

ENGL6041: Game of Thrones: Medieval English Political Poetry
Eric Weiskott
Fall 2022, M 2:00–4:25pm
Office hours: T 10:00–11:00am (Stokes S407) or by appointment

Before House Stark and House Lannister came the House of York and the House of Lancaster. The fourteenth and fifteenth centuries in England witnessed a series of social and political upheavals, from the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt to the Wars of the Roses. English poetry responds to and intervenes in these events. Political writing influenced the decisions of kings, shaped public perception of national politics, and landed people in prison (or worse). This course makes a survey of political poetry from England, 1300–1500, with focus on William Langland's *Piers Plowman* and the poetry of John Gower. We read canonical authors such as Geoffrey Chaucer, Gower, and Langland alongside little-known texts from manuscript archives. Topics include multilingualism, the relationship between literature and politics, and the histories of poetic forms. No prior knowledge of Middle English required. Gower's French and Latin texts read in translation.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

Gower, *The Minor Latin Works*, ed. and trans. R. F. Yeager, with *In Praise of Peace*, ed. Michael Livingston (Medieval Institute, 2005) (also free online, but we will read almost all of it)
Langland, *Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text*, ed. Derek Pearsall (rev. ed) (Exeter, 2008)
Medieval English Political Writings, ed. James M. Dean (Medieval Institute, 1996) (also free online, but we will read most of it)

RECOMMENDED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

Chaucer, *Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (3rd ed.) (Oxford, 2008)
Wynneere and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages, ed. Warren Ginsberg (Medieval Institute, 1992) (also free online)

SCHEDULE

I. Bearings

Singing and/or working (complaint and manorialism)

Aug 29 *Lament for Simon de Montfort* ("Chaunter m'estoit")
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/fein-harley2253-volume-2-article-24)
 Song of the Husbandman in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Pronunciation (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation)

Deadlock (Chaucer, ballads, and Westminster)

Sept 12 Charles d'Orléans, *Fortunes Stabilnes*, ballade 43
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/mooney-and-arn-kingis-quair-and-other-prison-poems-fortunes-stabilnes)

- Chaucer, *The Complaint of Venus*, ed. Benson
 Chaucer, *Truth*, ed. Benson
 Chaucer, *Lak of Stedfastnesse*, ed. Benson
 Chaucer, *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan*, ed. Benson
 Chaucer, *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton*, ed. Benson
 Chaucer, *The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse*, ed. Benson
 Scattergood, "Social and Political Issues in Chaucer"
 *Discussion post 1 due on Canvas
 Sept 19 Chaucer, *Parliament of Fowls*, ed. Benson
 Lydgate, "Soteltes at the Coronation Banquet of Henry VI"
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/sponsler-lydgate-mummings-and-entertainments-soteltes-at-the-coronation-banquet-of-henry-vi)
 Butterfield, "Chaucer's French Inheritance"
 *Discussion post 2 due on Canvas

II. Public poetry

A voice sounds out among the people (Gower, lollardy, trilingualism, and advice to kings)

- Sept 26 Gower, *De lucis scrutinio*
 Gower, *Carmen super multiplici viciorum pestilencia*
 Middleton, "The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II"
 *Discussion post 3 due on Canvas
 Oct 3 Gower, "O deus immense"
 Gower, "Ecce patet tensus"
 Gower, "Rex celi deus"
 Gower, "O recolende"
 Gower, "H. aquile pullus"
 Gower, "Presul ouile regis"
 Gower, "Unanimes esse"
 Gower, "Cultor in ecclesia"
 Gower, *Cinkante Balades*, prefatory balade 1 and balade 51
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-french-balades-cinkante-balades)
 "Ther is a Busch that is Forgrowe" in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Gower, *Minor Latin Works*, ed. and trans. Yeager, introduction (read the whole
 introduction; this includes the short poem "Ad mundum mitto")
 *Discussion post 4 due on Canvas
 Oct 11 Gower, "Quia unusquisque"
 Gower, *In Praise of Peace*
 Echard, "The Long and the Short of It"
 Weiskott, "The Idea of Bede in English Political Prophecy," pp. 279–88 (*Bede's
 Prophecy*)

Politics in the future tense (prophecy, alliterative verse, and the Wars of the Roses)

