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 English 245 Survey of British Literature I
 Dr. G's Journal

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29 November 2007: Lesson 27

It's a wrap.

A journal is a lumpy thing. I hope my students have written one or two entries in their journals that they think well of, so that they will not forever after give up on journaling. Reading back through this journal of mine, I find most of my entries uninspiring, but here and there I have had an idea that is not too bad, something that perhaps with a little work could be turned into an interesting essay. More important, however good or bad the journal is, I realize that by writing it I have forced myself to pay deeper attention to the readings than otherwise I would have. My journey through the course is more memorable and meaningful to me because of journaling for an hour or so every lesson. Therefore the journaling time has been well spent, regardless of the quality of the journal writing. The product of the journal is what's in my mind as much as what's on paper.

What about summing up the course? What has this course been about? Is it worthwhile? Should anybody (outside of the British Isles) study the things we have been studying? The simple answer for me is that I enjoy these readings, and they have given me a meditation that has brought hours of happy escape from the fears and predicaments and too real conflicts of my everyday experience, so for me the course has been most worthwhile. But for most students, there are different considerations. The poor students! To them there is "work," there are "assignments," there are quizzes and exams, all of which tell them the course is not fun at all, that like other courses it is actually about how well they read and think and write, that it is about what grade they will receive and how that grade will influence their next steps toward degrees or jobs.

Teaching literature in college is quite problematic in this way. It ought to be pure enjoyment, for that is what most of the writers wanted us to take from their writing, but how can the course be pure enjoyment? I can't evaluate how much enjoyment students take from a course! I suppose the most I can hope is that students will have gained something from the course that will enable them in the future to enjoy literature or history or Brits themselves more fully.

Aside from the pleasure it can bring them, why should American students know anything about British literature, part one? The traditional answer is out of favor with the multiculturalists now, but at least it is an answer. Students should know Brit Lit through the 18th century because it is our own American literature from the pre-colonial and colonial periods. The American colonies were part of the British Empire from 1607 to 1783, so they existed under eight English kings, three queens, and two lords protector. The ideas of the revolution came largely from England, too. The Declaration of Independence, for instance, is modeled in part on English Declaration of Right, which was published to justify the Glorious Revolution of William and Mary in 1688. Our banking system stems from the Bank of England which was founded in 1694, and our insurance system stems from the Great Fire of London in 1666.

The ongoing connection of Britain and America is obvious in the two world wars of the 20th century and in the current Iraq war. There could not be an America today without Britain; there perhaps could not be a Britain any more without America. Much of the world looks at Britain and America and Australia as if it was one vast Anglo-Saxon empire, and there is a point to this view. The English speaking world is Anglo-Saxon not in a genetic sense but in culture as in language. Who are these people in terms of culture? There are attributes that go back to the Anglo-Saxons, many reflected even in *Beowulf*. Here are 10 that come to mind:

- they believe themselves to be a free people who must fight to retain their liberty
- they have a popular assembly that makes their laws and taxes (but there is often the threat of a king or dictator seizing control over the representatives)

- they have a judicial system that is based on common law, independent of the ruler's whims
- they are anti-tyrannical; their leaders are judged on the basis of how they increase or decrease the people's wealth; they believe in home rule and limited government, but it is often threatened and sometimes overwhelmed for a while; they frequently engage in revolutions and civil wars
- they are traders and merchants who export their way of life by founding colonies and accepting immigrants;
- they love gold, costly things, banqueting and story-telling
- they are highly competitive among themselves at the family and personal levels
- they are world leaders in discoveries, in voyaging, and in science
- they are formidable militarily and make use of advanced military technology and defense alliances; they say they depend for protection on the hero's sacrifice
- they are successful; this group has been winning against other nations and empires rather consistently since the 16th century

If this line of thinking is correct, if the Brits and Americans form a cultural continuum, then there is a special utility for Americans (and not just genetic Anglos) in the study of British culture. The documented images of us in the distant past can be a source of orientation and reflection from which we can draw inspiration and wisdom.

Should the course be reorganized more along lines of relevance to contemporary America? There are big plusses and big minuses here. The downside is that much of most famed literature (medieval romances, Chaucer, most of Shakespeare, Pope, etc.) is courtly or French or Latin in inspiration, rather than central to the Anglo-Saxon ways. So this is my major question for another semester, whether to keep a standard curriculum or whether to redesign for an American focus.

