English literature was invented during the medieval and early modern periods. During this quarter we will explore these origins, asking what "English literature" meant for its earliest practitioners and how the writings of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance prepared for the literature that followed. Constructing the literary history of this period requires us to reimagine some of the most familiar features of our own literary landscape when they were new and strange (or still unknown): the printing press, the American continents, even the English language itself.

The course traces the development (and transformation over time) of key literary concepts and forms, including the notion of literary character, the use and meaning of poetry (versus prose or other written forms), and the adaptation of literary conventions (such as courtly love) to changing historical circumstances. We will also pay close attention to changing technologies of writing and their transformation of texts, writers, and readers. And we will chart the literary impact of ideologies such as humanism, the Reformation, and Puritanism, in the process asking how literature reflects and adapts to social and cultural change. From our first week to our last, we will consider how the concept of English literature takes hold and creates a bridge between readers, writers, and their changing world.

Schedule of Lectures and Assignments

September 27
Introduction to the Course

September 29
Introduction to Medieval Language and Culture
Geoffrey Chaucer, General Prologue

**September 30
First Writing Assignment: Autobiography of a Reader

October 4
The Medieval World and Pre-Modern "Character"
Geoffrey Chaucer, General Prologue

October 6
Chivalric Romance and Literary Culture I
Geoffrey Chaucer, The Knight’s Tale

**October 7
Second Writing Assignment: Pilgrim Portrait
October 11

**Romance and the Art of Rulership**
Chaucer, *The Knight’s Tale*

October 13

**Chivalric Romance and Literary Culture II**
Sir Thomas Malory, from *Morte DArthur*

October 18

**Technologies of Writing: Manuscript and Print Culture, Paleography**
Sir Thomas Malory, from *Morte DArthur*

October 20

**Technologies of Writing: From Manuscript to Print Culture II**
Lyrics in the Devonshire manuscript by Sir Thomas Wyatt; Henry Howard, Earl of Surrey; and Mary Shelton (readings available on Coursework)

**October 21
First Analytical paper**

October 25

**Technologies of Writing: From Manuscript to Print Culture III**
Lyrics in *Tottel’s Miscellany* by Surrey and Wyatt (Reader)

October 27

**Early Modernity: Humanism, Diplomacy, and Intellectual Networks**
Sir Thomas More, *Utopia*

November 1

**Desire and Power: The Court Seen from the Outside**
Sir Philip Sidney, from *Astrophil and Stella*; Sir Walter Ralegh, ”The Lie,” ”The Passionate Man’s Pilgrimage,” ”Shepherd, what’s love, I pray thee tell?” (Reader)

November 3

**Desire and Power: The Literature of the Elizabethan Court**
Elizabeth I, poetry and speeches (Reader)

**November 4
Sonnet**

November 8

**Chivalric Romance and Literary Culture III**
Edmund Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 3

November 10

**The Nature of Virtue and Heroism**
Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, Book 3

November 15

**The Making of a Renaissance Genre: Elizabethan Revenge Tragedy**
Thomas Kyd, *The Spanish Tragedy*

**November 17**  
**The Making of a Renaissance Genre: Jacobean Revenge Tragedy**  
John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore*

**November 18**  
**Second Analytical Paper**

**November 29**  
**Religion and Selfhood: The Subject of Devotion**  
The King James Bible; psalms of Mary and Philip Sidney (Reader)

**December 1**  
**Love, Wit, and New Knowledge**  
John Donne, from *Songs and Sonets* (Reader)

**December 6**  
**Religion and Selfhood II: Protestant and Baroque Poetics**  
John Donne, from *Holy Sonnets*; George Herbert, from *The Temple*; Richard Crashaw, from *Carmen Deo Nostro* (Reader)

**December 8**  
**Overview and Conclusions; Looking Ahead to Literary History II**

**December 12, 3:30pm**  
**Take-Home Final Examination Due**

**Books and Materials**

The following titles are available at the Stanford Bookstore:

- John Ford, *'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays*, ed. Marion Lomax (Oxford University Press, 1995)  

A Reader for the course is available at <https://students.universityreaders.com/store/>.  
(You may log in, create an account, and order via this website)

Timeline: <http://timeline.stanford.edu/>
The timeline is an interactive tool designed for this course. You should refer to it regularly for a historical overview and links related to the materials and their contexts.

