NGLISH 4820: EARLY ENGLISH LITERATURE
Three credit hours, Writing designator (W).
11-11:50 Mondays, Wednesdays, & Fridays, 302 Sanford

INSTRUCTOR: Thomas McGowan, 121 Sanford (first floor, back door).
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Office hours: MWF 8-9 & 10-11; TR 8:30-9:30 & 10:45-noon; other times by appointment or opportunity.

COURSE DESCRIPTION
This course presents an introduction to literature written, sung, read, and performed in the British Isles during the medieval period and to late Middle English language. Two noted modern authors—the fantasy writer J.R.R. Tolkien and the religious thinker C.S. Lewis—devoted their main academic work to this literature and language, and a noted contemporary poet, Seamus Heaney, has translated Beowulf, a central text from our course. Because this course has a writing designator, the instructor also emphasizes developing effective prose using a word processor.

For about one-third of the course, we read Old English and early Anglo-Latin works in translation, including the great epic Beowulf, heroic and elegiac poems, religious and didactic verse, and historical prose. In reading these, we consider the forms and purposes of literature during the English “Dark” Ages and study such important themes as the role of the hero in society, the values of the Anglo-Saxon comitatus, the mixing of Germanic heroic and Hiberno-Christian cultures, oral and written literature, and medieval views of history and literature. We’ll also give some attention to problems and opportunities in the translation of Old English, including discussion of Irish poet Seamus Heaney’s new best-selling translation of Beowulf.

In the remainder of the course, we read a considerable selection of Middle English and Anglo-Norman literature, some in translation and some in Middle English. These readings include selections from The Canterbury Tales, secular and religious lyrics, a Breton lai by Marie de France, the prose writings of two female mystics, the alliterative poetry of the Gawain-Poet and William Langland, and vernacular drama. We again consider literary forms and purposes, but we have special interests in larger cultural backgrounds, e.g., the relationship between visual art and literature during the High Middle Ages, philosophical and theological systems and models, and the role of poetry in medieval Christian and court cultures.

Throughout the course, we focus on texts, what they reveal of medieval beliefs about and attitudes toward women and men, this world and the next, and how they reveal these meanings.

GOALS AND OBJECTIVES
❖ To develop skills in interpreting medieval texts and modern criticism written about them.
❖ To know some of the features of Old and Middle English language.
❖ To acquire a basic understanding of Middle English grammar and the ability to read Middle English aloud.
❖ To recognize a set of medieval literary genres and the conventions important to their expression.
❖ To be familiar with the following critical approaches as they apply to medieval works: close reading and formalist, genre and stylistic, allegorical, iconographic, rhetorical, and new historicist.
To understand some significant medieval models of the person, society, and the universe.
To understand some historical, intellectual, and cultural contexts significant to specific medieval works.
To work with research resources helpful to understanding medieval literature.
To develop skills in writing and talking about medieval texts.

COURSE REQUIREMENTS
Students complete readings as directed in section assignments. They write mid-term and final examinations that ask questions about concepts, methods, and themes covered in classes. Examination responses include short written discussions and multiple choice format; however, the final will also include a comprehensive essay. They write exercises applying skills in interpreting medieval literature and using the conventions of scholarly writing. They speak a competency test in reading Chaucer’s language aloud based on work with a tape and script. They work on developing computer learning skills including Internet searching and participation in a WebCT discussion forum.

EVALUATION AND GRADING
The instructor evaluates requirements according to the letter and value categories of the Appalachian State University catalog. He weighs requirements as follows: participation in class and WebCT work (20%), mid-term (20%), final examination (25%), competency test in reading Chaucer’s language aloud (10%), and ten writing exercises (40%). All these activities are required, but this arrangement allows dropping the lowest computed 15% from the final evaluation. Writing exercises are due on the dates assigned and should be completed in appropriate format using a word processor. Late submissions receive evaluation penalties.

COMPUTERS AND WEBCT
A special focus of this semester’s course will be using computer technology to support learning, appreciation, and personal growth. The instructor is happy to communicate by e-mail with students and tries to check his e-mail at least at the start and end of the working day. All writing exercises must be completed on a word processor and printer. Some writing and reading assignments will include Internet and compact disc research.

The course has a WebCT site designed to support study and learning. Developed assignments are posted there: specific readings, writing exercises, and directions for approaching some topics. It includes a Discussion Forum for threading questions, responses, and comments. Some supplementary critical readings will be stored there too. The course has a basic Internet website, which in the spirit of the Web is open to all, but the course WebCT site includes additional material and affords discussion privacy for our learning community.

