

# English 301: British Literature, Origins through Early Modern

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Section XH81, Code 58548  
Thursday 6-8:40pm  
Room: Carman 322

**Course Description:** *3 hours, 3 credits. English literature to 1660, emphasizing major writers in poetry, drama, and prose.*

The title of the course as it appears in the Lehman College catalogue indicates a sort of linearity to British literature. The phrase “origins through early modern” suggests that British literature sprang into being all on its own in the early Middle Ages, and that it then developed – again, all on its own – through the early modern period. But in fact, British literature was of course always influenced by other literatures and cultures, including the culture(s) which it originated from to begin with. The course description adds to the insular perception of British literature by calling it “English literature.” There was lots of non-English-language literature in medieval Britain (French and Latin, of course, but also Irish, Welsh, Hebrew, and Arabic). And the idea of a unified “English” people is also problematic. This is not the fault of Lehman – it is the fault of the field of medieval studies, the institution of the university, and the development of English departments in the 19<sup>th</sup> through 21<sup>st</sup> centuries.

In this class, we will learn the basics of medieval and early modern British literature, but we will not confine ourselves to English-language texts or to texts produced within the borders of England. Rather, we will engage in current scholarly conversations about “[Whose Middle Ages](#)” we study and why, looking at texts from a multiplicity of perspectives. We’ll talk about how the imagery of the Middle Ages is currently being misappropriated by white supremacists to foster hatred and exclusion, and we’ll learn about what the Middle Ages *really* looked like – multicultural and full of difference, but also full of mistrust, prejudice, and racism of its own.

We will also learn to question how we know what we know, both about the Middle Ages and early modern periods, and about our contemporary world. We’ll look at how people in the Middle Ages and early modern periods constructed knowledge about themselves, their neighbors, and their world. We’ll examine the stories of the Middle Ages and early modern periods for evidence of what people thought of their realities and what they imagined the world could be. We’ll think about how people in the Middle Ages and early modern periods expressed emotion, and how similar or different that is to our contemporary emotional expression. We’ll look at the forms and genres of medieval and early modern literature from various cultures and learn to appreciate the literary and cultural environment of an age so foreign to ours and yet also so similar.

## Course Objectives

- to develop an awareness of a variety of literary genres, structures, values, and purposes
- to write about literary texts with imagination, precision, and detail
- to place literary texts within their aesthetic, political, religious, and historical contexts
- to develop an understanding of medieval and early modern literatures and cultures

## Course Goals

- demonstrate the ability to compose well-constructed and rhetorically effective writing in various modes and media, including formal essays, creative think-pieces, and use of social media
- refine use of critical methods and approaches to literature in written work
- demonstrate effective pre-writing techniques, including active reading, drafting, and responding to critique from peers and the professor
- demonstrate mastery in use of English language conventions and MLA formatting

## Required Text(s)

Most texts we will read are available on BlackBoard. Purchase (or borrow from a library):

1. *Silence: A Thirteenth-Century French Romance*. Trans. Sarah Roche-Mahdi, 2007. ISBN: 978-0-87013-543-9. \$18.
2. *Merchant of Venice*. ed. Leah S. Marcus. Norton Critical Editions, 2004. ISBN: 9780393925296. \$17.
3. *The Norton Anthology of English Literature: Volume A, The Middle Ages*. Tenth Edition. ISBN: 978-0-393-60302-6.

## Assessment

10%	Essay 1
25%	Essay 2
30%	Essay 3
10%	Twitter / Instagram timeline
10%	BlackBoard posts and in-class writing
15%	Participation

## Course Requirements

1. **Regular attendance.** Regular attendance is essential. Since this class meets only once a week, one absence means missing 7% of class meetings; two absences 14%; three absences 21%. More than **two** absences will significantly affect your grade.
2. **Weekly readings.** This class moves at a fast pace. Stay on track with the reading schedule, read carefully and attentively, and take notes as you read. Check BlackBoard for reading guides. I understand that you may be overwhelmed at times and end up not having time to read. This is okay if it happens once or twice all semester. But **please be honest** with me

and let me know when you haven't read. It will help me guide you during class discussions, and it will be less stressful for you than trying to fake it during discussion!

