

**Carleton University**  
**Fall 2026 Preliminary Course Outline**  
**Department of English**

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

**Prerequisites:** 2<sup>nd</sup> year standing or permission of the department/instructor

**Preclusions:** ENGL 2300 (no longer offered)

**Format:** In-Person

**Professor:** Dr. S. Bly Calkin

**Email:** *siobhain.calkin@carleton.ca*

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

**Course Description:** ENGL 2301 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 2301 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*, Welsh poems by Taliesin, 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 forms, 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 written analyses of literature

### **Required Text: PLEASE NOTE Physical Copy required**

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

*Used versions of this edition or of the unrevised 3<sup>rd</sup> edition are acceptable.*

### **Evaluation:**

#### **Participation and Attendance**

**10%**

*(Attendance will be taken regularly; unannounced, brief, in-class written responses to readings/lectures/Book Arts Lab activities, class discussion participation, and/or oral readings of medieval texts will contribute to this portion of your grade)*

#### **Readings Analysis and Comprehension Test 1 (Early Feedback)**

**10%**

*(In-class written close textual analysis of passage to assess completion of readings and comprehension of course material; paragraph(s) expected; 20-30 minutes)*

**Readings Analysis and Comprehension Test 2** **20%**

*(In-class essay and/or written close textual analysis of passages to assess completion of readings and comprehension of course material; paragraphs expected; 80 minutes—i.e. full class)*

**Readings Analysis and Comprehension Test 3** **20%**

*(In-class essay and/or written close textual analysis of passages to assess completion of readings and comprehension of course material; paragraphs expected; 80 minutes—i.e. full class)*

**Final Examination (In-person during Official Examination Period)** **40%**

*(3-hour cumulative examination; will include essay question(s) and/or in-depth passage analyses to assess completion and comprehension of readings; will be scheduled during official examination period and written on exam booklets)*