

ENGL7742: Chaucer: Verse History
Eric Weiskott
Fall 2015, W 4:30-6:55
Office hours: T 2:00-3:00 (Stokes S407)

A practical and theoretical introduction to issues in medieval and modern poetics, focalized through Chaucer's verse forms. Emphasis on metrical form, the momentum of metrical traditions, the translation of prosody between languages, and the circulation of cultural stereotypes about meter. We ask how poetic traditions develop, why they endure or disappear, and how the practice and theory of meter changes over time.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

The Vision of Piers Plowman, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (2nd ed.) (London: Everyman, 1995)
The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson (3rd ed.) (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987)

SCHEDULE

Introduction to verse history and historical poetics

Sept 2 Jarvis, "For a Poetics of Verse"
Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, Introduction
(Sept 8) *Discussions post 1 due on Canvas
Sept 9 Taylor, *Hardy's Metres and Victorian Prosody*, Ch. 1
Weiskott, "Introduction" (excerpt) (not for circulation)
*Exercise: Scan "A Slumber Did my Spirit Seal" and "Jabberwocky" on For
Better for Verse (prosody.lib.virginia.edu)

The alliterative tradition in its eighth century

(Sept 14) *Discussions post 2 due on Canvas
Sept 16 Langland, *Piers Plowman*, ed. Schmidt, Prologue and Passūs 1-2
Eric's One-Page Guide to Middle English Alliterative Meter
Lawton, "The Unity of Middle English Alliterative Poetry"
Steiner, *Reading 'Piers Plowman'*, Introduction
*Exercise: Scan *Piers Plowman*, Prologue, ll. 1-19
(Sept 21) *Discussions post 3 due on Canvas
Sept 23 *St. Erkenwald*, ed. Burrow and Turville-Petre
Weiskott, "Phantom Syllables in the English Alliterative Tradition"

Chaucer's tetrameter and template meter

(Sept 28) *Discussions post 4 due on Canvas
Sept 30 Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*
Butterfield, "Chaucer's French Inheritance"
(Oct 5) *Discussions post 5 due on Canvas
Oct 7 Harley Lyric 4, "Alysoun" (from British Library MS Harley 2253)
(quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/HarLyr/1:4?rgn=div1;view=fulltext)
Harley Lyric 30, "The Man in the Moon" (from British Library MS Harley 2253)
(quod.lib.umich.edu/c/cme/HarLyr/1:29?rgn=div1;view=fulltext)
Butterfield, "The Construction of Textual Form"

Cable, "Foreign Influence, Native Continuation, and Metrical Typology"
*Exercise: Scan Harley Lyric 4, "Alysoun"

Chaucer's pentameter, tail rhyme, and prose

- (Oct 13) *Discussions post 6 due on Canvas
Oct 14 Chaucer, *General Prologue* I 1-34
Chaucer, *The Cook's Prologue and Tale*
Riverside Chaucer, pp. xlii-xlv (paperback xxxviii-xli) (*Versification* only)
Cole, "Chaucer's Metrical Landscape"
Duffell, "'The Craft So Long to Lerne'"
*Exercise: Scan *Cook's Tale*
Oct 21 Chaucer, *Introduction to the Man of Law's Tale* (II 1-98 only)
Chaucer, *The Prioress's Prologue and Tale*
Chaucer, *The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas* (through VII 966)
Chaucer, *Parson's Prologue*
Brantley, "Reading the Forms of *Sir Thopas*"
Pearsall, "Chaucer's Meter"
*Topic study due (2-5 pp.)

Chaucer's pentameter in the fifteenth century

- Nov 4 Hoccleve, *Regiment of Princes*, ll. 1-112 and 4978-5019
(d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/blyth-hoccleve-regiment-of-princes)
Myklebust, "Misreading English Meter," Ch. 1
Nov 11 Lydgate, *Siege of Thebes*, Prologue (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/edwards-lydgate-siege-of-thebes-prologue)
Duffell, "Lydgate's Metrical Inventiveness and his Debt to Chaucer"
Nolan, "Performing Lydgate's Broken-Backed Meter"
*Exercise: Scan *Siege of Thebes*, Prologue, ll. 1-65

(Chaucer's) pentameter in the sixteenth century

- Nov 18 Surrey, "The Soote Season"
Wyatt, "[They fle from me that sometyme did me seke]"
Wyatt, "[Who so list to hounte I know where is an hynde]"
Duffell, "The Italian Line in English after Chaucer"
*Exercise: Scan "[Who so list to hounte I know where is an hynde]"
Nov 24 [*Class meets at 10 Stone Ave.*]
Shakespeare, "Sonnet 17" and "Sonnet 59"
Gascoigne, *Certayne Notes*, pp. 291-300
Hardison, Jr., "Crosscurrents in English Sixteenth-Century Prosody"
Puttenham, *Arte of English Poesie*, pp. 48-51

Pentameter in the nineteenth century

- Dec 2 Shelley, "Ozymandias"
Hopkins, "[As Kingfishers Catch Fire, Dragonflies Draw Flame]"
(poetryfoundation.org/poem/173654)
Glaser, [Review of Martin, *Rise and Fall*]

Martin, *The Rise and Fall of Meter*, Introduction (reread)
*Exercise: Scan “Ozymandias” on For Better for Verse

Pentameter in the twentieth century

Dec 9 Brown, “When de Saints Go Ma’ching Home”
 Stevens, “The Idea of Order at Key West”
 Glaser, “Folk Iambics”
 Pound, “A Retrospect” (poetryfoundation.org/learning/essay/237886)
 Taylor, “The Apparitional Meters of Wallace Stevens”
 *Exercise: Scan “The Idea of Order,” ll. 1-14

Dec 16 *Paper due (15-25 pp.)

GRADING

Discussions posts 15%
Oral presentation (to be scheduled), 5-15 min. + handout and/or Page on Canvas 20%
Paper, 15-25 pp. 40%
Participation 10%
Topic study, 2-5 pp. 15%

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussions posts, due on Mondays (or Tuesday after a university holiday), 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. In each unit, you will explore meter either by using the interface on For Better For Verse or by writing out scansion by hand. The topic study is an introductory essay on a problem, topic, or research question relating to the course material. The paper is an article-length research project that engages with prior scholarship and argues for its point of view in detail. Each student will also prepare one oral presentation (to be scheduled) of 5-15 minutes, supported by a handout and/or a dedicated Page on Canvas.

OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will become familiar with a variety of forms of English meter over 600 years of literary history, including all of those used by Chaucer and some others not used by him. You will get a feel for scanning poems written in these meters. At the same time, you will gain both a practical and a historical understanding of the conceptual frameworks that commentators have used to theorize English prosody since the sixteenth century. Along the way, you will also 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 will not need laptops or smart phones.

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity (bc.edu/schools/cas/polisci/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 documented disability seeking reasonable 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.