

Carleton University  
**Winter 2025 Preliminary Course Outline**  
Department of English

**ENGL 2301B: *Literatures and Cultures 500-1500***

**Prerequisites:** Second-year standing or permission of the department  
**Preclusions:** Precludes additional credit for ENGL 2300 (no longer offered)

**Professor: Dr S. Bly Calkin**  
**Email:** [siobhain.calkin@carleton.ca](mailto:siobhain.calkin@carleton.ca)

**\*\*\* This is a preliminary syllabus only—texts and assignments are subject to change. A complete version will be available closer to the start of the term. \*\*\***

### **Course Description:**

ENGL 2301B introduces students to the multilingual and multicultural literatures of the English-speaking world during the period 500-1500 CE, situating these literatures within the larger global and transmarine influences that shaped them. The English-speaking world in 500-1500 means a very small part of one of the British Isles. It would be a mistake, therefore, to think that the British Isles were a monolingual, English-speaking society during this period. As a multicultural, oft-invaded and oft-conquered geographic area, the British Isles between 500 and 1500 were a space within which people read and wrote in Latin, French, Irish, Welsh and Hebrew as well as, or often instead of, English. English then did not have the position of cultural power and influence it holds today either in the world or in Britain itself. Blending the tongues of invading and invaded peoples, the Englishes written during this period were multiple, and differ significantly from the Englishes used today. This course will introduce you to the variety and hybridity of English and British languages and literatures during the medieval period. It will also indicate the multicultural, transmarine flows of peoples, texts, and literary forms into and out of the British Isles during this period, from areas such as continental Europe, Africa and the Middle East.

In ENGL 2301B you will study literature from the Old English (c. 500-1100) and Middle English (c. 1000-1500) periods in English alongside contemporaneous writings in Latin, Welsh, Irish, French, and Hebrew. We will situate all these texts within the historical and cultural contexts of their day and learn what they look like today as well as (as far as we can reconstruct) what they sounded like when they were first copied down. Lectures will also indicate some of the literary influences that made their way to medieval Britain from other parts of Europe, Africa, and the Middle East. As we study all these texts, we will discuss their portraits of heroism, gender, love, violence, magic, monstrosity, religion, authorship, conquest, and group identity. We will also explore the different ways in which different writers handled such topics. Medieval literary conventions, genres, forms, and aesthetics (ideas about what is considered beautiful) will also be discussed.

Specific texts we will read include *Beowulf*, *Judith*, Taliesin's "Urien Yrechwydd" and "Battle of Argoed Llwyfain," Marie de France's *Lanval*, Meir b. Elijah's "Put a Curse on My Enemy," and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, as well as excerpts from writings by Augustine of Hippo, Bede, Geoffrey Chaucer and Margery Kempe. We will also read some medieval plays, saints' lives, and lyrics from a variety of language traditions. All texts originally written in Old English, Latin, French, Welsh, Hebrew, Irish or other languages will be read in a modern English translation. Most Middle English texts will be read in their original language, with some coaching provided!

### **Learning Objectives/Outcomes:**

Students in this course will:

- Read a variety of medieval texts from different literary and linguistic traditions
- Become aware of the dynamic multicultural and transmarine flows of the medieval world and the ways these washed up on the shores of medieval Britain and shaped its multilingual literatures between 500 and 1500
- Explore the ways in which literatures from pre-modern periods articulate and engage central cultural concerns of their day while also relating to cultural issues of our day
- Consider ideas about heroism, gender, religion, love, violence, conquest, magic, monstrosity, authorship, and aesthetics that appear in literature from the medieval period, and the ways in which ideas about these issues change between 500 and 1500 C.E.
- Identify ways in which the English language has changed over time and is a product of conquest and cultural hybridization
- Become familiar with some of medieval British literature's primary conventions and genres, and with the ways these vary over time
- Develop and extend their knowledge of key technical and literary terms and critical concepts for studying literature
- Develop their ability to read difficult texts closely and accurately
- Develop their ability to deploy evidence from primary texts effectively and accurately in analyses of literature on exams and essays

### **Required Text:**

- *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Medieval Period* (Volume 1). Ed. Joseph Black et al. 3rd ed (revised). Peterborough: Broadview, 2023. ISBN: 9781554816163

The textbook will be available from the Carleton University Bookstore 173 Nideyanan building  
<https://www.bkstr.com/carletonstore/home>.

