

Carleton University
Fall 2025 Preliminary Course Outline
Department of English Language and Literature

ENGL 2301A: Literatures and Cultures, 500–1500

Prerequisites: second-year standing or permission of the department

Preclusions: precludes additional credit for ENGL 2300 (no longer offered)

Location: Online Scheduled

Instructor: Robin Norris
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***** 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:

A study of the period between 500 and 1500, with attention to cultural, historical, geographical, and literary contexts. This is the 1000 years we call the Middle Ages. Today, when we look to the medieval world, we are tempted, both by scenes we identify with and scenes we wish to reject, to reconstruct the Middle Ages in the image of (post)modern whiteness. In this class, we will aspire to undermine monolithic reconstructions of the period in favour of situating particular texts within in their historical, linguistic, and cultural contexts. The medieval world was rich in cultural diversity and exchange. On the island of Britain, authors and speakers of multiple language families exchanged texts in Latin, Celtic languages such as Irish and Welsh, the Germanic languages Old English and Old Norse, as well as Anglo-Norman French. These languages were brought into contact through processes of migration and diaspora, invasion and colonization. It is no surprise then that medieval literatures often explore themes of violence and nobility, exile and return, heroism and monstrosity, and relationships between human and Other – whether animal, supernatural, otherworldly, or divine.

Learning outcomes:

Appreciation of themes, genres, and conventions reflected in a range of medieval texts
Practice with pronouncing Old English and reading Middle English
Awareness of lexical continuity and change as a result of the external history of the language
Awareness of the roles of author, poet, scribe, editor, translator, interpreter, and adapter
Awareness of how terminology, periodization, and narrative impact our understanding of history
Analysis of how medieval influences live on in contemporary culture
Rejection of monolithic stereotyping of medieval culture
Introduction to fundamental research resources (e.g., textual apparatus, OED, library access, online scholarly sources)

Texts: *The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: The Medieval Period, Revised 3rd ed.* (2023). \$69.50.

Evaluation: There will be a formally scheduled in-person final exam during the final exam period. I am currently working with Teaching and Learning Services to develop an alternative approach to the other assessments for this course. Requirements may include class participation, group work and roundtables, oral exams, pronunciation of Old and Middle English, transcription of Old English manuscripts, an Oxford English Dictionary activity, a visit to your local public library, etc.