

ENGL2170: Introduction to British Literature and Culture I

Eric Weiskott

Teaching Assistant: Kenneth Haley

Fall 2021, M/W/F 1:00–1:50pm

Office hours: M 2:00–3:00pm (Stokes S407)

Britain, Ireland, and their archipelago were home to an exceptionally vibrant early literary tradition spanning English, French, Irish, Latin, Norse, and other languages. Writing from these islands connected rulers and rebels, merchants and monks, brewers and bureaucrats. This course is a survey of ‘British’ literature (we’ll question the term) from the beginnings to 1700. Most texts are in English; some are read in translation. The course focuses on connections between literature, power, and the formation of literary canons. The survey covers all major genres of early literature from the archipelago. Texts and authors include *Beowulf*, Marie de France, Chaucer, Margery Kempe, Spenser, Shakespeare, Milton, and Behn.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

The Broadview Anthology of British Literature: Concise Edition, Volume A (3rd ed.) (Broadview, 2017)
William Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, ed. Peter Holland (Penguin, 1999)

Note: All page numbers in parentheses refer to the *Broadview Anthology*.

SCHEDULE

Literature before “literature”

Aug 30 Introduction to early insular literature
“Riddle 47” (79; solution 80)

Bards and beer halls

Sept 1 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History of the English People*, 4 (begin at “In Hild’s monastery was a certain brother. . .”) (53–5)
“Cædmon’s Hymn in Old and Modern English” (55)
“The First Satire” (59)
Sept 3 “Ornamental belt buckle” (between 46 and 47)
“The Wanderer” (66–8)
Skallagrímsson, *Höfuðlausn*
Sept 8 *Beowulf*, ll. 1–836 (85–96)
*Discussion post 1 due on Canvas

Monks and scholars

Sept 10 Bede, *Ecclesiastical History*, 1 and 2 (42–6)
Sept 13 “CHI-RHO page from the Lindisfarne Gospels” (between 46 and 47)
“Nave, Durham Cathedral” (between 46 and 47)
“[Messe ocus Pangur Bán]” (60)
“[Is acher in gáith innocht]” (62)
“[Teacht do Róim]” (62)

- Sept 15 *Discussion post 2 due on Canvas
 The Dream of the Rood (72-5)
 “Riddle 26” (78-9; solution 80)
 “Riddle 43” (79; solution 80)
 “Riddle 44” (79; solutions 80)
 “Riddle 45” (79; solutions 80)

Clerics and kings, history and magic

- Sept 17 “Map of Britain” (between 46 and 47)
 Geoffrey of Monmouth, *A History of the Kings of Britain*, books 1 and 9-12
 (134-36; 147-55)
Sept 20 *The Four Branches of the Mabinogi*, branch 1 (158-69)
 *Discussion post 3 due on Canvas

Ladies, monsters, and courtly love

- Sept 22 “Sir Geoffrey Luttrell taking leave of his wife and daughter” (between 46 and 47)
 Marie de France, *Bisclavret* (180-87)
Sept 24 “Betwene Mersh and Averil” (205-206)
 “I lovede a child of this cuntree” (207)
 “My lefe is faren in a lond” (210)
 Isabel, Countess of Argyll, “There’s a Young Man in Pursuit of Me” (640)
 Pronunciation (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation)
Sept 27 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ll. 1-490 (226-39)
 Watch trailer for *The Green Knight* (youtube.com/watch?v=sS6ksY8xWCY)
 *Discussion post 4 due on Canvas

Rebels, truthseekers, and the status quo

- Sept 29 “The Black Death” (216-18)
 Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue
Sept 30 *The Green Knight* (2021) private screening (7:00pm, Stokes S195)
Oct 1 “Statute of Laborers (1351)” (219-20)
 Froissart, *Chronicles* (221)
 Ball, “Letter to the Common People of Essex, 1381” (222)
 Piers Plowman, passūs 1, 5, and 7 (436-38)

London lawyers and bureaucrats

- Oct 4 Gower, *Cinkante balades*, nos. 28, 33, and 51
Oct 6 Chaucer, *The General Prologue*, ll. 1-42 (300)
 Chaucer, *The Pardoner’s Prologue*, ll. 41-174 (353-55)
 Watch Agbabi perform “Prologue (Grime Mix)” from *Telling Tales*
 (youtube.com/watch?v=U-ozgiZfjQ)
 Chaucer’s Life (mediakron.bc.edu/mappingchaucer/chaucers-life)
Oct 8 “Opening page of the Prologue to *The Wife of Bath’s Tale*” (between 46 and 47)
 Chaucer, *The Wife of Bath’s Prologue*, ll. 1-828 (331-44)

- Watch Agbabi perform “What Do Women Like Bes’?” from *Telling Tales*
 (youtube.com/watch?v=8LptEFGhR7A)
- Oct 12 Chaucer, *The Prioress’s Prologue and Tale*, ll. 19–256 (366–70)
 Chaucer, *Retraction* (385)
 Hoccleve, *The Regiment of Princes*, ll. 1–112
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/blyth-hoccleve-regiment-of-princes)
 Butterfield, “Chaucer’s French Inheritance” (excerpt)

Visionaries and prisoners

- Oct 13 Julian of Norwich, *A Vision Shown to a Devout Woman*, sections 1–3 (388–91)
 Kempe, *The Book of Margery Kempe* (405–21)
- Oct 15 “Detail from an illuminated page from a manuscript of the poems of Charles,
 Duke of Orléans” (between 46 and 47)
 Malory, *Morte Darthur*, book 1 (490–96)
 Cent, “The Illusion of the World” (665–66)
 Charles d’Orléans, ballade 8
- Oct 18 Midterm exam (in class)
- Oct 20 “Henry VIII at the Opening of Parliament” (between 574 and 575)
 Wyatt, “Ballads” and “Songs” (612–14)
 Surrey, “So Cruel Prison How Could Betide” (621–22)

