

# A SURVEY OF BRITISH LITERATURE

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# Some general and administrative points

**Module E/V**

**Module C/E**

**Module Lit2**

## Module E/V and C/E

*You need to have passed module A/II in order to be able to take this course!!!!*

*Module Exam:* Term paper of 10-12 pages

**Deadline:** 31st March, 2020

**Official Registration:** via HiS – fifth and sixth week of the semester

**Additional Registration:** with me during my office hours (till end of February!) ☺

### **Please note:**

- Late submissions cannot and will not be accepted!
- Once we've agreed on a topic, the exam has started and you can no longer withdraw.
- Hand in paper in print **and** digital form.
- „Bib-Schein“ part III (available on Moodle2 – „Fachrecherche für Anglisten“; to be handed in with the registration)

### **Only for GS students:**

No paper, but an oral exam. Register via HiS (dates above) AND Moodle (starts with the HiS registration but runs one week longer)

## Module Lit 2

*You need to have passed module Lit 1 in order to be able to take this course!!!!*

**No module exam but a mandatory “Prüfungsvorleistung”**

**→ this needs to be passed before you can write the term paper in one of the thematic literature seminars in the same module!!**

**Official Registration:** via HiS – fifth and sixth week of the semester

**Date of exam:** last session of the seminar

**Resit** (ONLY for those who failed the first exam):

1st April 10-12

**E3 students:** No paper, but a short test in the last session of the seminar!

## What you can expect from this course:

- an overview of British literary history from the Anglo Saxon period to Post-Modernism, viewing literature in its socio-political and cultural context
- discussions on (recurring) topoi and themes and their influences/impacts
- tools and skills for engaging critically with literature

## What I expect from you:

- come to class prepared, i.e. do your reading and **think** about the texts
- participate in class discussions -> this is your chance to practice academic discourse!

# A Survey of British Literature

## *Anglo-Saxon England / The Middle Ages*

Anglo-Saxon: ca. 449 -1066

Middle Ages: 1066 – 1485

# 1. Anglo-Saxon England: The beginnings

- Britain as Roman Province from approx. 42 - 420 A.D.
- attacks from the Picts and from seafaring Germanic tribes
- Britons asked Germanic tribes from continental Europe to help fight the invaders. These tribes...
  - ... eventually turned against the Britons and settled permanently in Britain
  - ... were predominantly **Angles, Saxons and Jutes.**

## 2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- Germanic tribes established kingdoms in Britain:
- ~ 650 A.D. seven kingdoms had consolidated; more or less stable for 200 years
- **Heptarchy**: power-relations constantly in flux

## 2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture



## 2. The Height of Anglo-Saxon Culture

- from end of the 7th century: influence of **Christianisation** via Ireland and from continental missionaries sent from Rome
- 597: St Augustine arrived in Kent; only ~ 75 years later all the major kingdoms were Christian.

### 3. Anglo-Saxon Culture: The decline

- In 793, the first Vikings appeared along the British coast = beginning of a time of repeated Viking incursions.
- From 852, Viking lords settled permanently in Britain.
- The Vikings destabilised the Heptarchy and all Kingdoms except for WESSEX perished.  
-> **King Alfred the Great**

### 3. Anglo-Saxon Culture: The decline

- 9th century: Wessex became predominant Anglo-Saxon dialect
- The Vikings were incorporated into Anglo-Saxon culture
- 1066: In the Battle of Hastings William of Normandy (later known as *William the Conqueror*) successfully secured the throne of Britain for himself after a dispute regarding the succession of King Edward the Confessor



## 4. Features of Anglo-Saxon Literature

- consists mostly of poetry
- anonymous
- The poetry that has survived is **elegaic** and **religious**
  - > *Caedmon's Hymn* as the earliest Old English poem (a prayer, ~ 660-680)
  - > *The Wanderer*, *The Seafarer*
  - > *Beowulf* (~800), a heroic epic in alliterative verse
- Old English prose writings are mainly **religious** texts and **chronicles**.

## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

### The Lord's Prayer (West Saxon Dialect)

Fæder úre, ðú ðe eart on heofonum,  
Sí ðín nama gehálgod.  
Tó becume ðín rice.  
Gewurde ðín willa  
On eorþan swá swá on heofonum.  
Urne dægwhamlícan hlaf syle ús tóðæg.  
And forgyf ús úre gyltas,  
Swá swá wé forgyfaþ úrum gyltendum.  
And ne gelæd ðu ús on costnunge,  
Ac álýs ús of yfele sóþlice.

## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature / Dialect

*Do you recognize any of these? 😊*

Ic wylle þine hand healdan,  
Ic wylle þine hand healdan.

\*\*\*\*

Ond æfter eallum, þu eart min wundorweal.

\*\*\*\*

On smeal steppe for a mænne,  
On giante leap for mancynde.

## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

- **Poetry:**

- Mostly oral poetry
- Performed in the **mead hall** by a minstrel called the **scop**
- no rhyme scheme; alliteration is the central principle;

*A fair field full of folk || found I there between,  
Of all manner of men || the mean and the rich,  
Working and wandering || as the world asketh.*

- *kennings* are compounds typical for Old English literature

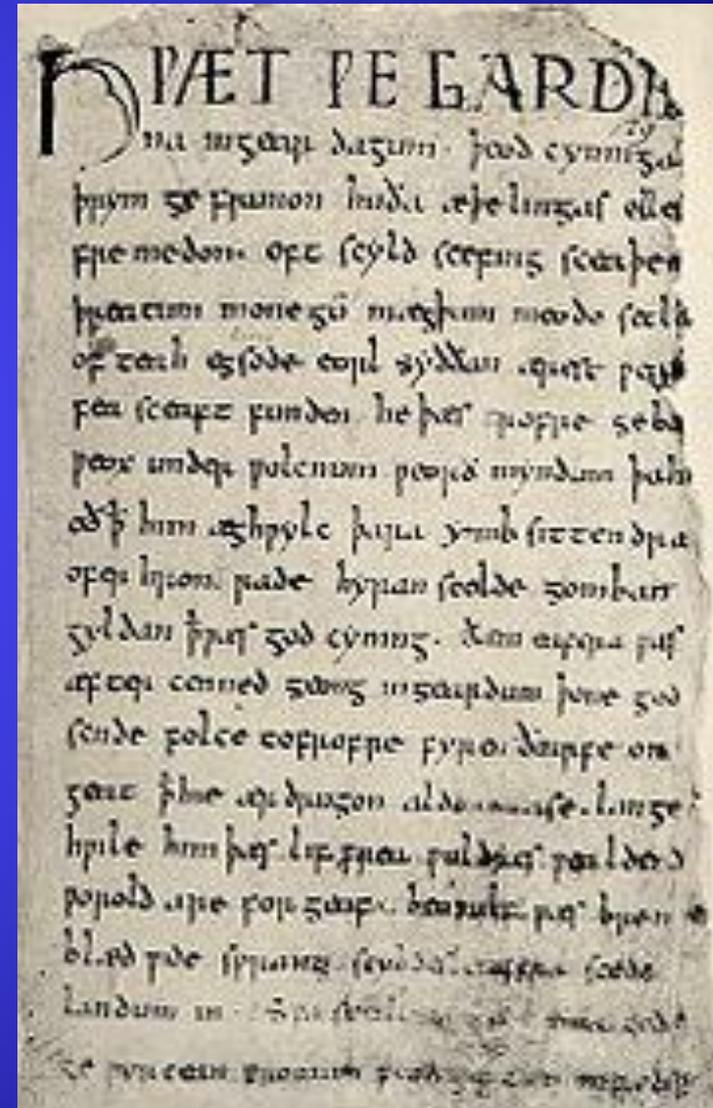
## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

- **Poetry: *Beowulf***

- Epic heroic poem
- illustrates a warrior society in Northern Europe (Danes and Geats) -> thus refers to early Anglo-Saxon phase
- set in a pagan world, depicting its waning culture (-> elegaic)
- the story has a definitive Christian strain
- Plot: **Beowulf**, a Geat, comes to the rescue of King **Hrothgar**, a Dane, whose lands are haunted by the monster **Grendel**. After killing Grendel, Beowulf slays **Grendel's Mother** and, later in life, a **dragon**.

# 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

## Poetry: *Beowulf*



- Beowulf reflects a Christian tradition; many references, esp. to the Old Testament
- However, this Christianity had not yet succeeded in obliterating an older pagan tradition.
- **Relationships** between kinsmen as one central element (concept of *wergild* and **revenge**)
- **Boasting** as representation of heroic way of life but also as a vow (pagan ideal of a heroic life; immortality through being kept in the minds of later generations).

## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

### *Sic transit Gloria mundi* – Topos

Forþon ic geþencan ne mæg  
geond þas woruld  
for hwan modsefa  
min ne gesweorce  
þonne ic eorla lif  
eal geondþence,  
hu hi færlice  
flet ofgeafon,  
modge maguþegnas.  
Swa þes middangeard  
ealra dogra gehwama  
dreoseð ond fealleð;

Indeed I cannot think  
why my spirit  
does not darken  
when I ponder on the whole  
life of men  
throughout the world,  
How they suddenly  
left the floor (hall),  
the proud thanes.  
So this middle-earth,  
bit each day,  
droops and decays –  
(The Wanderer)

## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature

### *Ubi sunt* -- Topos

Hwær cwom mearg? Hwær cwom mago?

Hwær cwom maþpumgyfa?

Hwær cwom symbla gesetu?

Hwær sindon seledreamas?

