Touchstones 1 – Early British Literature

English 230-01, Fall 2015, TTh 9:30–10:45 in Stein 208

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touchstone n: 1A. A piece of fine-grained dark schist or jasper formerly used for testing alloys of gold by observing the colour of the mark which they made on it. 1.1A. A standard or criterion by which something is judged or recognized.

-excerpted from Oxford Dictionary (British & World English) (US)

Description:

This course provides an introduction to some of the earliest literature in English, from Middle English poetry and plays of the late fourteenth century to the beginnings of the novel in the early eighteenth century. Reading a variety of representative works, we will examine the relations between and among authors, texts, and literary genres, paying particular attention to how literary forms – including epic, romance, drama, and the emerging novel – morphed and developed. Throughout we will explore the shifting status of vernacular fiction-making in English life. Who wrote and read/heard/watched these works? And why?

Goals:

- To trace how English language and literature developed across the medieval, Renaissance, and early eighteenth century periods
- To engage with works by major writers in a range of genres as a foundation for more intensive study at the 300 and 400 levels
- To investigate how texts interacted with their cultural contexts
- To hone close reading and analytical writing skills by learning to ask and answer interesting questions
- To establish a learning community across Touchstones sections around shared experiences and common readings
Texts:

I ask that everyone please use the listed editions, in hard copy, so that you can annotate effectively and we can refer to passages quickly and easily in class. All texts are available at the Holy Cross Bookstore unless otherwise noted.

- Daniel Defoe, Robinson Crusoe, ed. Thomas Keymer (Oxford)
- Diana Hacker and Nancy Sommers, A Pocket Style Manual, 7th Edition (Bedford)
- A number of shorter readings available on our Moodle course site

Expectations:

Class participation (10%): This course is designed to help you develop your thinking about early British literature both independently and collaboratively. To take full advantage of the opportunities it offers, the most important thing you can do is to read all material closely, more than once, and always in hard copy, filling your margins with questions and observations. This will prepare you to advance your thinking even further by engaging in thoughtful class discussion. If you aren’t yet comfortable participating in class discussion, please stop by to see me so that we can work on strategies for developing that skill. You need not be adept at it at first, only willing to improve through preparation, practice, and patience with yourself.

Since regular attendance is essential in a discussion-centered course, more than three absences will lower your final grade. That’s a full week and a half of class – an ample allowance for most illnesses, although not if you’ve allowed yourself to be flaky about attendance earlier in the semester. If you miss a class, it is your responsibility to borrow the notes from another student, acquire any materials that were handed out, and learn if changes have been made to the syllabus. I do not need to know why you have been absent unless you need my help with a crisis.

Exercises and quizzes (10%): To help you think critically about our texts, for many sessions I will assign questions or ask you to write on questions of your own. Sometimes I will collect the responses, sometimes not. Since the writing in these short exercises is informal and exploratory, collected exercises will receive general marks (✓, ✓-, or ✓+) based on how thorough and thoughtful they are. For legibility’s sake, I ask that exercises be typed. Exercises must be on time to receive credit.

Quizzes will be given regularly to ensure that everyone is keeping up and reading carefully. They may include questions about the assigned introductions and headnotes, the literary texts, or both. There will be no make-up quizzes.
Papers and projects (55%): a 4–6pp explication paper (15%), a creative Spenserian stanza project (15%), and a 7–10pp comparative analysis (25%), each due at the beginning of class on the dates specified in the Schedule. We will discuss paper topics in advance. For papers we workshop in class, grades will be based on completion of first drafts, thoughtfulness of peer reviews, and quality of revision work as well as final drafts.

I am delighted to meet with you to discuss your papers as you develop them. For me, email is not an effective medium for substantive discussion, so I ask that you come to talk with me in person, either in office hours or by appointment. To ensure that I can be helpful to you, please come in well before a paper is due. I will gladly sit down with you anytime up until two days before a final due date.

Late papers lose 1/3 of a grade (e.g. from A to A-) for each class period or part of a class period they are overdue. Last-minute extensions will not be granted; if you foresee any problem with the due date for a final draft, please speak to me well in advance. We can usually work out a solution.

I do my best to return papers no more than two weeks after they come in. If you have any questions about my comments (or my handwriting!) never hesitate to stop by office hours or make an appointment.

Papers should be printed in a conventional twelve-point text font (like Times), and double-spaced, with one-inch margins all around. In the upper left corner of the first page, list your name, my name, the course number, and the date on separate lines. At the center of the next line, please provide a title designed to prepare your reader for your argument. Remember to proofread carefully for spelling and mechanical errors before you print. To preserve your instructor’s sanity and good humor, always number and staple your pages.

Final exam (25%): a cumulative final exam will be given during exam period. Part I will ask you to define terms and demonstrate their importance to our texts; Part II will ask you to identify and analyze passages from our texts; and Part III will request a short essay.

Academic Honesty: Your work must be your own and must be prepared exclusively for this class. Since you are developing your own close reading skills in this course, please do not consult any secondary sources except reference texts like dictionaries or encyclopedias unless an assignment specifically requires you to conduct research.

