

English 281: History of the English Language

Course Syllabus



Instructor: C. Fee

Meeting Time: MWF 11:00-11:50 AM

Meeting Place: Glatfelter 001

Office: Breidenbaugh 406

Office Hours: MWF 10:00-11:00 AM, and by appointment, and by appointment

Office Phone: x6762

Home Phone: 528-4799 (Call before 10:00 PM)

E-mail: cfee@gettysburg.edu

Required Texts:

Davis, Norman ed. *Sweet's Anglo-Saxon Primer*. 9th ed. Oxford: Clarendon, 1953.

Millward, Celia M., and Mary Hayes. *A Biography of the English Language*. 3rd ed.
Boston, Mass: Wadsworth Cengage Learning, 2012.

Truss, Lynne. *Eats, Shoots & Leaves: The Zero Tolerance Approach to Punctuation*. NY:
Gotham, 2004.

Winchester, Simon. *The Professor and the Madman: A Tale of Murder, Insanity, and the
Making of the Oxford English Dictionary*. NY: HarperCollins Publishers, Inc.,
1999.

Course Objectives:

The history of a language is the history of the people who speak it, those who read and write it, and those who come into contact with it. This is a course in which we will examine the origin and development of the English language, from its earliest beginnings in the misty past, through Old English (or Anglo-Saxon), Middle English, Early Modern English, and Present Day English, and across the post-modern globe. Language is a fundamental cornerstone (perhaps the very foundation) of all human culture. It is, therefore, a vital part of who we are, and a knowledge of how language operates serves to explain, in part, how we came to be what we are. The study of what language is and how it changes, and how these changes are grounded in parallel cultural changes, is therefore a subject of intrinsic value, especially to those interested in literature, linguistics, history, and cultural studies.

Course Requirements & Assignments:

This course may be unique amongst English courses in that it mixes the study of technical subjects (phonetics, linguistics, historical grammar, etc.) with more abstract cultural and literary issues (the impact of the Norman Invasion upon Old English, the place of Ebonics in the modern public school curriculum, etc.). I have attempted to reflect this mix in the schedule of reading assignments, exercises, papers, and the like. Some of the material covered in this course is a bit technical, and we will cover a wide range and large volume of material in a relatively short time. It is vital, therefore, that you keep up with the daily reading, as well as with the linguistic and historical exercises. I have structured the course assignments and schedule so as to encourage you to take a cumulative approach to this material (learning a little at a time will prove easier, in this course, than trying to absorb a large volume of material overnight).

Midterm & Final Exams: There will be two exams, and both will be similar in format: a series of short-answer and identification questions drawn from the texts, discussions, quizzes, and exercises, and an essay question or two concerning cultural and historical material. There will always be some range of choice in the essay questions. Be aware that class lectures and discussions are designed as a supplement to, and not a substitute for, the assigned reading. Both exams will cover material from the assigned reading which was not covered in class.

Quizzes: There will be a set series of quizzes (not pop quizzes); check the schedule. The purpose of these quizzes is not to catch students unaware, nor to provide futile exercises in grading, but rather to give each of you a continuous sense of how well you have mastered the material thus far, to boost your confidence concerning areas which you have mastered, and to target that material which needs more work. The quizzes will also give you a very good impression of the sort of short answer and identification material you may anticipate on the exams. Because of the nature of these quizzes as “practice” for the exams, we will use a bit of class time after each quiz to conduct a peer grading exercise, a proven pedagogical technique which further reinforces positive outcomes and further underscores areas which need more attention.

2 Short Book Assessments: You will be asked to write two short (2-4 page each) critical reviews of the popular books included on the syllabus. A "critical review" is not a "book report" but a thoughtful assessment of the writing, evidence, and persuasiveness of the work in question. Is it good? Is it useful? Is it worth the money? Why or why not? Does the book you're assessing further illuminate your knowledge of the history of the English language? The first assessment, **due in Week Five**, will critique *The Professor and the Madman*, and should address the question: "**Are you crazy? Is that any way to put together a dictionary?**" The second assessment, **due in Week Twelve**, will concern *Eats, Shoots & Leaves*, and should take as its point of departure the eternal English student lament: "**Grammar: Does it Matter?**"

Word-Study Essay: During the second week of class we will discuss this 4-5 page paper, which is concerned with the "etymology" (look up in Millward glossary) of words. You will choose an interesting word, discuss its derivation, "cognates", spelling, pronunciation, characteristics, and meanings, and will examine how some of these have changed over time, and discuss why. The purpose of this assignment is to ensure that you have grasped the basic linguistic concepts and tools associated with this course. **This paper will be due at the end of Week Eight.**

Language & Culture Essay: During the third week of class I will distribute a list of possible topics for this 6-7 page essay; you may choose one of these topics, or you may (subject to discussion with me) design your own. The purpose of this assignment is to underscore the relationship between linguistic development and cultural factors. Possible topics might include the impact of the Viking invasions on the English language, the relationship between the slave trade and the establishment and development of Jamaican Creole, or the function of dictionaries as tools to attempt to slow or to halt linguistic change. Perhaps beginning with the Suggested Further References in Millward, you will compile a bibliography on your subject, outline your approach to the topic, and then meet with me to discuss your progress. You will then annotate your bibliography and present a report on your findings to the class (see below). **Your final paper will be due during the last week of class.**

Language & Culture Oral Report: At some point **during Week Eleven, Week Twelve, or Week Thirteen**, each student will deliver a short (3-5 minute) oral report to the class concerning the research on that student's language and culture essay. Further details will be forthcoming in week three.

