This course will both survey the shifting sands of the English canon -- paying homage alike to well-established monuments and the odd, forgotten Ozymandius -- and investigate the strange and diverse forces through which canons themselves take shape. We will begin by looking at the history of English as an academic field, and the cultural histories that have brought the “canon wars” to their current, uneasy truce. We will read a wide variety of primary texts from the full range of historical periods up until 1800, along with selected commentaries and a few brief supplemental texts. Weekly response essays of one page each will be the basis for our class discussions; there will also be two formal literary essays on selected texts or themes.
COURSE POLICIES: Regular attendance and class participation are required; more than two absences or two missing responses will have an adverse effect on your final grade. Class participation is vital, the more so as some of the texts we’ll be reading will take some considerable effort to fully access and understand.

Our textbook is the *Norton Anthology of English Literature*, Ninth Edition, which is available in a convenient three-volume edition; copies are available at the RIC campus store.

COURSE SCHEDULE


WEEK II – Sept. 6. NO CLASS MONDAY Thursday: *Beowulf*, Prologue, "Heorot is Attacked," "The Hero Comes to Heorot" (lines 1-490).


WEEK IV – Sept. 24. Monday: Margery Kempe, excerpts from *The Book of Margery Kempe*; Julian of Norwich, excerpts from *Showings*. NO CLASS THURSDAY


WEEK VI – Oct. 11. Thursday: The resurrection of the English Tongue. Readings: Skelton, *Upon a Dead Man’s Head*; excerpt from *Speke, Parrot*; E.K.’s preface to Spenser’s *The Shepheardes Calendar* (blog link). **Essay # 1 due Thursday**.

WEEK VI – Oct. 15 Monday: Shakespeare, Selected Sonnets: 15, 18, 29, 71, 73, 129, 130, 144. NO CLASS THURSDAY


WEEK XII – Nov. 19. The Age of Letters. Frances Burney, from The Letters and Journals, “The Most Dangerous Employment Young Persons Can Have”; “A Young and Agreeable Infidel,” “Miss Burney’s Alarm on being Chased by the King”; in-class film, The Madness of King George