Eala beorht bune!

Eala byrnwiga!

Eala þeodnes þrym!

Hu seo þrag gewat,

Where is the horse gone? Where the rider?

Where the giver of treasure?

Where are the seats at the feast?

Where are the revels in the hall?

Alas for the bright cup!

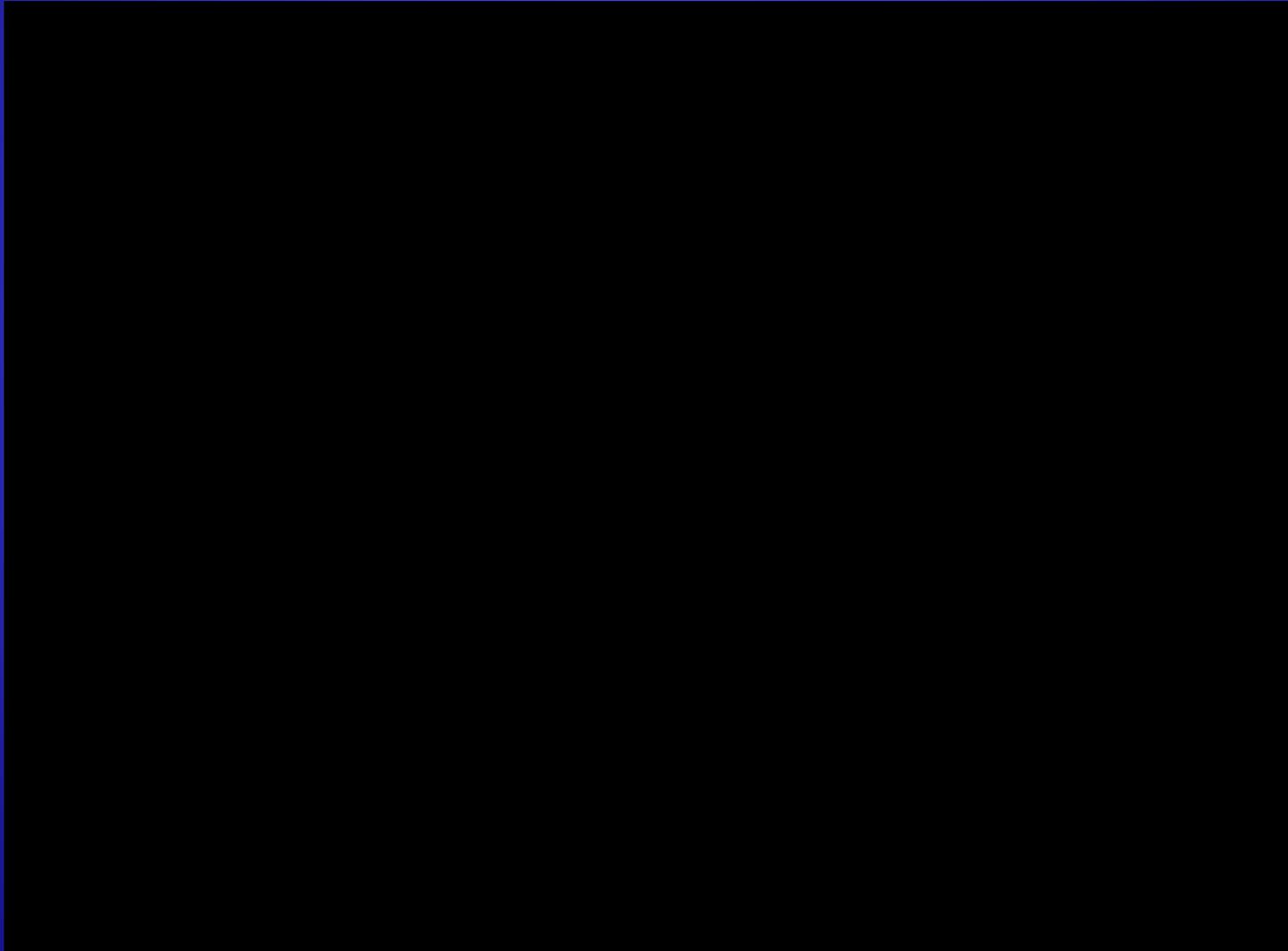
Alas for the mailed warrior!

Alas for the splendour of the prince!