28 November 2007: Lesson 27

Pope's "Essay on Man" 1c 2664-2673. "Perspectives: Mind and God" 1c 2793-2825.

The 18th century may have been the age of irreverence, but it is remembered primarily today in American thought as the high point of the Enlightenment. With the glorious revolution in England, the civil strife that had been more or less continuous in England since 1300 and the overthrow of Richard II finally came to an end, the throne settled firmly in the Protestant camp and parliament in control of both the military and the legal system. The wars of religion and civil wars shifted offshore to wars of colonization: there was a new tolerance of faiths and a widespread search for a common "natural religion" based on reason or Deism or (as would call it today) creationism.

Pope's "Essay on Man" is typical of the natural religion movement in referring to no Christian doctrine but nonetheless retaining what we would call an "intelligent design" theory in which the whole universe is believed to be created and ruled by God, even though God does not let Man in on many of His secrets. According to Pope, what God created is a great chain of being, in which Man's place lies between the angels above (who know God) and the animals below (who know only nature). In this ordered "system," Man must know his place (his link in the chain) and stick to it, instead of aspiring to be an angel or "a God of God." There is a certain skepticism here: Pope says we can no more know what God is up to than the horse knows why he is ridden or the ox knows why he plows. But the skepticism does not extend to any doubt that there is a God or that the God is benign, or that the universe is designed for God's purpose and controlled by his providence. I call this "a certain skepticism" of Pope's because it is arrogance, not skepticism, to claim that humans due to their nature cannot know the purpose of the universe and should never claim to know it. There is an anti-scientific strain here, as in the snipe at Robert Hooke that Man was not given microscopic eyes because "Man is not a fly" (l. 193-194). If we violate the natural order and step out of our place, Pope infers not only that we will be unhappy but that the whole universe then will be thrown into chaos:

And if each system in gradation roll,
Alike essential to th' amazing Whole,
The least confusion but in one, not all

That system only, but the Whole must fall.
 Let earth unbalanced from her orbit fly,
 Planets and stars run lawless thro' the sky;
 Let ruling angels from their spheres be hurl'd,
 Being on being wreck'd, and world on world;
 Heav'n's whole foundations to their centre nod,
 And Nature tremble to the throne of God!
 All this dread order break--for whom? for thee?
 Vile worm!--O madness! pride! impiety!
 "Essay on Man" VIII

"Everything in its place" is not a modern attitude, but it can be seen as the product of a hierarchical society in which all individuals are assigned roles, and those whose roles are lowly must be content with their lot because this is what God intended for them.

The section of our reader on "**Mind and God**" contains further examples of "natural religion" in Newton's letter to Bentley, in Addison's ode in the *Spectator* ("The spacious firmament on high") and most radically in Berkeley's idea that nature exists only as idea in the mind of God. That natural religion or the argument from design was a stimulant to science is seen in Newton, who worked so successfully on the laws of optics and motion, while under the belief that he was grappling with the thoughts and designs of God.

The selections from Locke and Hume provide insight into the skeptical tradition in the golden age of British philosophy. They are "age of irreverence" figures with enduring influence.

25 November 2007: Lesson 26

"Richard Brinsley Sheridan" and "School for Scandal" 1c 3001-3063

A ridiculous criticism of this classic play appears on the internet:

By current standards, the play appears artificial in the characters' speech, dress, and motivations. A comedy about manners is not as interesting to twentieth century audiences because manners and the rules of society are far more permissive and wide-ranging than they were in the 1700s.

(For the rest of this nonsensical review, enotes.com wants you to send money.) *School for Scandal* is a most modern play in dealing with scandal-mongering and public character assassination, which seems our chief form of entertainment these days. Although the gossip columns are not as prevalent as they used to be in our newspapers, one has only to turn on the television and watch some of the endless celebrity circus to understand that "the rules of society" are not at any more permissive today than they were in 1777. A public figure is fair game for the gossips now as in the 18th century. A person in the public eye is not entitled to defend his reputation by suing for libel or defamation. Smears of character are no less malicious, damaging and hurtful than ever. They are published more widely. Question: how are celebrities coping?