Whenever you do make use of language or ideas from outside sources (including web sites, books, high school classes, roommates, etc.), you must acknowledge the sources in formal citations, formatted according to MLA guidelines. You’ll find an overview of MLA format in A Pocket Style Manual. For issues the overview doesn’t address, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (call number LB2369.M53) in Dinand’s main reading room.
Failure to acknowledge sources constitutes plagiarism, a serious violation of academic honesty. Other violations include cheating and collusion. Just as you need to be able to trust that I will evaluate your work fairly, I must be able to trust that the work you present as your own is, in fact, your own. Therefore any violation of academic honesty will incur a zero on the assignment and academic probation, suspension, or dismissal from the College, as determined by the college-wide academic honesty policy described on pages 17–19 of the College Catalog (http://www.holycross.edu/catalog/).

The process of learning which sources need to be cited and how takes time. I am always happy to field questions about acknowledging sources before you submit an assignment. Afterwards is too late. Always err on the side of giving credit where credit may be due.

Schedule:

This schedule offers a tentative outline of the course; it may change as the course progresses. It does not include the short exercises that will be assigned throughout the term.

**THE LATE MIDDLE AGES**

**Thurs. 9/3:** Introductions
Middle English

**Tues. 9/8:** “The Middle Ages to ca. 1485” and “Middle English Literature in the Fourteenth and Fifteenth Centuries,” N.A pp. 3–6, 13–19
“The General Prologue” lines 35–79, N.A pp. 244–45
“The Knight’s Tale” Parts 1 and 2, modernized (Moodle, pp. 25–50)

**Thurs. 9/10:** “Romance,” N.A pp. 140–142
Selection on medieval romance from Barbara Fuchs’s *Romance* (Moodle, pp. 39–44)
“The Knight’s Tale” Parts 3 and 4, modernized (Moodle, pp. 50–80)

**Tues. 9/15:** “The General Prologue” lines 547–68, N.A pp. 256–57
“The Miller’s Prologue and Tale,” N.A pp. 264–280

**Thurs. 9/17:** “The General Prologue” lines 447–78, N.A pp. 254–55
“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue,” N.A pp. 282–301
Discussion of explication paper

**Tues. 9/22:** “The Wife of Bath’s Tale,” N.A pp. 301–310
Hacker and Sommers, “Integrating literary quotations,” “Using the ellipsis
Quick review of thesis and paragraph points

Thurs. 9/24: “Mystery Plays,” NA pp. 447–49
The Wakefield Second Shepherds’ Play, NA pp. 449–77
Everyman (after 1485), NA pp. 507–29

THE RENAISSANCE (A.K.A. THE EARLY MODERN PERIOD)

Edmund Spenser (1552?–1599), The Faerie Queene, NA introductions pp. 766–68, 775–77

Thurs. 10/1: “Writers, Printers, and Patrons,” NA 547–49
The Bower of Bliss cont’d
The Faerie Queene Book 3, Proem–Canto 1, ESP pp. 231–49

EXPLICATION PAPER DUE

Tues. 10/6: The Faerie Queene Book 3, Cantos 2–3 and Canto 4, stanzas 1–28, ESP pp. 249–85
Discussion of Spenserian stanza project


Tues. 10/13 & Thurs. 10/15: Fall break. Enjoy!

Tues. 10/20: The Faerie Queene Book 3, summary of Cantos 7–10 (Moodle) and Cantos 11–12, including 1590 ending, ESP pp. 375–401

Thurs. 10/22: Writing workshop – peer reviews
FULL DRAFT OF SPENSERIAN STANZA PROJECT DUE

William Shakespeare (1564–1616), King Lear, NA introductions pp. 1166–1170, 1251–54  
King Lear Act 1, NA pp. 1254–77  

Thurs. 10/29: King Lear Acts 2–5, NA pp. 1277–1339  

Tues. 11/3: King Lear cont’d  
SPENSERIAN STANZA PROJECT DUE  

John Milton (1608–74), NA introduction pp. 1897–1901  
“The Morning of Christ’s Nativity” NA pp. 1901–09  

Discussion of comparative analysis essay  

THE RESTORATION AND EARLY EIGHTEENTH CENTURY  

Refresh your memory of the epic genre by looking up “epic” in a reference resource focused enough to provide a substantial definition. One readily available source is the Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory by J.A. Cuddon et al., accessible as an ebook through HC’s library web site.  
Alexander Pope (1688–1744), The Rape of the Lock, NA introductions pp. 2665–69 and 2685–86  
The Rape of the Lock, dedicatory letter and Canto 1, NA pp. 2686–2690  

Tues. 11/17: The Rape of the Lock Cantos 2–5, NA pp. 2691–2704  

Thurs. 11/19: The Rape of the Lock cont’d  

Tues. 11/24: Daniel Defoe (c. 1660–1731), NA introduction pp. 2424–25  
Robinson Crusoe pp. 1–84  

Thurs. 11/26: Happy Thanksgiving!  

Tues. 12/1: Entry for “novel” in The Oxford Dictionary of Literary Terms by Chris Baldick, available as an ebook through HC’s library web site.  
Robinson Crusoe pp. 84–187
Thurs. 12/3:  Writing workshop – peer reviews  
**FULL DRAFT OF COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE.**  
Draft must meet minimum page requirement to be eligible for peer review.

Tues. 12/8:  *Robinson Crusoe* pp. 187–258  
Discussion of final exam

Thurs. 12/10:  Conclusions  
**COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS ESSAY DUE**

Exam period:  **Final exam**