

ENG 5306: British Literature

Beowulf to 1800

Monday 6:00–8:30 PM · Fall 2026
Sul Ross State University

Professor: Stephen Hager, Ph.D.

Office Hours: Tuesdays & Thursdays 2:00–3:15 PM **Email:** shager@sulross.edu

Class Location: Online (synchronous)

Course platform: Blackboard

Course Description

ENG 5306 covers nearly a millennium of literary invention in (mostly) the English language, from a legendary lyric attributed to a seventh-century cowherd to the poems of Phillis Wheatley. This upper-division course introduces a variety of literary forms and genres, including epic, lyric, romance, verse drama, prose narrative, and satire, while building skills in close reading and historical contextualization.

Medieval Britain was never English-only: it was a multilingual, multiethnic island in contact with Irish, Welsh, Jewish, and French traditions. We will follow that wider frame throughout, reading a small number of works originally written in Old Irish, Hebrew, and Welsh in translation. The course closes by placing Black and Native writers in the English Atlantic alongside philosophical and political writing that helped justify slavery in the same period.

Learning Outcomes

BA English Program Marketable Skills

Students will be able to:

- Communicate effectively in writing and speaking.
- Use different research strategies to address problems and develop ideas that engage a variety of perspectives.
- Recognize how social and cultural contexts shape meaning and language.

SRSU English Program SLOs

Students will be able to:

- Construct documents that demonstrate unity, organization, coherence, and development, and that are grammatically correct.
- Analyze and interpret literary works by applying principles of critical thinking, literary criticism, or theoretical engagement.
- Produce researched documents that demonstrate the ability to locate a variety of credible sources, employ them effectively through quotations and paraphrases, integrate them smoothly into the writer's own prose, and document them correctly using the style appropriate to the document.

ENG 5306 Course Learning Objectives

By the end of this course, you should be able to:

- Communicate the meanings of early British literary works.
- Explain how the social and cultural contexts of early Britain shape the ideas and themes of its literature.
- Analyze how British authors use literary elements and devices to communicate ideas and themes.
- Recognize and identify early British literary works and authors, from Beowulf through 1800.
- Situate British literature within its wider multilingual and, by the eighteenth century, Atlantic contexts.

How the Course Works

This is a discussion-driven, synchronous online course. We meet online every Monday from 6:00–8:30 PM. Each meeting will combine historical and literary context with close reading and discussion of the assigned texts, with a short break near the midpoint. Complete the reading before class and have it available during our meeting, in print or digitally, so that you can refer to specific passages during discussion. Meeting access information and course materials will be posted on Blackboard.

The midterm and final exams draw substantially on material developed during our class meetings. Attendance, preparation, discussion, and occasional informal writing or journaling are therefore part of the work of the course, not separate from it.

Assignments

Detailed instructions for the Critical/Creative Assignments and graduate research work will be posted on Blackboard.

Exams (40% total)

The midterm will be a timed Blackboard exam completed outside our Monday meeting; the cumulative final exam will take place during the university's final-examination period. Each exam is worth 20% of the course grade.

Critical/Creative Assignments (40% total)

Undergraduate students will complete two Critical/Creative Assignments, each worth 20% of the course grade. Graduate students will substitute an annotated-bibliography/research presentation (10%) and a seminar paper (30%). Full prompts, expectations, and due dates will be posted on Blackboard.

Attendance, Participation, and Informal Writing (20%)

This portion of the grade reflects regular attendance at our synchronous online meetings, preparation for class, participation in discussion, and informal writing or journaling. For graduate students, it also includes preparation of assigned scholarship and periodic discussion leadership.

Grading

Component	Weight
Midterm exam (Blackboard)	20%
Critical/Creative Assignment 1	20%
Critical/Creative Assignment 2	20%
Final exam (cumulative)	20%
Attendance, Participation, and Informal Writing	20%

Letter grades: A = 90–100; B = 80–89; C = 70–79; D = 60–69; F = below 60.

If you are ever unsure about your standing in the course, please ask.

Materials

Four books anchor the course:

- *Beowulf*, trans. Seamus Heaney (Norton)
- *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, trans. Simon Armitage (Norton)
- *The Book of Margery Kempe*, trans. Barry Windeatt (Penguin)
- William Shakespeare, *The Tempest* (Folger Library edition)

All other readings will be posted on Blackboard. Have the assigned reading available during our online meeting, either in print or digitally, so that you can refer to it during discussion.