Sheridan was a lawyer who became a member of parliament within a few years after writing *School*. A champion of free speech rights, he was nonetheless interested in development of a law of defamation to protect character from scandal mongers. This interest is said to have arisen from his own experiences when he found himself written up disagreeably in the papers. Ironically, his celebrity status contributed to his success in the theater; he seems to have cultivated a persona as a dissolute high roller and heavy drinker, rather like his Charles. Lots of media stars have since followed this profile

How interesting that this play was the talk of London at the time of the American Revolution. I can't resist the analogy to the current media fascination with gossip during the Iraq War and meltdown of the polar icecaps. What is it that makes us so petty? Notice how contemporary are most of the targets of scandal: excessive

spending, excessive drinking, overweight, ridiculous clothing and makeup, advancing age, and most of all sexual disloyalty,

A school of psychology tells us that we conceive of ourselves by reflection, according to what others say about us: a child told he is bad will be bad, etc. Whether or not our characters are actually created by others as this theory says, our reputations certainly are not self-determined. Our best attempts to control them can fail. Joseph Surface is careful in cultivating his reputation, but not quite careful enough; he has so many lies running at the same time that "tis an unfair monopoly and never prospers" (3057). Charles Surface is not at all concerned to protect his reputation, which makes him an easy target for Scandal School, and yet he is the eventual winner because his honesty eventually shines through. This is the sentimental ending of the play: what's really in the heart is what counts; good intentions will prevail. Hazlitt pointed out this play's good feeling: it has "genial spirit of frankness and generosity about it, that relieves the heart as well as clears the lungs."

The crook has a special need to manage reputation. Hypocrisy, deceit, in Joseph's case "moral sentiment" are masks that hide the devious character. Beware those who adopt the conventional fashions; they may be hiding unpleasant and unconventional truths in themselves. The nonconformist is less likely to be a hypocrite (though there are fashions of nonconformity to be wary of). Embrace Charles, not Joseph.

18 November 2007: Lesson 24

"Alexander Pope" 1c 2599- 2601 and "The Rape of the Lock" 2631-2652.

In becoming the foremost poet of his time, Alexander Pope overcame horrendous obstacles of social prejudice, crippling disease, and cruel critical slander. He is generally recognized as the foremost neoclassicist in British literary tradition—he is certainly the most prolific and successful of the imitators of the Greek and Roman classics—and yet it was all self-taught. Quite apart from his literary output, the man is a lesson in determination and the overcoming of obstacles.

"The Rape of the Lock" is a foremost example in English of the mock-heroic, the presentation of a trivial or comic subject using the techniques of the grand epic tradition. Much as the humor in Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" depends on the contrast between the lowly subject matter and literary conventions of high chivalric romance, almost everything in Pope's poem has its effect as an echo of the grand poetry of Homer, Virgil, Shakespeare or Milton. The "machinery" of the ethereal Sylphs and devilish Gnomes, for instance, is an imitation of the Homeric gods and the Miltonic angels with more than a hint of Shakespearian fairy poetry from *A Midsummer Nights Dream* and *The Tempest*. You can say there is nothing original in Pope's work, other than the application of the great masters' literary devices to contemporary subject matters which, at first, appear to have nothing at all in common with the old subjects, but it is this application of the classic to the banal and seemingly unremarkable present of Arabella Fermor and company that is the top level of the "wit" or ingenious cleverness of the poem.

The interplay of high and low reaches down into the language of the poem as well. A good example occurs as the clueless Sylph Ariel considers the variety of evils that perhaps may befall Belinda:

This Day, black Omens threat the brightest Fair
That e'er deserv'd a watchful Spirit's Care;
Some dire Disaster, or by Force, or Slight,
But what, or where, the Fates have wrapt in Night.
Whether the Nymph shall break *Diana's* Law,
Or some frail *China* Jar receive a Flaw,
Or stain her Honor, or her new Brocade,
Forget her Pray'rs, or miss a Masquerade,
Or lose her Heart, or Necklace, at a Ball;
Or whether Heav'n has doom'd that *Shock* must fall.

