

## English 4431, English Poetry – The Beginnings

T/Th, 2:00–3:20 pm, Language Building 114

Dr. Upchurch, Professor of English

E-mail | Robert.Upchurch@unt.edu

Office Hours | Tuesdays, LANG 409F, 3:30–4:30 pm

### Course Description

The object of our study in this course will be the poetry written in English between the early 700s and 1065 in all of its stunning vitality “[f]rom the riddling song of a bawdy onion that moves between kitchen and bedroom to the thrilling account of Beowulf’s battle with a treasure-hoarding dragon, from the heart-rendering lament of a lone castaway to the embodied speech of the cross upon which Christ was crucified from the anxiety of Eve, who carries ‘a sumptuous secret in her hand / and a tempting truth hidden in her heart,’ to the trust of Noah who builds ‘a sea-floater, a wave-walking / ocean-home with rooms for all creatures’ (*The Complete Old English Poems*). The goal of our study will be to discern the set of beliefs about life and universe represented in these poems and thus to understand what the people who wrote, read, and heard them believed about the nature of reality and their need for meaning, happiness, identity, morality, and hope.

**Required Text** — *The Complete Old English Poems*, trans. C. Williamson (2017)

- *Bring your book to each class to avoid a reduction of your participation grade.*

### Course Requirements and Grading

- 30% — Essay 1
- 40% — Essay 2
- 10% — Essay 3
- 20% — Attendance (10%) & Participation (10%)

### Attendance & Participation

You are expected to attend class and participate actively. This course is participatory, collaborative, and discussion-based, and you will learn more, perform at a higher level, and have more fun if you come and take part in class. Since in-person class attendance and class participation are essential and inextricably linked, I reserve the right to reduce a student’s attendance and participation grades. Attendance is taken daily, and all absences lower the attendance grade. After a student’s 3<sup>rd</sup> unexcused, undocumented absence, I will reduce the student’s attendance grade for a fourth and a fifth absence by 5 points each. Students who accumulate a sixth unexcused, undocumented absence will receive a final grade of “F” unless they withdraw from the class within the period authorized by UNT’s academic calendar.

### Additional Policies

Please consult the Welcome module for additional university policies on Academic Integrity (including the use generative AI writing tools), Student Conduct, ADA Accommodation among others.

### Course Calendar

Due dates for drafts, peer review responses, and final drafts will not change. The schedule of assigned readings may change depending on the pace at which we’re able to work productively as a community.

Week 1

1/16 **Introduction**

1/18 **Framework**—*Strange Likeness?*

Week 2

1/23 **Early English Literary History:** Cædmon's Hymn

1/25 **Early English Literary Traditions:** Widsith

Week 3

1/30 **Charms:** The Metrical Charms

2/1 **Gnomic Poetry:** Maxims I, Maxims I, A Proverb from Winfrid's Time,

Week 4

2/6 **Catalog Wisdom Poetry:** The Gifts of Men, The Fortunes of Men, The Rune Poem

2/8 **Wisdom Poetry:** Precepts, Vainglory, The Order of the World

Week 5

2/13 **Lyric and Elegy:** Deor, Wulf and Eadwacer, The Wife's Lament, The Husband's Message

2/15 **Lyric and Elegy:** The Ruin, The Seafarer, The Wanderer

Week 6

2/20 **Framework:** *Strange Likeness?*

2/22 **Poetic Allegories of Nature:** Physiologus I: The Panther, Physiologus II: The Whale, The Phoenix

Week 7

2/27 **Poems of Worship and Prayer:** The Lord's Prayer I–III, The Apostle's Creed, The Gloria I–II, The Kentish Hymn, Cædmon's Hymn, Godric's Hymns, A Prayer, Resignation A

2/29 **Poems on Christian Living:** Almsgiving, Homiletic Fragment I, Homiletic Fragment II, The Rewards of Piety, Instructions for Christians

Week 8

3/5 **Poems on the Last Things:** Soul and Body I, The Soul's Address to the Body (From the Worcester Fragments), The Grave, Judgment Day I–II, Verse in a Homily: The Judgement of the Damned

3/7 **Framework:** *Strange Likeness?*

**3/10** Draft of Essay 1 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas

Week 9

3/12 SPRING BREAK

3/14 SPRING BREAK

**3/18** MONDAY — Peer Review Responses to Essay 1 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas

Week 10

3/19 **Poems of Old Testament Narratives:** Genesis

3/21 Genesis *continued*

**3/24** Final Draft of Essay 1 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas

Week 11

3/26 **Poems of Old Testament Narratives:** Exodus

3/28 Exodus *continued*

Week 12

4/2 **Poems of Christ:** Christ I: Advent Lyrics, The Dream of the Rood, The Descent into Hell

4/4 **Poems of Christ:** Christ II: The Ascension, Christ and Satan, Christ III: Judgment

Week 13

4/9 **Framework:** *Strange Likeness?*

4/11 **Secular Heroic Poetry:** Waldere, The Battle of Brunanburg, The Battle of Maldon

Week 14

4/16 **A Secular Hero in Christian Heroic Poetry:** Beowulf

4/18 Beowulf *continued*

**4/21** Draft of Essay 2 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas

Week 15

4/23 **Christian Heroic Poetry:** Judith, Fates of the Apostles

4/25 **Christian Heroic Poetry:** Juliana

**4/28** Peer Review Responses to Essay 2 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas

Week 16

4/30 **Framework:** *Strange Likeness?*

5/2 **Framework:** *Strange Likeness?*

**5/3** Final Draft of Essay 2 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas

**5/5** Essay 3 due by 11:59 pm in Canvas