovery of glass mirror manufacture in Europe in the twelfth century came an increase in a category of book called the ‘mirror-book’. The earliest mirror-books were moralistic in nature. They attempted to encourage virtuous behavior by presenting role models and discourage vices by showing how vices have been punished. As the centuries passed, this mirror-book category expanded to include secular literature and even stage plays. As we read and discuss the texts assigned for this class, we will see what they reflect about the cultures from which they came, and we will ask what these texts may have to show us about ourselves, our university, our city, our nation, and our world. We will also examine the origins and development of the English language, the many complex relationships between history and literature, and the evolution of new types of writing.

Required Texts:

Course Requirements:
Attendance (10%)
Class participation (10%) This includes solicited and voluntary contributions.
Two short papers (15% each)
Two in-class presentations (10% each)
A Final Exam OR its equivalent (30%)

Students with bona fide disabilities will be afforded reasonable accommodations.

Course Schedule (subject to change):
M Jan. 12 Welcome and introductions
W Jan. 14 A Midsummer Night’s Dream Act 1
F Jan. 16 A Midsummer Night’s Dream Acts 2 and 3
M Jan. 19 No class: The Reverend Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. Holiday
W Jan. 21 A Midsummer Night’s Dream Acts 4 and 5
F Jan. 23 National Players Workshop, Laidlaw Performing Arts Center
Saturday Jan. 24  Performance of Dream at Saenger Theatre at 8pm

M Jan. 26 Read “The Middle Ages to ca. 1485” (1-14)

W Jan. 28 Beowulf introduction (29-32) and the beginning of the poem (lines 1-490)

F Jan. 30 Beowulf The Fight with Grendel (lines 662-835); Another attack (lines 1251-1650); Advice (lines 1651-1798); Dragon wakes to conclusion (lines 2200-3182)

M Feb. 2 Sir Gawain introduction (156-158) and Part 1 of poem

W Feb. 4 Sir Gawain Part 4 of poem

F Feb. 6 Canterbury Tales introduction (210-215) plus the General Prologue

M Feb. 9 Canterbury Tales The Miller’s Prologue and Tale

W Feb. 11 Canterbury Tales Wife of Bath’s Prologue

F Feb. 13 Canterbury Tales Wife of Bath’s Tale

M Feb. 16 Piers Plowman (317-328)

W Feb. 18 Piers Plowman (328-349)

F Feb. 20 The Chester Play of Noah’s Flood (379-391)

M Feb. 23 Everyman (445-middle of 455)

W Feb. 25 Everyman (middle of 455-467)

F Feb. 27 Malory’s Morte D’Arthur (419-439)

M March 1 The Sixteenth Century (469-middle of 485)

W March 3 More’s Utopia (503-middle of 523)

F March 5 Skelton (499-503); Wyatt (525-527, They flee from me on p.529-530, Mine own John Poins on p.535-537); Surrey (569-570, Wyatt resteth here on p.574-575)

M March 8 Queen Elizabeth (593-middle of 594, Speech at Tilbury p.597); Spenser (614-middle of 616, 628-641)

W March 10 Sidney’s Defense of Poesy (middle of 909-middle of 911, m939-954)

F March 12 First paper due.
M March 15 through F March 19 No class: Spring Break

M March 22 Ralegh (978-top of 879, 885-887); The Wider World (889-middle of 890); Drake (middle of 894-bottom of 897); Hariot (901-906)

W March 24 Religious writings (538-539), Anne Askew (bottom of 547-550); Foxe (551-top of 553)

F March 26 Scientific and philosophical writings (1528-1530, 1548-1552, 1587-1588, 2145-2150)

M March 29 Doctor Faustus (970-971, middle of 990-top of 991, plus scenes 1, 2, 3, 5, 12, and 13 of the play)

W March 31 Twelfth Night Act 1

F April 2 Twelfth Night Act 2

M April 5 Twelfth Night Act 3

W April 7 Twelfth Night Act 4

F April 9 TBA

M April 12 Twelfth Night Act 5

W April 14 Donne (1233-1235, The Flea on 1236, The Sun Rising on 1239, The Indifferent on 1239-1240, Holy Sonnets on 1268-middle of 1272)

F April 16 Ben Jonson (1292-top of 1303)

M April 19 Milton’s Paradise Lost intro. and Book 1 (1771-middle of 1774, bottom of 1815-top of 1836)

W April 21 Paradise Lost Book 4 (1874-1895)

F April 23 Paradise Lost Book 6 (1915-1934)

M April 26 Paradise Lost Book 9 (1961-1986); Amelia Lanyer (1285-1287)

W April 28 Pope, The Rape of the Lock (2505-2508, 2525-2544)

F April 30 Last day of class. Second paper due.