**Other required readings will be available from online sources or ARES (the library's electronic reserves system)**

### **Evaluation:**

#### **Participation and Attendance**

**15%**

*Participation is worth 7.5% of the Attendance and Participation Grade.*

- *You are expected to contribute to class discussion and participate in class activities.*
- *You are required to post responses to 5 discussion questions posted in Brightspace (2-3 sentences=a response; a discussion question will be posted for each class, usually after class)*

- You are required to post a response reflection on the Book Arts Lab on quill-making in Brightspace. (6-8 sentences, i.e. a paragraph, is expected)

Attendance is worth 7.5% of the Attendance and Participation Grade.

- You are expected to attend class and attendance will be taken at each class. **Please note that attendance means attending to what is going on in class. It does not mean texting or playing games on your phone or computer, doing other course work on your computer, or leaving early after signing the attendance sheet. Such activities will lower your attendance grade significantly.**
- If you are ill, please do not come to class, but do e-mail to let me know why you are absent so that I can excuse that class from the calculation of your attendance mark
- If you miss class, you may earn an attendance checkmark for that day by posting an answer to the posted discussion question on the material (this will not count as one of your 5 required posts but must instead be an extra post). **This option is only available for 2 unexcused class meetings.**

**Early Feedback: Short Quiz** **5%**  
*(short answer; 15-20 minutes; written in class)*

**Readings Analysis and Comprehension Test** **10%**  
*(in-depth passage identification and analysis questions to assess completion of readings and comprehension of course materials to date; 35-40 minutes; written in class)*

**Final Examination (In-person during Official Examination Period)** **35%**  
*(3-hour cumulative examination; may include a short answer section; will include essay questions as well as in-depth passage analyses to assess completion and comprehension of readings; will be scheduled during official examination period and written on exam booklets)*

**Term Paper Assignment** **35%**  
*You have 2 options for your term paper assignment:*

**Option 1:**

If you are interested in engaging more deeply with the medieval literature we have been reading and working on your analytical and essay-writing skills, choose this option.

**Part A: Draft Thesis** **5%**  
***(0.5-1 page; DUE in class; hard copy)***

*Please submit:*

- *A draft thesis statement for your essay*
- *An example of a quotation you might use as evidence from one of your medieval texts*
- *Your explication of that quotation*

*Evaluation assesses progress; will consider timely completion of this preparatory writing for your term paper, inclusion of the three required elements, and thoughtfulness of engagement with texts.*

**Part B: Term Paper (April 2)** **30%**  
***(6-7 pages double-spaced; DUE in class; hard copy)***

*MLA format is required for this paper. A detailed list of topics and of my expectations for structure, form, and language will be distributed during term. No secondary research is required.*

## **Option 2:**

If you wish to explore the world of generative AI writing and work on your analytical and assessment skills, choose this option. **Please note:** This option will require you to sign up for an account on Chat GPT. You should be aware that what you enter and get fed out will likely end up as part of their repository of information; that there are no privacy guarantees on this or other generative AI sites; and that the handling of copyright and labour issues by generative AI sites like this has been considered ethically problematic by some.

***Part A: AI Initial Prompts and Result Assessment***                      **5%**  
***(6 AI generated pages double-spaced + Your Prompts + 1-2 pages double-spaced of your own writing; DUE in class; hard copy)***

- *Choose one of the assigned essay prompts and feed it in to Chat GPT with instructions to produce a 6-page essay on that plus any other specifications you think might improve the quality of the text produced, drawn from my hand-out on Essay Expectations for this course. Record those prompts/instructions to show me what you fed in to the AI program.*
- *Read the text produced and highlight or underline any features that strike you as problematic in one colour and any features that seem praiseworthy in another colour*
- *Write a 1-2 page (double-spaced) analysis/evaluation of the essay AI produced.*
  - *What were its strengths and weaknesses?*
  - *Did it accurately represent the medieval texts? (Provide concrete evidence from the actual medieval text)*
  - *Did it make a compelling analytical claim and support it with textual evidence (i.e. quotations)?*
  - *How well-structured were its paragraphs?*

*Evaluation will consider timely completion of this preparatory research for your term work assignment, inclusion of the required elements, and thoughtfulness of engagement with generated text.*

***Part B: Revised AI Prompts + New Result Assessment***                      **30%**  
***(6-7 new AI generated pages double-spaced + Your revised prompts + Completed grading rubric and instructional comment of 1-2 paragraphs + your own independent 4-page double-spaced written analysis of the essay produced by the revised AI prompt; DUE in class; hard copy)***

*(MLA format is required for the AI-generated essay and your 4-page analysis; Detailed lists of topics, instructions, and my expectations for structure, form, and language will be distributed during term)*