

TERM: Fall 2025
COURSE NUMBER: ENGL 5000.07
COURSE TITLE: The Invention of English
SECTION TIMES/DAYS: TR 7:55-9:35 pm
INSTRUCTOR: Shepherd

COURSE DESCRIPTION/PRINCIPAL TOPICS:

Using a variety of theoretical models—some modern and some written more than six centuries ago—the course will examine the rise of the idea of English as a literary medium, beginning with the growing anti-Norman sentiment of the 12th century, and concentrating especially on the “English explosion” that occurred after the devastating 14th-century pandemic of the Black Death. This was an age when the choice to write in English, viewed as the language of the underclass (as opposed to French and Latin) was often desperate, nearly always radical, very often dangerous, and sometimes even heretical. In this spirit, even the most famous authors in English, such as Chaucer, Langland, Margery Kempe, and Julian of Norwich (all of whom we will read), were driven to interrogate the legitimacy of their own work. This course will also engage real manuscripts and early printed books as the physical manifestations of this turbulent but formative period.

STUDENT LEARNING OUTCOMES:

We will learn key period/literary/book-archaeological concepts and vocabulary, will discern the key historical markers and sequences in the rise of post-Conquest literary English, and will be exposed to medieval theories of adaptation or rejection of tradition, alongside modern critical studies that venture to understand and interpret such developments. We will also encounter a truly diverse range of authors, texts, and genres, a mix of "greatest hits" and lesser-known masterworks, many inherently radical and/or underclass-oriented, working against the prestige languages of an (outgoing) hegemony, Latin and French. (A reading knowledge of Latin or French is not, however, at all required.)

CLASS LEVEL RESTRICTION:

Gaduate Only

RECOMMENDED/PREREQUISITES:

N/A

COURSE ATTRIBUTES:

- Critical Methodology
- Contemporary Critical Theory
- Major Writer / Genre / Literary Period
- Literature Elective
- Theory Elective
- Creative Writing Seminar
- Rhetoric / Composition Theory and Practice
- Linguistics OR Reading Theory