

ENGL4424: Middle English Alliterative Poetry
Eric Weiskott
Spring 2016, T/R 10:30-11:45
Office hours: T 3:00-4:00 (Stokes S407)

In the fourteenth century, there were two ways of writing poetry in English. Chaucer's rhyming, syllable-counting iambic pentameter exemplifies one tradition. This course makes a survey of the other tradition, known today as alliterative poetry. Among the poems we will read are tales of King Arthur's court, the story of a resurrected corpse discovered in London, and a wild allegorical dream-vision starring such characters as Bribery and Truth. We ask how this poetry is formally organized, where this form of writing comes from, and why medieval English writers chose to use it. No prior knowledge of Middle English required.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

The Poems of the Pearl Manuscript, ed. Malcolm Andrew and Ronald Waldron (Exeter, 2007)
The Vision of Piers Plowman, ed. A. V. C. Schmidt (2nd ed.) (Everyman, 1995)

RECOMMENDED TEXTS (inexpensive paperbacks; also free online)

The Siege of Jerusalem, ed. Michael Livingston (Medieval Institute, 2004)
Wynnere and Wastoure and The Parlement of the Thre Ages, ed. Warren Ginsberg (Medieval Institute, 1997)

SCHEDULE

What is Middle English alliterative poetry?

Jan 19 *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ll. 1-36 (in *Poems*, ed. Andrew and Waldron)

Strange countries (romance)

Jan 21 *SGGK*, ll. 37-129
Pronunciation (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation)

Jan 26 *SGGK*, ll. 130-490
Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (excerpt)
*Discussions post 1 due on Canvas

Jan 28 *SGGK*, ll. 491-1125

Feb 2 *SGGK*, ll. 1126-1557
Meter (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/meter-guide)
Eric's One-Page Guide to Middle English Alliterative Meter
*Discussions post 2 due on Canvas
*Introductory meter assignment: scan *SGGK*, ll. 1126-49

Feb 4 *SGGK*, ll. 1558-1997

Feb 9 *SGGK*, ll. 1998-2530
*Annotation assignment *via* Genius (genius.com/search?q=gawain)

Feb 11 *St. Erkenwald*, ed. Burrow and Turville-Petre

Fair forms (exemplum)

Feb 16 *Siege of Jerusalem*, ll. 1-636
(d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/livingston-siege-of-jerusalem)

- *Discussions post 3 due on Canvas
 Feb 18 *Siege of Jerusalem*, ll. 637-1340
 Feb 23 *Patience* (in *Poems*, ed. Andrew and Waldron)
 Manuscripts (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/manuscript-guide)
 *Manuscript assignment: transcribe text from the images at the bottom of the page
 Feb 25 *Cleanness*, ll. 1-1048 (in *Poems*, ed. Andrew and Waldron)
 March 1 *Cleanness*, ll. 1049-1812
 Bahr, "Finding the Forms of *Cleanness*"
 March 3 *Midterm exam (in class)

The season of summer (dream vision)

- March 15 Kennedy, "A Bird in Bishopswood"
 *MediaKron workshop; form teams
 March 17 *The Parliament of the Three Ages*
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/ginsberg-parlement-of-the-thre-ages)
 March 22 *Winner and Waster*
 (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/ginsberg-wynnere-and-wastoure)
 Flood, "*Wynnere and Wastoure* and the Influence of Political Prophecy"

Blood shall run (political prophecy)

- March 29 *The Second Scottish Prophecy*, ed. Haferkorn
 Act Touching Prophecies
 (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/act-touching-prophecies)
 *MediaKron teams meet
 March 31 *The Vision of William Banastre*, ed. Weiskott
The Vision of William Banastre (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/poems)

Seek St. Truth (*Piers Plowman*)

- April 5 *Piers Plowman*, Prologue
 Steiner, *Reading "Piers Plowman"*, Introduction
 William Langland (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/william-langland)
 April 7 *PP*, Passus 1
 *Intermediate meter assignment: scan *PP* B.1.1-22
 April 12 *PP*, Passus 2
 *MediaKron poem introductions due
 April 14 *PP*, Passūs 3-4
 Paper planning exercise
 April 19 *PP*, Passus 5
 April 21 *PP*, Passus 6
 *Paper skeleton due (1 p.)
 April 26 *PP*, Passus 7
 April 28 Hanford and Steadman, "Death and Liffe"
 *Paper due (7-10 pp.)
 May 3 Crowley, "The Printer to the Reader"
 Pattenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, pp. 48-51
 Weiskott, "Prophetic *Piers Plowman*"

May 5 Review session
May 10 Final exam (9:00am)

GRADING

Discussions posts 10%
Annotation, manuscript, and meter assignments 10%
MediaKron poem introductions 10%
Midterm and final exams 20% each (40% total)
Paper, 7-10 pp. 20%
Participation 10%

OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will learn about the Middle English alliterative poetic corpus and its manuscript tradition. Special emphasis will be laid on the internal diversity of alliterative verse. Along the way, you will gain reading proficiency in the Middle English language and competence in scanning Middle English alliterative meter.

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussions posts should reflect your initial reactions to the material of the first few weeks. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. This course is accompanied by a website powered by MediaKron, a digital tool developed here at BC. In the second half of the semester, students will work in teams to research, design, and compose a short (*c.* 200-word) introduction to the MediaKron page for a course poem (or another Middle English alliterative poem). For the annotation assignment, you will create a username on Genius and contribute ten annotations to the Middle English text of *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. The paper is a research project that engages with prior scholarship and argues for its point of view in detail.

EXAMS

The midterm will consist of fifty multiple-choice questions, plus two short-answer passage identifications. The final will consist of a short essay on a previously unseen passage of Middle English alliterative verse. Make-up exams will only be given in extenuating circumstances and only if I am informed one week before the exam.

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading and/or film viewing. Students should come to class prepared to discuss course texts as literature and as language. 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.