ATTENDANCE POLICY
Because multiple absences create extraordinary problems in instruction, evaluation, and intellectual habit, the instructor encourages faithful class attendance and writes or calls students he notices cutting too much. Topics of class discussion are very present in examinations, and writing exercises are due at the start of assigned classes. The instructor interprets more than five class absences as unsatisfactory completion of the course and awards the appropriate no-credit grade. No absences are “excused,” although Mr. McGowan understands a student occasionally must miss a class.

PLAGIARISM, ACADEMIC DISHONESTY, & COLLABORATION
Passing off another person’s work as your own is unacceptable in college—and life, and in this course, such practices will receive grading penalties, usually an F or zero on the assignment, and
appropriate applications of the Appalachian State University Code of Student Conduct and Academic Integrity Code. Cheating on writing exercises and examinations is a major violation of the trust among members of the academic community and will result in a course grade of no credit (F). Mr. McGowan will apply Appalachian’s review procedures to cases of intellectual dishonesty that he considers intentional and egregious. Don’t cheat or lie. (Kenneth Starr might catch you.)

You may work with others in doing writing exercises, but you must submit your own version of the assignment. Don’t let another person copy your work; do work with each other to make work more meaningful. If you borrow interpretive words from an outside source, document that use.

REQUIRED TEXTS
Various handouts including a tapescript and poems.
Texts from Internet websites.

RESERVE TEXTS AND OTHER READINGS (AND LISTENINGS)
Some reserve texts will be in Belk Library. Mr. McGowan will provide periodic listing of titles as part of section assignments. The reserve section will also include copies of a cassette tape of Middle English and Chaucerian readings that you may copy. The WebCT site also provides some supplementary reading.

SYLLABUS AND CALENDAR
Sections of the course will be covered by separate lists of reading assignments, reading suggestions, and supplementary readings. These directions will be assembled with some supporting interactive links on the course website and its WebCT site.

The following calendar lists tentative course plans:

AUGUST
28: Introduction to course.
30: Anglo-Latin history writing--Bede; Cædmon and the Old English alliterative line.
SEPTEMBER
2: Labor Day holiday.
4: Heroic poetry--“The Battle of Maldon” and other battle poems. Writing Exercise #1.
6: Old English elegies.
9: Old English hagiography. Writing Exercise #2.
11-16: Beowulf. 16: Writing Exercise #3.
18: Beowulf criticism. Writing Exercise #4.
20: Riddles and religious verse.
25: Middle English language.
OCTOBER
2: SGGK continued. Writing Exercise #6.
4-7: Middle English language and lyric poetry.
9: The Visio of Piers Plowman.
11-14: Chaucer’s General Prologue.
16: Mid-term examination.
17-19: Fall break.
21: Exam critique. Language and reading The Knight’s Tale.
23: The Knight’s Tale.
25: The Miller’s Tale.
28: The Reeve’s Tale.
30: The Wife of Bath’s Prologue.

OCTOBER
1: The Wife of Bath’s Tale.
4: Marie de France’s Lanval. Writing Exercise #7.
6: The Clerk’s Tale.
8: The Franklin’s Tale.
11: The Pardoner’s Tale.
13: The Nun’s Priest’s Tale. Writing Exercise
#8.
15: Julian of Norwich and her *Shewings*.
18: The prose of Margery Kempe.
20: York Creation and Fall plays.
26: Deadline for Middle English reading proficiency.
27-30: Thanksgiving Break.

DECEMBER
2: Wakefield *Second Shepherds’ Play*
4: Plays of the Crucifixion. Writing Exercise

ASSIGNMENT
Friday, 30 August
*Topics:* Anglo-Saxon Christianity, Bede’s historiography, the Old English alliterative line, computer resources.

*Computer work:*
☐ Master accessing your Appalnet account.
☐ Visit the course WebCT site, and be able to get future assignments from it.

*Required reading:* Crossley-Holland x-xii, 156-75, and 205; *Middle Ages* 1-6, 19-20, and 23-26.

We read Crossley-Holland’s introduction and the Norton preliminary material to know dates and broad concerns. We read Bede to see how some of those concerns are expressed in a Christian scholar’s history.

All historians select details—and stories. Although our sense of selectivity is skewed by editorial and pedagogical filters, we can think about the kinds of stories that Bede tells and the values within them. The story of Edmund’s conversion illustrates graphically, the introduction of Christianity to a heroic culture and “the extraordinary power of creative assimilation” (Wrenn 1) in that process. The story of Caedmon describes a native poetic tradition that miraculously rises to Christian religious functions. The Norton reading describes one theory of the mechanics of that tradition, the Old English alliterative line (19); in class, we’ll consider one alternate explanation. “Cædmon’s Hymn” gives us a sense of the forms and one purpose of Old English poetry. The story of Cuthbert shows Christian asceticism with strikingly practical consequences.

*Supplementary reading:* Greenfield, CHOEL, 168-72 and 69-79.

Works Cited