Linguistic Exercises: There will be a series of assigned out-of-class exercises (Phonetics, Old English, Middle English, and Early Modern English); each exercise will be preceded by related reading, in-class discussion, and/or a sample exercise(s) in class. Each exercise will give you a good idea of what sort of material you may expect on the following quiz, and our peer assessment of each quiz will give us a forum for a productive discussion of the subsequent appearance of related material on the exams. Thus the linguistic material in this course will be covered incrementally, with ample opportunities for feedback and revision.

Course Evaluation:

Attendance, Participation, & In-Class Exercises: +/-10%

Linguistic Exercises: +/-10%

Quizzes: +/-10%

2 Short Book Assessments: +/-05%

Word-Study Essay: +/-10%

Language & Culture Essay: +/-15%

Language & Culture Oral Report: +/-05%

Midterm Exam: +/-15%

Final Exam: +/-20%

ALL ASPECTS of this course must be completed in order to pass the course, regardless of the overall percentage earned.

Attendance, Participation, & In-Class Exercises: Because of the nature of the material, a good deal more of this class will be devoted to lecture than I would like. This does not, however, alleviate your responsibility to be well prepared and ready to participate. I will ask for questions more than once a day, and I often call on people out of the blue. Having intelligent questions to ask and occasionally being willing to try to answer a question or to offer a comment are requirements of this course. We also will have a series of in-class exercises, and active and enthusiastic participation in these also is expected. On a more light-hearted note, part of the fun of this subject is making connections between linguistic study and everyday life. I encourage you to note and to relate to the class interesting, odd, or inexplicable uses of English which you encounter in conversation, reading, eavesdropping, televising, etc. What starts out as fun (and even silly) can often lead to provocative and worthwhile explorations! By the way, what does "silly" mean? Look up its etymology.

Syllabus and Schedule Subject to Change

**English 281: History of the English Language
Schedule of Classes**



Reading Assignments should be **completed** before the date listed!

M 8/29: Introduction to course, syllabus, schedule, and assignments.

W 8/31: What is “language”? Crash course in linguistic terminology and concepts.
Millward (1-8)

F 9/2: “Evolution” or “Decadence”? You be the judge! The nature of linguistic change. **Millward** (8-21)

M 9/5: Does that sound like language? Phonology and the production of speech.
Millward (23-33)

W 9/7: Whutdyameen transkripshun praktis? In-class phonetics exercise. Word-Study Essay discussed and assigned. Phonetics Exercise assigned.

F 9/9: **Phonetics Exercise due.** Peer grading in class. Freezing the fluid of language--writing systems, runes, and the culture of the book. **Millward** (35-44)

M 9/12: **Phonetics Quiz.** Introduction to Indo-European. Who were the Indo-Europeans, anyway, and are we going to talk about Euro-Disney? **Millward** (47-64)

W 9/14: The Brothers Grimm and their nasty old law: Don’t count on a fairy-tale ending! Introduction to Germanic. Language and Culture Essay discussed and assigned; list of possible topics distributed. **Millward** (65-76).

F 9/16: Dr. Johnson prescribes a cure: introducing dictionaries! Dictionary handouts.
Millward (231-236).

M 9/19: How to read an etymology; introduction to the history, function, and mystery of the OED. Look at OED on-line. **Millward** (300-302).

W 9/21: Writing a historical novel with the OED; or, etymology as cultural archaeology: raiders of the lost denotation. **Winchester** (in entirety).

F 9/23: Hwæt se deofol is going on here!?! Old English in bite-sized pieces: Love at first bite! Introduction to the Anglo-Saxon period, culture, and language. Selected excerpts from *The Story of English* video series. **Millward** (79-86). Sign up for topic for Language and Culture Essay and date for oral report.

M 9/26: Old English in bite-sized pieces: Nibble an appetizer: My, what a strange voice you have! The Old English sound system. Selected excerpts from *The Story of English* video series. **Millward** (86-93). **Sweet** (1-8).

W 9/28: "**Are you crazy? Is that any way to put together a dictionary?**" **Paper Due.** Old English in bite-sized pieces: Alphabet Soup: Scribes, sheep skins, mysterious runes and funny looking letters. Facsimiles of manuscripts, pictures of runic inscriptions, and a rune exercise. **Millward** (93-97).