The English royal court

- Oct 22 “Queen Elizabeth I” (between 574 and 575)
 Spenser, *The Faerie Queene*, proem and book 1, cantos 1–2 (670–84)
 Spenser, “Letter to Sir Walter Raleigh on *The Faerie Queene*” (718–21)
- Oct 25 Philip Sidney, *Astrophil and Stella*, sonnets 18 and 41 (731; 734)
 Philip Sidney, *The Defence of Poesy* (stop at “. . .the speaking picture of poesy.”)
 (740–43)
- Oct 27 ?Peake, “Elizabeth I in Procession” (between 574 and 575)
 Elizabeth I, “The Doubt of Future Foes” (761)
 Elizabeth I, “On Monsieur’s Departure” (761)
 Elizabeth I, “Speech to the House of Commons, 28 January 1563” (764–66)
- Oct 29 CLASS CANCELED
- Nov 1 Shakespeare, *The Tempest*, act 1
 *Social mapping paper due (2–4 pp.)
- Nov 3 *Tempest*, acts 2–3
- Nov 5 *Tempest*, acts 4–5
- Nov 8 Lanyer, “Eve’s Apology in Defense of Women” (806–807)
 Raleigh, *The Discovery of the Large, Rich, and Beautiful Empire of Guiana*, part 5
 (816–21)
- Nov 10 Bacon, “Of Truth” (825–26)
 Marlowe, “The Passionate Shepherd to His Love” (845)
 Shakespeare, *Sonnets*, 20 and 106 (887–88; 893)
- Nov 12 Jonson, “On Something that Walks Somewhere” (902)

Jonson, "To John Donne" (903)

Mary Sidney Herbert, "O"

(poetryfoundation.org/poems/55249/o-56d2369e67a1d)

Lovers and believers

- Nov 15 "John Donne" (between 574 and 575)
Keating, "Bear with Thee, O Letter, My Blessing" (649)
Donne, "The Relic" (923-24)
Donne, *Elegies*, 19 (925-26)
Donne, *Holy Sonnets*, 14 (938)
- Nov 17 Gheerarterts the Younger, portrait of Barbara Gamage Sidney, Countess of
Leicester, and her children (between 574 and 575)
Wroth, *Pamphilia to Amphilanthus*, sonnet 77 (945-46)
Herrick, "To the Virgins, to Make Much of Time" (959)
George Herbert, "The Collar" (971)
George Herbert, "Death" (973)
- Nov 19 Marvell, "To His Coy Mistress" (979-80)
Philips, "A Married State" (988-89)
Philips, "Upon the Double Murder of King Charles" (989)

Dissenters, Puritans, and a rake

- Nov 22 Milton, "L'Allegro" and "Il Penseroso" (995-1000)
*Final paper skeleton due (1 p.)
- Nov 29 O'Donoghue, "This caps all their tricks, this statute from overseas" (652)
Milton, *Areopagitica* (1006-14)
- Dec 1 Milton, *Paradise Lost*, "The Verse" (1017)
Paradise Lost, "Argument to Book 1" (1017)
Paradise Lost, book 1 (1017-30)
- Dec 3 Cavendish, "Of Many Worlds in this World" (1150)
Behn, *Oroonoko: or, The Royal Slave* (stop at "...all imaginable respect and
obedience.") (1235-53)
- Dec 6 Pepys, *The Diary*, 21 May - 20 October 1660 (1201-1204)
Oroonoko (1254-69)
- Dec 8 Wilmot, "A Satire on Charles II" (1324-25)
Wilmot, "Impromptu on Charles II" (1333)
Watch opening scene from *The Libertine* (2004)
(youtube.com/watch?v=nUtwSGSRViE)
Review session
*Final paper due (5-7 pp.)
- Dec 18 Final exam (9:00am)

GRADING

Discussion posts 10%

Final paper, 5-7 pp. 25%

Midterm and final exams 20% each (40% total)

Participation 10%

Social mapping paper, 2–4 pp. 15%

OBJECTIVES

Over the course of the semester, you will encounter early literature from Britain, Ireland, and their archipelago in its linguistic, social, and cultural diversity. You will learn to recognize the conventions of the major genres of insular writing before 1700. Special emphasis will be given to the relationship between writing and social institutions such as families, professions, and royal courts. This course will help you develop skills of literary criticism and written exposition.

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion posts should reflect your initial reactions to the course material. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. For the social mapping paper, you will use the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (oxforddnb.com) to conduct research on one author from our syllabus, or another relevant historical figure, and then compose a short essay connecting the person's life and social context to one of our course readings up to that point, or to another text by an author included in the course. The final paper stages an extended argument about one or more course texts and makes reference to prior scholarship.

EXAMS

The midterm exam will consist of fifty multiple-choice questions about our course readings and key critical concepts from our discussions up to that point. A make-up midterm will only be given in extenuating circumstances and only if I am informed one week before the exam. The final exam will consist of sixty multiple-choice questions about our course readings and critical concepts from our discussions since the midterm, followed by four short-answer passage identifications drawn from course readings.

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading. Students should come to class prepared to actively discuss the language and rhetoric of the assigned texts. This is a discussion-based class, and you typically will not need laptops or smart phones.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity (bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html). I have a zero tolerance policy for intentional plagiarism. All quotations or paraphrases of sources must be cited parenthetically or in a footnote (examples: libguides.bc.edu/c.php?g=44446&p=281300).

ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability seeking accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

TITLE IX MANDATORY REPORTING

Please be aware that as a Boston College faculty member, I am obligated to report to the Student Affairs Title IX Coordinator any case of sexual misconduct that any student discloses to me.