

English 261: British Literature to 1800

Professor Farina
TuTh 2:30-3:45

This course attempts to capture the diversity of British literary traditions in their first 1000 years, when “English” literature was profoundly shaped by a variety of influences: invasion and conquest, religious schism, continental humanism, civil war, and contact with the New World. Throughout this period, British society was dynamic and often caught in conflict; its writers and readers looked to literature for both guidance and consolation, using it as a means of confronting social upheaval. We will look in particular at works that portray imaginary “Otherworlds,” or alternate societies that invite comparison with British custom. The imagination of foreign worlds or different realities allowed writers to comment on their own. When they did, they touched on topics such as: the perception of class and gender, the relation of individuals to their communities, and the reconciliation of entertainment and education.

We will read from the following works: *Beowulf*, Marie de France’s *Lais*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *The Canterbury Tales*, *Utopia*, *The Tragical History of Doctor Faustus*, Shakespeare’s *Sonnets*, *Paradise Lost*, *The Blazing World*, and *Gulliver’s Travels*.