The opposition of the virgin and unbroken china, honor and brocade, prayers and masquerade, heart and necklace bring foolish Ariel from the grand tradition to sweat the small stuff of precious interest to frivolous Belinda. Somewhat daringly, Pope extends similar treatment to the powers of Britain in the famous passage on Hampton Court:

CLOSE by those Meads for ever crown'd with Flow'rs,
 Where *Thames* with Pride surveys his rising Tow'rs,
 There stands a Structure of Majestick Frame,
 Which from the neighb'ring *Hampton* takes its Name.
 Here *Britain's* Statesmen oft the Fall foredoom
 Of Foreign Tyrants, and of Nymphs at home;
 Here Thou, great *Anna!* whom three Realms obey,
 Dost sometimes Counsel take--and sometimes *Tea*.

British statesmen seem equally interested in tyrants and nymphs, the queen in advice and tea.

What would the ancient masters think of our world today? How would they present it, if they somehow could speak again? In "The Rape of the Lock" Pope suggests the heroic voice can still be used to describe the unheroic world of his day, but the effect is a joke. Materialistic concerns are replacing the ideals of the high cultural past. It is in this past, reflected in the great books, where Pope is at home. Literature is his solace.

16 November 2007: Lesson 23

"Jonathan Swift" 1c 2498-2500. "Lady's Dressing Room" 2507-2512. "Gulliver" 2531-2587.

Gulliver Book 4, chapter 12 contains one of the best-ever satiric descriptions of European colonialism

a crew of pirates are driven by a storm they know not whither; at length a boy discovers land from the topmast; they go on shore to rob and plunder, they see a harmless people, are entertained with kindness; they give the country a new name; they take formal possession of it for their king; they set up a rotten plank, or a stone, for a memorial; they murder two or three dozen of the natives, bring away a couple more, by force, for a sample; return home, and get their pardon. Here commences a new dominion acquired with a title by *divine right*. Ships are sent with the first opportunity; the natives driven out or destroyed; their princes tortured to discover their gold; a free license given to all acts of inhumanity and lust, the earth reeking with the blood of its inhabitants: and this execrable crew of butchers, employed in so pious an expedition, is a modern colony, sent to convert and civilize an idolatrous and barbarous people!

But this paragraph is immediately followed up by another in praise of British colonialism (playing on the traditional distinction that British buccaneers like Raleigh drew between British and Spanish):

But this description, I confess, does by no means affect the British nation, who may be an example to the whole world for their wisdom, care, and justice in planting colonies; their liberal endowments for the advancement of religion and learning; their choice of devout and able pastors to propagate Christianity; their caution in stocking their provinces with people of sober lives and conversations from this the mother kingdom; their strict regard to the distribution of justice, in supplying the civil administration through all their colonies with officers of the greatest abilities, utter strangers to corruption; and, to crown all, by sending the most vigilant and virtuous governors, who have no other views than the happiness of the people over whom they preside, and the honor of the king their master.

Is the narrator saying the thing which is not? Is he saying it in both passages? If he is saying it only one of them, which one is it? As an Irishman, albeit an Anglo-Irishman working for the Church of England, Swift knew all about colonialist programs and their effects, but Gulliver is not Swift, nor is Gulliver a more or less normative fictional persona like Bickerstaff or Mr. Spectator in Addison and Steele. In Gulliver, as in Hythlodæus in More's *Utopia*, we have an unreliable narrator whose statements carry some authority but can be disowned by the author. It is the voice of a Yahoo that has somehow come by a small endowment of rationality and enough linguistic skill to imitate a Houyhnhnm. To us Yahoos, this voice sounds less godlike than horselike; it is as laughable or pathetic as a madman's. (That Gulliver has the fool's license of Feste, see "*Gulliver's Travels and Its Time*" 2587-2591).

Gulliver's 4th voyage manages to make us wonder about our species in the context of other species which, in terms of morality (interaction), can be better or worse than we are. In the comic view, we have no greater potential than our kind or our creaturehood allows. We are an animal that happens to have come by a bit of reason (we today would call it mind), an adaptation that compensates for our physical weakness and permits us to be more malicious in pursuing our selfish desires than other brutes. This is a near-Darwinian perspective on human nature. The creation is far from perfect.