Course Policies

Exam policy. The midterm will be completed through Blackboard outside class; the final will take place during the university final-examination period. Exam dates and windows are fixed. If you have a documented medical or personal emergency or a known unavoidable conflict, contact me as soon as possible.

Attendance and participation. This is a discussion-driven course, and the exams draw substantially on material developed during our class meetings, so regular attendance matters. Because we meet only once each week, missing one Monday means missing a full week of instruction. Please join on time and remain engaged; persistent lateness or early departure affects your participation grade. If you miss class, you are responsible for finding out what you missed. Some live discussions and activities cannot be recreated outside of class.

Technology. Because this is a synchronous online course, you will need reliable access to a computer, an internet connection, Blackboard, and the software used for our online meetings. Please test your setup before class and contact me as soon as possible if a significant technical problem interferes with your participation. During class, use your devices primarily for course-related work; unrelated browsing, messaging, and social media make it harder to participate fully.

Cameras in synchronous meetings. Because this is a small, discussion-based seminar, I ask that you keep your camera on during our class meetings whenever reasonably possible. Being able to see one another makes conversation easier and helps us build a genuine seminar environment. Please remain muted when necessary to avoid background noise, but be prepared to unmute and participate

in discussion. I understand that occasional circumstances may require you to turn your camera off. If this becomes a recurring issue, please let me know so we can work out an appropriate arrangement.

Communication. The best way to reach me is at shager@sulross.edu. I'm usually quick to respond.

Academic integrity. Submit work that is your own. Do not submit work used in whole or part for another course, submit another person's work as your own, copy from sources without citation, or collaborate when collaboration is forbidden. Violations can result in failing assignments, failing the course, and/or further university disciplinary action, as outlined in the SRSU Student Handbook.

Artificial intelligence. The use of generative artificial intelligence is prohibited for any reading or writing you do in this course. This includes Critical/Creative Assignments, informal writing, drafts, outlines, revisions, and any other written work submitted for class. The work of this course is learning to read closely, think through a text's language and historical context, and find your own words for what you see. Text generated or substantially rewritten by ChatGPT, Claude, or any similar system is not your writing.

Any submitted work that has been generated or substantially written by AI will receive a zero for the assignment and may also be handled under the university's academic integrity policy. If you are unsure whether a particular tool or use is permitted, ask me before using it. Asking is never held against you.

If you are stuck, come to office hours or email me. A rough piece of analysis you wrote yourself is worth more to me than polished prose you did not write, and it is worth far more to you. I cannot help you become a stronger reader and writer if what I am reading is not yours.

Classroom climate. This class will foster free expression, critical investigation, and open discussion of ideas, including material involving conquest, religious violence, gender, and slavery. All of us must help sustain an atmosphere of tolerance, civility, and respect for the viewpoints of others, and learn to disagree without intimidation, harassment, or personal attack.

Course Schedule

Complete the assigned reading before the Monday class meeting for which it is listed. "Blackboard" indicates a reading posted on the course site rather than one of the four required books. The two discussion blocks below are both part of the same Monday meeting.

Week 1 · Aug 24 and 26 · Beginnings: Old English Lyric

Monday: Course introduction and overview.

Wednesday: Old English lyric. Blackboard: "Cædmon's Hymn"; "Wulf and Eadwacer"; "The Wife's Lament."

Week 2 · Aug 31 · Heroic Epic

First block: *Beowulf* through the fight with Grendel's mother.

Second block: *Beowulf*—kingship, the dragon, and the poem as a whole.

Week 3 · Sep 7 · Labor Day

Monday: No class: Labor Day.

Week 4 · Sep 14 · Arthurian Myth and Multilingual Medieval Britain

First block: Blackboard: Geoffrey of Monmouth, from *History of the Kings of Britain*; Marie de France, Prologue and *Lanval*.

Second block: Blackboard: "Pangur Bán"; Jacob ben Judah Hazzan, "I Shall Bend My Knee"; Me'ir ben Elijah, "The Fate of Creatures"; Dafydd ap Gwilym, selected poems.

Week 5 · Sep 21 · Middle English Romance

First block: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Parts I–II.

Second block: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Parts III–IV; the poem as a whole.

Week 6 · Sep 28 · Chaucer: Pilgrimage, Comedy, and Sanctity

First block: Blackboard: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*: General Prologue; The Miller's Tale.

Second block: Blackboard: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*: The Second Nun's Tale.

Week 7 · Oct 5 · Chaucer and Medieval Women's Spiritual Writing

First block: Blackboard: Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*: The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale.