- Oct 17 *The Prophecy of Merlin* (Dublin, Oxford, and Cambridge texts) in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Thomas of Erceldoune's Prophecy in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Ercylound's Prophecy in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Prelude to the Wars ("The root is dead the swan is gone"), ed. Robbins
 Hicks, *The Wars of the Roses*, ch. 1
 Weiskott, *Meter and Modernity in English Verse, 1350–1650*, ch. 3 and appendix D
 (*The Ireland Prophecy*)
 *Topic study due (2–5 pp.)
- Oct 24 *London Lickpenny* in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Winner and Waster (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/ginsberg-wynnere-and-wastoure)
 Ni, "Wyde howses full of wolfe sakkes"
 Eric's One-Page Guide to Middle English Alliterative Meter
 *Introductory meter exercise: Scan *Winner and Waster*, ll. 1–10

III. Contestation

An imaginary bomb with real shrapnel (Langland's *visio*, the Peasants' Revolt, and the commons)

- Oct 31 Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue and passūs 1–2
 Piers Plowman, ed. Pearsall, pp. 6–7 ("The nature and form of the poem")
 Steiner, *Reading "Piers Plowman"*, introduction
 Manuscripts (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/manuscript-guide)
- Nov 7 *PP*, passūs 3–5
 Hanna, "Reading Prophecy/Reading *Piers*"
 Statute of Cambridge 1388
 *Intermediate meter exercise: scan *Piers Plowman* C.5.1–15
- Nov 14 *PP*, passūs 6–7
 Audelay, *Carols*, 2 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/fein-audelay-poems-and-carols-carol-sequence)
 "I-blessyd Be Cristes Sonde" in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Lochrie, *Nowhere in the Middle Ages*, ch. 4
- Nov 21 *PP*, passūs 8–9
 "The Letter of John Ball" (Royal MS and Stow) in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 "Addresses of the Commons (Knighton)" in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 "John Ball's Sermon Theme (Walsingham)" in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 "Tax Has Tenet Us Alle" in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Aers, "Vox populi and the Literature of 1381"
 Piers Plowman, ed. Pearsall, pp. 25–9 ("Lollardy and lollares")
 "Piers's Pardon, before and after 1381"

Grammar, the ground of all (Langland's *vita*, institutions of education, and the clergy)

- Nov 28 *PP*, passūs 10–11
 “Preste, ne Monke, ne Yit Chanoun” in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 “Thou That Sellest the Worde of God” in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed.
 Dean
 “Allas, What Schul We Freris Do” in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 “Freers, Freers, Wo Ye Be” in *Medieval English Political Writings*, ed. Dean
 Hanna, “School and Scorn”
 Piers Plowman, ed. Pearsall, pp. 22–4 (“Friars”)
Dec 5 *PP*, passūs 12–14
 Clifton, “The Romance Convention of the Disguised Duel”
Dec 14 *Paper/portfolio due (15–25/10–15 pp.)

GRADING

- Discussion posts 15%
Oral presentation (to be scheduled), 5–15 min. + 1-page paper 15%
Paper/portfolio, 15–25/10–15 pp. 40%
Participation 10%
Topic study, 2–5 pp. 20%

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion posts, due Monday mornings, should reflect your initial reactions to the material from the first half of the semester. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. The topic study is an introductory essay on a problem, topic, or research or teaching question arising from the course material. Or choose any one of the following three alternative options: (1) a book review: a descriptive and evaluative review of a recent (past 1–2 years) scholarly monograph in your field or related to the course material; (2) a public writing essay: a short article with no jargon, suitable for general-interest magazines like *The Atlantic*, drawing contemporary relevance out of the course material or your area of expertise; or (3) a small-scale digital project. The paper is an article-length research project that engages with prior scholarship and argues for its point of view in detail. Alternatively, you may complete a substantial digital project arising from the course material. Undergraduates in the course are permitted to write toward the lower end of the page range (15 pp.), while graduate candidates are expected to write longer (20–30 pp.). Lynch School students may instead complete a teaching portfolio and/or lesson plan relating to the course material. Each student will also prepare one “most important bit” oral presentation (to be scheduled) of 5–15 minutes, supported by a 1-page paper turned in the same day via email. In addition to the oral presentation, graduate candidates in the course may be invited to take primary responsibility for class discussion for up to an hour.

OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will explore many kinds of correspondence between English writing and politics before 1500: patronage, propaganda, friendship, exclusion, domination, inspiration, revolution. You will gain competence in reading all major (and some minor) genres and forms of early English

poetry, including the now-defunct alliterative meter. You will read most of the final authorial version of William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, the most persistently challenging premodern English poem, and almost all of John Gower's minor English and Latin works. Along the way, you will acquire reading proficiency in the Middle English language.

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading. Students should come to class prepared to actively discuss the language, rhetoric, and literary form of assigned primary texts and the arguments and ideas of assigned secondary criticism. 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/bc-web/academics/sites/university-catalog/policies-procedures.html#tab-academic_integrity_policies). 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.