12 November 2007: Lesson 23

"Reading Papers" 1C 2453-2498

"The man who reads nothing at all is better educated than the man who reads nothing but newspapers" (Thomas Jefferson). The coming of the papers was not greeted with universal enthusiasm. For the most part, the papers enmeshed their readers in banal trivia, silly amusements, distorted political propaganda, celebrity gossip and ludicrous fashion. They are with the novel and the science journal the signature literary creations of the Age of Irreverence.

How quickly all the major forms of journalism came into being! In today's readings, we see the origins of the government press release in the *Mercurius Publicus* (how on the anniversary of the regicide everyone was praying for the king) and the *London Gazette* (how during the great fire of London all of the citizens were praying for the king), the use of associated press in *the Daily Courant*, the opinion magazine in Defoe's *Review of the State of the British Nation*, the opposition press in *The Craftsman*, the correspondent system and advice column in the *Athenian Mercury*, the advertising system in all of them, and the media personality in the *The Tattler* and *The Spectator* and *The Female Spectator*. All of the major features of modern journalism seem to have been invented by the first half of the 18th century.

The Spectator seems to have been the most popular of the early papers, with Addison claiming 60,000 readers in London and Westminster (2472). Even though it is large, the circulation was very local, featuring local hangouts, coffeehouses, gamerooms, teahouses, chocolate houses and theaters, local customs and institutions with which the readers themselves were intimately familiar.

The Spectator is gossip but it pretends to be something more. In this publication Addison and Steele formed the first great media personality, a fictitious and anonymous Mr. Spectator who filters all events through what he thinks as he sits writing each day in the reflective solitude of his apartment. By his own account Mr. Spectator is witty but moral, his chief aim being to recover his readers "from that desperate state of vice and folly into which the age has fallen" (2472). He wishes to impart to women "beauties of the mind" (2473). This is a philosophical quest in the tradition of Socrates (2472), designed to lead to self-knowledge (2473). The discipline depends on detachment from the world, the ability to stand apart in order to become a spectator more than a participant in the theater of the world (2473).

The retiring and philosophic Mr. Spectator seems an odd media personality by today's standards, and no doubt it was intended at first tongue-in-cheek. Nevertheless, if Mr. Spectator was only a joke, he would not have caught on as well as he did. Addison and Steele in fact stumbled on to a curious fact about journalism, that the reporter is far more important than the events reported on, that the customers want someone to

believe in, someone they can rely on to provide them what they need to know. This is a quite absurd feature of human nature, that we should look to others to tell us what to think. No doubt this trait evolved through tens of thousands of years in which it was critical for survival to be able to distinguish a true story from a false one, a distinction necessarily based on the assumed "character" of the story-teller since no actual evidence was available to make a correct assessment. The ability of a story-teller to dissemble cleverly was much more valuable than the truthfulness of his tale. Think of popular media opinion makers today, and notice that little has changed.

In the early newspapers as in the early novels developing later, persona is the story. There is no question about objectivity and fairness in reporting. There isn't any.

7 November 2007: Lesson 22

"Aphra Behn" 2267-2269. "Oroonoko" 1C 2278-2321 .

Well, finally a female writer! It's been a long time since Marie de France! Interestingly, it is in the courtly circles where the women writers seem to congregate. There are relatively few among the clergy or the middle class, though we have the examples of Marjorie Kempe and Julian of Norwich in the Middle Ages.

One of things I like to do with a longer piece of writing is to outline it, so that the overall plan or structure of the work can become clearer to me. The outline then serve me as a map by which I can find what I am looking for, when I go back to the piece of writing again. Here for *Oroonoko* I've come up with a kind of five-act structure that Mrs. Behn may have been conscious of, as she was primarily a dramatist..