F 9/30: Old English in bite-sized pieces: Gobble it all up: (DON'T PANIC!!!) Inflections, case, number, and gender. Practice sentences and The Lord's Prayer. **Millward** (98-112). **Sweet** (22-23 and 44-47). **Memorize** demonstrative/definite article (all of paragraph 47).

M 10/3: Inflections continued. In-class Old English reading exercise (*King Edmund* handout). **Sweet** (8-18). **Memorize** *nama* and *stan* declensions.

W 10/5: Inflections continued. The Old English New Testament. **Translate** the Gospel according to Matthew, ll. 1-10 (Sweet 62). **Sweet** (25-27; look over 28-36). **Memorize** *scip* and *giefu* declensions.

F 10/7: Anglo-Saxon perceptions of history. **Translate** the *Anglo-Saxon Chronicle*, ll. 68-81 (Sweet 75). **Memorize** *bindan* conjugation.

M 10/10: **NO CLASS: FALL READING DAYS**

W 10/12: What ever happened to word order? Old English syntax. The Old English Old Testament. **Translate** Abraham and Isaac, ll. 1-16 (Sweet 66). **Millward** (112-119). **Sweet** (59-61).

F 10/14: Old English poetry, *Beowulf*, and the heroic tradition. In-class *Beowulf* reading exercise (glossed handout). **Millward** (119-141).

M 10/17: Catch up and prepare for Old English Quiz

W 10/19: **Old English Quiz.** Come to class prepared to look at some of your Word Study words on the OED on-line. *Sir Orfeo* handout (text, notes, and exercises).

F 10/21: **Word Study Essay due.** Introduction to the Middle English period, culture, and language: Middle English, the language of Romance! **Millward** (143-148 & 191-217).

M 10/24: Pronouncing Chaucer: “Whan that Aprill...”. Handout from the *General Prologue* to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (read aloud in class). In-class Middle English exercise (*Sir Orfeo*). Middle English Exercise (*Sir Orfeo*) assigned. *Sir Orfeo* (in entirety). **Millward** (148-159).

W 10/26: The structure and vocabulary of Middle English. **Middle English Exercise due.** Peer grading in class. **Millward** (159-191).

F 10/28: **Middle English Quiz.**

M 10/31: Middle English dialects: The Rise of London English (*Sir Orfeo* and the importance of the East Midland dialect). Review for First Exam.

W 11/2: **FIRST EXAM**

ATTENDANCE IS MANDATORY AT THE CROLL LECTURE WEDNESDAY AFTERNOON, 2 NOVEMBER; IF YOU HAVE A CONFLICT, CLEAR YOUR ABSENCE IN ADVANCE WITH THE INSTRUCTOR, WHO WILL ARRANGE AN ALTERNATIVE ASSIGNMENT FOR YOU.

F 11/4: Introduction to Early Modern English and Renaissance England: What was so great about the Great Vowel Shift? Handouts of selections from Shakespeare. **Millward** (219-224).

M 11/7: Pronouncing Shakespeare: what fools these mortals be! In-class Early Modern English exercise. Early Modern English Exercise assigned. **Millward** (224-231).

W 11/9: The structure and vocabulary of Early Modern English. **Early Modern English Exercise due.** Peer grading in class. **Millward** (236-244).

F 11/11: Reflections of Language in Literature: the structure and vocabulary of Shakespeare. **Millward** (244-258; 277-292).

M 11/14: What was that you said? Pronouncing Present Day English. **Millward** (295-309).

W 11/16: Reading, writing, and loanwords; what’s new about English? **Millward** (309-339).

F 11/18: English into the 21st century: the impact of cyber-technology on language; or, remember the printing press? Think about e-mail, www, mtv, the film industry, instant global access to information, the proliferation of electronic media, and the hegemony of

U.S. popular culture. Will the language survive? Of course it will (remember the vikings!); but how will it change? Speaking of violence, what about the culture wars? While you're IMing your friend to ask her to google up "culture wars" for you, think about this: Whatever happened to good old-fashioned grammar? Should you care? Why? Why not? **Truss** (in entirety).

M 11/21: English around the world: How did *that* happen? **Millward** (341-346).

W 11/23-F 11/25: **NO CLASS: THANKSGIVING BREAK**

M 11/28: "**Grammar: Does it Matter?**" **Paper due.** U.S. English: General American, regional variation, and dialect maps. **Millward** (346-358).

W 11/30: U.S. English: African American Vernacular English. **Millward** (358-362).

F 12/2: International English: Surfeit of Sassannachs (England, Scotland, Wales, Ireland). **Millward** (367-385).

M 12/5: International English: International English: Commonwealth Cultures (Canada, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa, the Western Atlantic). **Millward** (362-366 & 385-393).

W 12/7: The Legacy of Empire: Non-native English in Asia and Africa. Pidgins and creoles. **Millward** (393-406).

F 12/9: **Language & Culture Essay due.** Catch up day. Review for Final Exam.

FINAL EXAMINATION:

Saturday, December 17th

8:30 - 11:30 AM