

ENGL4424: Middle English Alliterative Poetry
Eric Weiskott
Teaching Assistant: Kelsi Champley
Spring 2018, T/R 1:30-2:45
Office hours: W 1:00-2:00 (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 (5th ed.) (Exeter, 2007)

Piers Plowman: A New Annotated Edition of the C-text, ed. Derek Pearsall (Exeter, 2008)

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

Strange countries (romance)

Jan 18 *SGGK*, ll. 37-129
Pronunciation (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation)

Jan 23 *SGGK*, ll. 130-490
Chism, *Alliterative Revivals* (excerpt: "Genre," "Poetic Voice")
*Discussion post 1 due on Canvas

Jan 25 *SGGK*, ll. 491-1125

Jan 30 *SGGK*, ll. 1126-1557
Meter (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/meter-guide)
Eric's One-Page Guide to Middle English Alliterative Meter
*Discussion post 2 due on Canvas

*Introductory meter assignment: scan *SGGK*, ll. 1126-49

Feb 1 *SGGK*, ll. 1558-1997

Feb 6 *SGGK*, ll. 1998-2530
*Annotation assignment *via* Genius (genius.com/search?q=gawain)

Feb 8 *St. Erkenwald*, ed. Burrow and Turville-Petre

Fair forms (exemplum)

- Feb 13 *Siege of Jerusalem*, ll. 1-636
(d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/livingston-siege-of-jerusalem)
*Discussion post 3 due on Canvas
- Feb 15 *Siege of Jerusalem*, ll. 637-1340
- Feb 20 *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 22 *Cleanness*, ll. 1-600 (in *Poems*, ed. Andrew and Waldron)
optional (not on the midterm): *Cleanness*, ll. 601-1048
- Feb 27 *Cleanness*, ll. 1049-1812
Bahr, “Finding the Forms of *Cleanness*”
- March 1 Midterm exam (in class)

The season of summer (dream vision)

- March 13 Kennedy, “A Bird in Bishopswood”
MediaKron workshop; form teams
- March 15 *The Parliament of the Three Ages*
(d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/ginsberg-parlement-of-the-thre-ages)
- March 20 *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 22 *The Second Scottish Prophecy*, ed. Haferkorn
Act Touching Prophecies
(mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/act-touching-prophecies)
MediaKron teams meet
- March 27 *The Vision of William Banastre*, ed. Weiskott
The Vision of William Banastre (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/poems) or
Weiskott, “Alliterative Meter after 1450” (you choose)

Seek St. Truth (*Piers Plowman*)

- April 3 Langland, *Piers Plowman*, Prologue
Steiner, *Reading “Piers Plowman”*, Introduction
William Langland (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/william-langland)
- April 5 *PP*, passūs 1-2
*Intermediate meter assignment: scan *PP* C.1.33-55
- April 10 *PP*, passus 3
Paper planning exercise
*MediaKron poem headnotes due
- April 12 *PP*, passūs 4-5
*Paper skeleton due (1 p.)
*Peer assessment forms due
- April 17 *PP*, passus 6
- April 19 *PP*, passūs 7-8

April 24 *PP C.9.1-10.55*
April 26 *Death and Liffe*, ed. Donatelli
*Paper due (7-10 pp.)

Retrospect

May 1 Chaucer, *The Parson's Prologue*
(sites.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/parspro-par.htm)
Pearl, ll. 1-120 (in *Poems*, ed. Andrew and Waldron)
Puttenham, *The Arte of English Poesie*, ch. 31
May 3 Review session
May 10 Final exam (12:30pm)

GRADING

Annotation assignment 10%
Discussion posts 10%
MediaKron poem headnotes 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 alliterative meter.

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion 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. 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*. In the second half of the semester, you will work in teams to research, design, and compose a short (*c.* 200-word) headnote to the MediaKron page for a course poem (or another Middle English alliterative poem). 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 about our course readings and key critical concepts from our discussions up to that point, plus two short-answer passage identifications. 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 analyses of previously unseen passages of Middle English alliterative verse.

PARTICIPATION

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