3. **Participation.** Bring your text with you every day and be ready to contribute to the class discussion. Participation will be graded holistically (ie you won't get a certain amount of points per class; rather, your grade will be based on your overall participation over the course of the semester). If you're uncomfortable speaking up in class, speak to me as early as possible so we can potentially make other arrangements for you to participate.
4. **In-class writing and Blackboard posts.** In-class writing will help you think through points about the texts we discuss, as well as prepare and practice for the essays you will write. Most will not be handed in. Keep all your writing and any work you do, as much of it can help you when you're writing your essays. There will also be some Blackboard prompts.
5. **Three formal essays.** Papers are due on the dates indicated in the schedule. Your first paper will be an in-depth study of one aspect of one text, focusing on poetry. Your second essay will be a thesis-driven analysis of one text, and your third will be a thesis-driven analysis of one play. Detailed assignment sheets for each essay will be provided in class. *Make every effort to attend class on days when papers will be assigned and when peer review is scheduled.* Being present for those discussions will be essential to your ability to write an effective paper.
6. **Twitter or Instagram timeline.** The fields of medieval and early modern history and literature are becoming increasingly aware of their public responsibilities. You'll get a chance to engage in that by writing a Twitter thread or Instagram post. This assignment will also help you keep track of a historical and literary timeline.
7. **Extra credit: Live-Tweet as you read.** I will award extra credit (up to three points total) if you live-tweet as you read each text. You could - and should - take notes in addition to what you post on Twitter, but make sure to post at least *three* tweets before each class session to get the extra credit. Your tweets can be raw reaction ("omg I can't believe they followed through on their plan! I bet they get in major hot water") or analysis ("the image of the bluebird when Carrie goes home echoes the bluebird when her mom gave birth to her") or questions ("why does the ogre use baby-language?"). Use the hashtag #eng301lehman in every tweet. See these threads for examples of live-tweeting books:  
[https://twitter.com/Ernest\\_Robyn/status/1061816767272677376](https://twitter.com/Ernest_Robyn/status/1061816767272677376)  
(*Harry Potter*, JK Rowling)  
<https://twitter.com/DainyBernstein/status/1085306006761021440>  
(*Sometimes We Tell the Truth*, Kim Zarins)  
<https://twitter.com/destinyunique3/status/1141397727600885766>  
(*Beauty*, Robin McKinley)

**\*\*\*In all areas and all requirements: if you see that you will have difficulty completing an assignment as described or by the due date, approach me as soon as you become aware of the problem. It is far easier to work out alternative solutions in advance of the deadline than to try to patch up missed deadlines, etc.\*\*\***

## CLASS POLICIES

**Breaks.** This class runs from 6:00 until 8:40 - two hours and forty minutes. We will take a short 15-minute break around the midway point of each class, to allow you to grab a quick coffee or snack, drink some water, or stretch your legs.

**Chatting hours.** Often called “office hours,” this is a time for you to come by and talk to me about anything at all! You can have specific questions or concerns, you can have general concerns about the class or your work, or you can just be in the mood for a chat. No matter the reason, **you should absolutely make use of this time.** I will be in my office (Carman 393) every Wednesday and Thursday, 5pm-6pm (before class). If this time does not work for you (ie, you have a class or work during that hour), please email me to set up an alternative appointment. **Your professors are here to help you. It’s part of our job.**

**Early and late assignments.** Deadlines for assignments are on the reading schedule. If you submit your assignment one day early, you will receive 2 points of extra credit for that assignment. If you submit your assignment up to one week late, you won’t be docked but I won’t comment on the assignment.

**Accessibility and accommodations.** If you require accommodation, please contact me privately to discuss your specific needs. Please also visit the **Office of Disabilities Services in Shuster Hall, Room 238**, to coordinate reasonable accommodations. These can range from speech-to-text devices to more frequent breaks - anything you need, please ask.

**Names and Pronouns.** If you would like to be called by a name other than the one given to me via CUNYFirst, please let me know. I will ask for each student’s pronouns on the first day of class. If you would like me to change the way I refer to you at any point, or if you would like me to use different pronouns in class versus via email (for example), please let me know. **My pronouns are they/them.**

**Diversity and inclusion.** It is my intent that students from all diverse backgrounds and perspectives be well-served by this course, that students’ learning needs be addressed both in and out of class, and that the diversity that the students bring to this class be viewed as a resource, strength, and benefit. It is my intent to present materials and activities that are respectful of diversity: gender identity, sexuality, disability, age, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, nationality, religion, and culture. Your suggestions are encouraged and appreciated. Please let me know ways to improve the effectiveness of the course for you personally, or for other students or student groups.