Library Reserves

On reserve in Green Library you will find a number of books on literary history in general, literary and cultural history of the Middle Ages and Renaissance, and historical backgrounds, as well as the major primary texts for the course.

Written Assignments

• Autobiography of a Reader, due Friday, September 30. In this ungraded assignment, you are asked to reflect on how you became a reader and the reader you have become.

• Pilgrim Portrait, due Friday, October 7. In Chaucerian verse, create a portrait of a modern “pilgrim” (extra credit for Middle English).

• Sonnet, due Friday, November 4. Following the formal and thematic conventions of the sonnets we have read, write a sonnet of your own (extra credit for reproducing early modern handwriting).

• Two analytical papers (4-5 pages), due Friday, October 21 and Friday, November 18. Topics will be distributed in advance, or you may develop your own in consultation with your TA.

• Take-Home Final Examination, due Monday, December 12th, consisting of short answer identification of key words from the lectures, and three essay questions.

Policies and Expectations

• Lectures will generally take 50 minutes, followed by a 5-minute written reflection, and afterwards, 25-30 minutes of questions and open discussion. The written reflection will ask you to respond to these questions: 1. What was the most important thing you learned in the lecture? 2. What was the most interesting thing you learned? 3. What do you want to know more about? These are collected at the end of every class meeting and will play a role in shaping subsequent lectures and discussions.

• Regular attendance at lecture and participation in section is required; if you must miss a lecture, please tell your TA, who will record daily lecture attendance.

• Laptops must be closed and stored, with rare exceptions allowed for compelling needs.
• Written outlines, with key words and reading questions for the following assignments, will be distributed at each lecture; these can be used for taking notes.

• Sections may have assignments; these are also required.

• The Honor Code applies to all written assignments and the final; the work you turn in must be your own.

**Grading**

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>“Pilgrim Portrait” and Sonnet</td>
<td>5%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 1</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Paper 2</td>
<td>25%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Final Exam</td>
<td>25%</td>
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**Learning Goals**

Through this course, you should gain:

• *knowledge and understanding* of how texts fit together into a broader literary history

• *awareness* of the major literary movements, terms, and forms of the Middle Ages and the Renaissance, along with an *appreciation* for their relevance and connection to later literary developments

• *reading skills*: early texts pose special challenges to modern readers. In this course you will develop strategies for reading individual texts as well as for reading across multiple texts, with the aim of discerning their relationships with one another and their changing cultural environments

• *writing skills*: writing assignments are designed to develop your abilities [1.] as readers (in the poetry assignments, by actively experimenting with medieval and early modern forms), and [2.] as practitioners in the discipline of literary studies, which requires you to be able to develop a cogent argument about a literary work or works, to support that argument with carefully-chosen evidence, and to demonstrate the argument’s importance within a broader framework of disciplinary knowledge
People

PROFESSORS

Professor Jennifer Summit
Office: 460-318
Office Hours: T Th 2:00-3:30
Email: summit@stanford.edu

Professor Roland Greene
Office 460-302
Office Hours: Th 2:00-4:00pm
Email: rgreene@stanford.edu

TEACHING ASSISTANTS

Talya Meyers
Office Hours: T 1:00-2:00pm and by appointment (location TBA)
Email: talya@stanford.edu

Claude Willan
Office Hours: T 1:00-2:00pm and by appointment (Green Library lobby)
Email: cwillan@stanford.edu

James Wood
Office Hours: M 3:00-4:00pm and by appointment (Bldg. 460, 3rd floor lounge)
Email: jrwood@stanford.edu

COURSE COORDINATOR

Kenneth Ligda
Office Hours: By appointment
Office: 460-315
Email: kenligda@stanford.edu