Second block: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, opening chapters.

Week 8 · Oct 12 · Medieval Women's Spiritual Writing

First block: *The Book of Margery Kempe*, continued.

Second block: Blackboard: Julian of Norwich, *Showings* (excerpt).

Week 9 · Oct 19 · Literature and the Humanities

Monday: Discussion: literature and the humanities. Blackboard: "On the Humanities" reading.

Midterm exam: timed Blackboard exam completed outside our Monday meeting; details posted on Blackboard.

Week 10 · Oct 26 · Mystery Plays and Faith in Conflict

First block: Blackboard: Wakefield, *The Second Shepherds' Play*.

Second block: Blackboard: York, *Play of the Crucifixion*; "Faith in Conflict" reading.

Week 11 · Nov 2 · Shakespeare

First block: William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, Acts 1–3.

Second block: *The Tempest*, Acts 4–5; the play as a whole.

Week 12 · Nov 9 · Early Modern Lyric and Milton

First block: Blackboard: selected lyric poetry of early modern England (Wyatt, Sidney, etc.).

Second block: Blackboard: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Books 1, 2, and 4.

Week 13 · Nov 16 · Milton and the Early Novel

First block: Blackboard: John Milton, *Paradise Lost*, Book 9; Books 10 and 12 (selected).

Second block: Blackboard: Eliza Haywood, *Fantomina*.

Week 14 · Nov 23 · Satire and Atlantic Narratives

First block: Blackboard: Jonathan Swift, *A Modest Proposal*.

Second block: Blackboard: Olaudah Equiano, from *The Interesting Narrative of the Life of Olaudah Equiano*; John Marrant, from *A Narrative of the Lord's Wonderful Dealings with John Marrant*; Samson Occom, from *Autobiographical Narrative*.

Week 15 · Nov 30 · The English Atlantic and Course Conclusion

First block: Blackboard: Phillis Wheatley, selected poems; John Locke, “Of Slavery”; Thomas Jefferson, from *Notes on the State of Virginia*.

Second block: course conclusion and final-exam review.

Final examination: during the university final-examination period; exact day and time to be confirmed.

Required University Statements**ADA Statement**

SRSU Accessibility Services. Sul Ross State University (SRSU) is committed to equal access in compliance with the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1973. It is SRSU policy to provide reasonable accommodations to students with documented disabilities. It is the student's responsibility to initiate a request each semester for each class. To help protect confidentiality, students seeking accessibility/accommodation(s) services must submit the Accommodation Request Form located on our

website. Students are welcome to call the Office of Accessibility Services at 432-837-8203 or stop by Ferguson Hall Room 112 if they have any additional questions regarding the process. Our mailing address is PO Box C-122; Alpine, TX; 79832.

Statement Regarding Generative Artificial Intelligence (AI)

The University does not recommend or endorse any specific AI tools or resources. Students should be aware that many generative AI tools (e.g., ChatGPT, Google Gemini, Microsoft Copilot) store user input and may use this data to train future models. For this reason, students should never upload or share personal, confidential, or identifiable information—such as names, ID numbers, health data, or assignment submissions containing such details—into any generative AI platform. When using AI tools, students should verify whether the tool complies with student privacy standards as indicated by the University. Faculty may recommend specific tools that better align with institutional data privacy policies, but ultimate responsibility for data protection rests with users. Students are encouraged to use faculty-recommended platforms when engaging in coursework involving generative AI. The University is not liable for any adverse experience or impact when students interact with these tools.

Student Responsibilities

All full-time and part-time students are responsible for familiarizing themselves with the Student Handbook and the Undergraduate & Graduate Catalog and for abiding by the University rules and regulations. Additionally, students are responsible for checking their Sul Ross email as an official form of communication from the university. Every student is expected to obey all federal, state and local laws and is expected to familiarize him/herself with the requirements of such laws.

SRSU Distance Education Statement

Students enrolled in distance education courses have equal access to the university's academic support services, such as library resources, online databases, and instructional technology support. For more information about accessing these resources, visit the SRSU website.

Students should correspond using Sul Ross email accounts and submit online assignments through Blackboard, which requires a secure login. Students enrolled in distance education courses at Sul Ross are expected to adhere to all policies pertaining to academic honesty and appropriate student conduct, as described in the student handbook. Students in web-based courses must maintain appropriate equipment and software, according to the needs and requirements of the course, as outlined on the SRSU website. Directions for filing a student complaint are located in the student handbook.