**Point of view.** The readings, class lectures, and my comments in class will suggest a particular point of view. This perspective is my own and does not have to be yours! I encourage you to disagree with the ideas in the readings and lectures as well as the perspectives of your colleagues in the

course. Please express yourself! A significant part of a college education is learning about the complexity of various issues; therefore, it is important that we listen and respect one another but we do not have to agree. A richer discussion will occur when a variety of perspectives are presented in class for discussion.

**Important note:** Given the sensitive and challenging nature of some of the material discussed in class, it is imperative that there be an atmosphere of **trust and safety** in the classroom. I will attempt to foster an environment in which each class member is able to hear and respect each other. It is critical that each class member show respect for all views expressed in class. It is expected that some of the material in this course may evoke strong emotions; please be respectful of others' emotions and be mindful of your own. Please let me know if something said or done in the classroom, by either myself or other students, is particularly troubling or causes discomfort or offense. While our intention may not be to cause discomfort or offense, the impact of what happens throughout the course is not to be ignored and is something that I consider to be very important and deserving of attention. If and when this occurs, there are several ways to alleviate some of the discomfort or hurt you may experience:

1. Discuss the situation privately with me via email or during office hours. I am always open to listening to students' experiences and want to work with students to find acceptable ways to process and address the issue.
2. Discuss the situation with the class, either during the relevant discussion or after conferring with me. Chances are there is at least one other student in the class who had a similar response to the material. Discussion enhances the ability for all class participants to have a fuller understanding of context and impact of course material and class discussions.
3. Notify me of the issue through another source such as your academic advisor, a trusted faculty member, or a peer. If for any reason you do not feel comfortable discussing the issue directly with me, I encourage you to seek out another, more comfortable avenue to address the issue. The Counseling Center's information is listed below in the Resources section.

**Children in the classroom.** I understand that you are more than a student, and some of you may be mothers, fathers, or guardians. Nursing babies are always allowed in class. If your child's school is cancelled, or if for any other reason you need to bring your child along to class, please check in with me before the start of class, and try to sit near the door for that day so you and your child won't disturb the class if you need to take a bathroom break etc.

**How to succeed in this class:**

- Read the material thoroughly (including any introductions or forewords) before class. Check BlackBoard for reading guides.
- Annotate your reading(s). Underline key passages (not everything), record reactions in the margins, ask questions, use asterisks and other symbols to indicate your process. Make that text your own!

- Attend every class. If you miss, get notes from a classmate (make sure you have someone's contact info at the start of the semester).
- Listen and take notes by hand or on a computer. You'll have to hear, think, summarize, and write – each of which engages your brain and body differently and more comprehensively than just sitting passively in class.
- Participate in class discussion and ask questions when you're unclear about something, if you have a question, or if you have an interesting thought or idea. You never know - your comment may make or break the class for another person! If you tend to be quiet in class, that's fine, but I will call on you from time to time. Please let me know in advance if you have anxiety and/or have other reasons for not wanting to be called on.
- Talk with others about what you're learning, what you're confused about, and what you're interested in. Respond to classmates' tweets and Blackboard posts, even when I'm not grading responses!
- Reread the text, and let your annotations guide your reflection. And (re)annotate!
- Create a reading group. Read together, share notes and insights.
- Plan ahead for discussions and writing assignments so that you have time to prepare thoroughly and to revise your essays prior to turning them in.
- Take advantage of my office hours. Don't wait until you're struggling to get help. Stop by when you're only slightly confused, or when you're excited about something you read – stop by for a chat about anything at all!

## RESOURCES

**The Academic Center for Excellence.** ACE provides appointment-based and drop-in tutoring in the humanities, social sciences, and writing, as well as general writing skills. For more information, visit their website at <http://www.lehman.edu/issp> or call 718-960-8175. Please make use of this valuable service early and often throughout the semester.

**Office of Disabilities Services.** Lehman College is committed to providing access to all programs and curricula for all students. Students with disabilities who may need classroom accommodations are encouraged to register with the Office of Student Disability Services. For more information, please contact the Office of Student Disability Services at Shuster Hall, Room 238, email [disability.services@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:disability.services@lehman.cuny.edu), or call 718-960-8441.

**PLAGIARISM.** Plagiarism (intellectual theft) has serious academic consequences, including potential failure of the course, suspension, or expulsion. Remember to cite or acknowledge the help you received in formulating your ideas. This help includes but is not limited to magazine or journal articles, other textbooks, reference books, introductions to texts, web pages, friends, and classmates. Remember to cite quoted material as well. If you have any questions about plagiarism, CUNY's policy on academic integrity is clear and available for you to read:

<http://web.cuny.edu/academics/info-central/policies/academic-integrity.pdf>. The statement in the

Lehman College student handbook is available at <http://www.lehman.cuny.edu/student-affairs/documents/student-handbook-02.pdf>.