How that time has passed away,

(The Wanderer)

## 4. Anglo-Saxon Literature



## 5. The Middle Ages (1066-1485)

- 1066: the Norman Conquest
- French becomes the language of the court and of administration
- Oxford University founded in 1167, Cambridge in 1209
- Drama: **miracle plays** and **mystery plays** performed in market square (originally religious drama)
- **Courtly Culture** develops
  - Knightly values
  - The noble lady as an object of admiration based on the worship of the Virgin Mary

## 5. The Middle Ages

### The medieval concept of courtly love

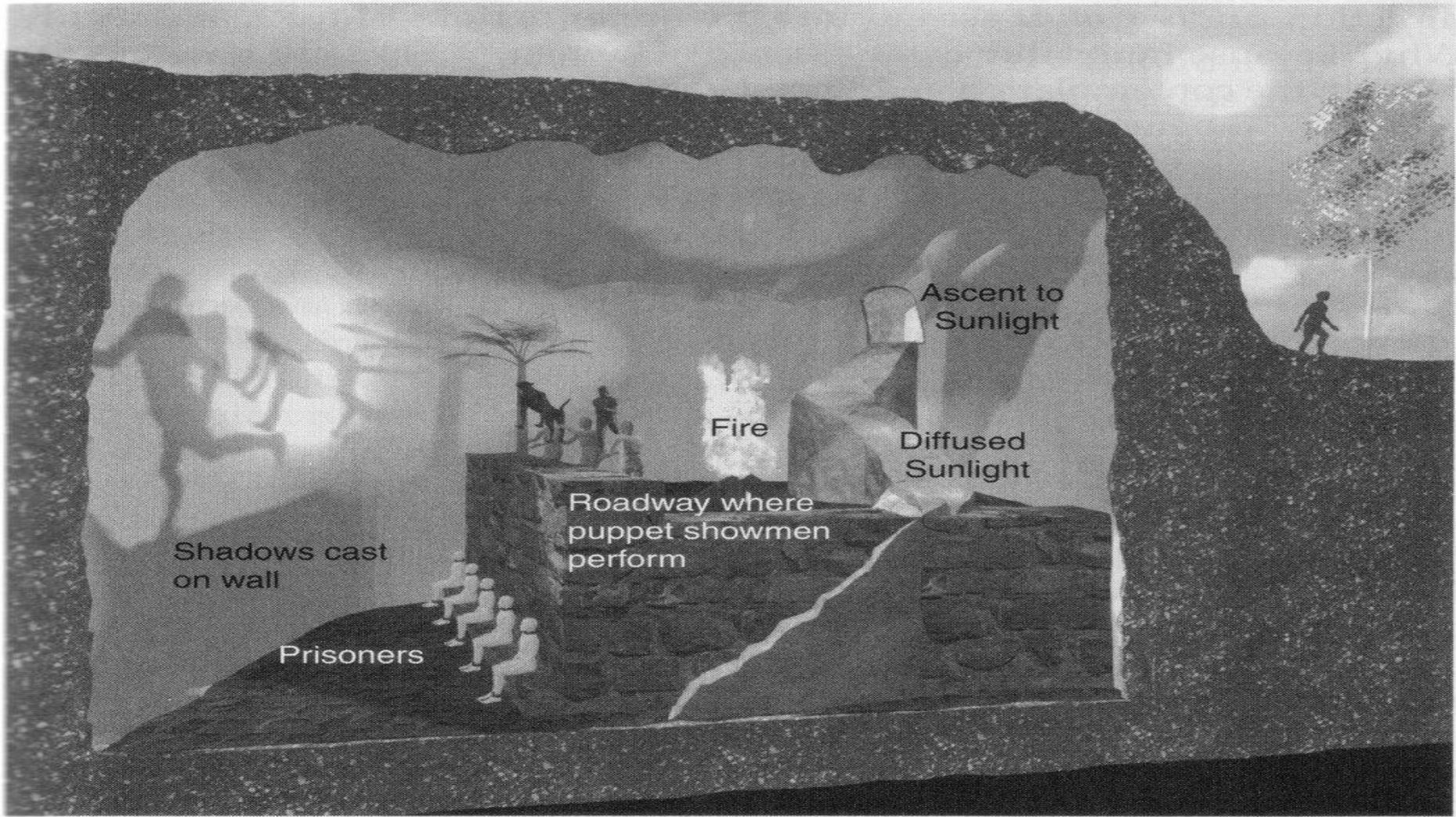
During the Middle Ages, the concept of courtly love developed.

- Errant knight
- Worship of the Virgin Mary

→ Led to a Christianisation of Platonic ideas → **NEO-Platonism**



# PLATO'S ALLEGORY OF THE CAVE



## 5. The Middle Ages

Chaucer (~1343 – 1400) as the most important Middle English writer

### *Canterbury Tales*

Frame narrative: pilgrims on their way to Canterbury tell each other stories

Individual tales: very different genres, from drastically sexual *fabliaux* ("Miller's Tale") to long sermon ("Parson's Tale")

Whan that aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,  
And smale foweles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
(so priketh hem nature in hir corages);  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And specially from every shires ende  
Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.



Thank you for your attention!  
See you next week!



*Please prepare the following for next session*

Pages 11-37 in your readers =  
texts & excerpts from:

Intro Middle Ages

Chaucer

Malory