**Counseling Center.** The Counseling Center at Lehman College (Old Gym Bldg. Rm 114) is a safe place for students to talk about any concerns they may have. The Counseling Center offers free and confidential services in a safe environment. At the Counseling Center, students can address issues that may be keeping them from attaining their academic goals. All students are treated with respect and are seen as individuals with unique strengths. Students may seek our services for a variety of reasons, including: Stress/Anxiety; Depression; Grief/Loss; Loneliness; Family Stress; Difficulties in Romantic Relationships; Academic Concerns (e.g. poor time management/procrastination); Cultural Issues; [Life Coaching](#). Old Gym Building, Room 114. 718-960-8761.  
[counseling.center@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:counseling.center@lehman.cuny.edu)

**Title IX.** Title IX of the Education Amendments of 1972 (“Title IX”) is a federal civil rights law that prohibits discrimination on the basis of sex in education programs and activities at universities receiving federal funds. Under Title IX, discrimination on the basis of sex can include sexual harassment or sexual violence, such as rape, sexual assault, sexual battery, and sexual coercion. Anyone – of any gender, gender identity, sexual orientation, religious affiliation, citizenship status, race, class or educational level – can suffer from sexual harassment, including sexual violence. The goal of this website is to help you understand what sexual harassment means and let you know that there are people at CUNY and in the community who can help if you or others experience it. We want to make sure you understand your rights as a student, CUNY’s policies, and other issues related to sexual harassment, gender harassment and sexual violence. Feel free to give us a call at (718) 960-8111 or send an email to [dawn.ewing-morgan@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:dawn.ewing-morgan@lehman.cuny.edu) or to [maritza.rivera@lehman.cuny.edu](mailto:maritza.rivera@lehman.cuny.edu)

**SCHEDULE OF ASSIGNMENTS:** *(Please note that this schedule is subject to change.)*

<b>Date</b>	<b>Reading Due</b>	<b>Writing Due</b>
August 29	<i>Wulf and Eadwacer</i> (ca. 800s), <i>The Wanderer</i> (ca. 900s)	BlackBoard (after class)
September 5	<i>MONDAY SCHEDULE</i>	
September 12	<i>Dream of the Rood</i> (ca. 700s) (Norton) John Donne, “Batter My Heart” (1572-1631) Margaret Cavendish, “A World Made by Atoms” (1623-1673)	
September 19	<i>The Wife’s Lament</i> (ca. 900s) (Norton), <i>Deor’s Lament</i> (PDF)(ca. late 900s) Isabella Whitney, “I.W. To Her Unconstant Lover” (1567-1578) John Donne, “The Flea,” “Death Be Not Proud” (1572-1631)	Essay #1 Proposal
September 26	<i>The Travels of John Mandeville</i> (1300s) + in class: <i>The Travels of Benjamin of Tudela</i> (1130-1173) + in class: <i>The Travels of Ibn Jubayr</i> (1145-1217)	Essay #1
October 3	Marie de France: <i>Lanval &amp; Bisclavret</i> (Norton) (ca. 1100-1150)	
October 10	<i>Roman de Silence</i> (ca. 1200-1250)	Essay #2 Proposal
October 17	<i>The King of Tars</i> (PDF) (ca. 1330)	Essay #2 First Draft
October 24	<i>The Canterbury Tales: The Miller’s Tale</i> (Norton) (ca. 1300) <i>Sometimes We Tell the Truth</i> (2018) (PDF)	Essay #2 Final Draft
October 31	Sir Thomas Malory, <i>Le Morte Darthur</i> : Book I, Book XX, Book XXI (ca. 1500) <i>HaMelech Artus</i> (1279) (PDF)	Twitter thread / IG post
November 7	Philip Spenser, <i>Faerie Queene</i> (1590-1596) (PDF)	
November 12	<i>The Second Shepherd’s Play</i> (ca. 1400-1500)	
November 21	William Shakespeare, <i>Merchant of Venice</i> (1605)	Essay #3 Proposal
November 28	<i>THANKSGIVING – No Class</i>	
December 5	<i>Beowulf</i> . ll. 1-1250, ll. 1251-2199 (ca. 800)	Essay #3 First Draft
December 12	Wrap-up day	Essay #3 Final Draft