2280. Indians of English Surinam described. Unfallen state of Adam and Eve.

2281. Negros.

2282. Oroonoko described, Prince of Koromantyn (modern Ghana).

2283. Imoinda described. Black Venus, daughter of general who died for O.

2285. Old King's (grandfather's) infatuation with Imoinda sets plot in motion.

2292. King's sale of Imoinda because she is unclean, having slept with O.

2296. Deceitful capture of Oroonoko and nobles by English slaver captain.

2298. O arrives in Surinam, named "Caesar," property of Trrfry

2301. O learns that Imoinda is there plantation as "Clemene."

2302. Behn's acquaintance with O + I, hunting and fishing. 2308 Visit Indian camp.

2311. O leads slave escape.

2314. Byan captures runaways. 2315 O whipped.

2317. O resolves to kill Byam and Imoinda. Kills Imoinda and goes nuts.

2319. O captured. 2320. O executed to be made an example to other slaves,

One theme of interest in *Oroonoko* is speech itself. How much is Behn allowed to say? Apparently she had kept the story to herself throughout her life. She will not comment on the captain who captured Oroonoko deceitfully (2296). She does not name the great Lord who was governor (2299). She does not at first mention that O and I are tattooed (2303). She tells Caesar all she can to ease to his fears that he will never be freed (2303), but does she suspect he is right, that nobody has any intention of freeing him? (She disappears in freight when the slaves have escaped 2315.) How complicit she is in the slaving is one of the issues generally debated about this piece, but what is she permitted to say? She is only a servant of the King, and he

tolerates and profits from slavery. Is she is some lesser sense also a slave working for others who forbid her to speak her mind and who are not much concerned about her welfare?

If Behn is reserved about politics, she minces no words about religion. Although she tries to convert Imoinda to Christianity, Oroonoko will have none of it, and Behn clearly appears to approve what he says, that Christians are liars, that the religion can be judged by the actions of its followers. The language theme in *Oroonoko* centers in the opposition of the blacks and Indians who say what they mean, and the whites who use language for strategic purposes that the natives never suspect until the whites have devastated them. To what extent is Behn also a white in this sense, a strategic user of language?

5 November 2007: Lesson 21

“Restoration and 18th Century” 1C 2121-2144. "Royal Society" 1C 2174-2193.

Well, it's Gunpowder Treason night, Guy Fawkes Day, commemorating when James 1 and Parliament were almost blown up by Catholic conspirators. I suspect that all good English students are burning something right now. The tradition remains in much of UK to celebrate by lighting bonfires on this night, and this may be the tradition that led Americas to the night of fireworks for the successful conspiracy on July 4th.

Remember, remember the Fifth of November,

The Gunpowder Treason and Plot,

I know of no reason

Why Gunpowder Treason

Should ever be forgot.

Guy Fawkes, Guy Fawkes, t'was his intent

To blow up King and Parli'ment.

Three-score barrels of powder below

To prove old England's overthrow;

By God's providence he was catch'd

With a dark lantern and burning match.

Holloa boys, holloa boys, let the bells ring.

Holloa boys, holloa boys, God save the King!

With the Restoration came Catholic monarchs pretending to be Anglican. Their failure led to more Jacobite conspiracies in the 18th century, and Napoleon's designs on England in the 19th century. Whether there would be a French King in the British Isles was thus in question for more than 800 years after William the Conqueror .

I like the introduction to volume 1C of the Longman Anthology (unlike the introductions to 1a and 1b). It is a clear account of the royals from Charles II to George III, with lots of good observations about social and artistic developments. One of the interesting concepts in the intro is that religious wars abated with the rise of party politics. Tory and Whig were at the outset to some extent associated with Catholic and Protestant factions respectively, but the parties were not controlled by churches or clerics, and their aim was simply

political, so their arguments needed to have a semblance of rationality, and religious affiliation therefore became irrelevant. I had never before considered that party politics might serve this function, to prevent civil wars. I thought parties were invented for talk shows or their 18th century equivalents. Can they be seen as entertainment networks?

The materialism of the 18th century is very striking. People are measured in terms of money to an extent not seen in previous periods. Riches are being created through trade. The government waffles between Walpole's isolationism and Pitt's global adventurism. Pitt's view wins out because empire is seen as necessary to protect trade routes. From this imperialism might have been predicted moneyed interests eventually waging wars around oil fields. How much has changed since the 18th century?

How interesting it is that science gets started at Oxford as a club. It is not a degree program, not even a course, but a club. (Remember Oxford from the Miller's Tale?) What kind of respect for knowledge is implied in this? Is it today worth studying anything about Britain prior to the Restoration, other than maybe Francis Bacon? What can be learned from people who have no science?

30 October 2007: Lesson 20

"The Civil War" 1B 1768-1795 "Milton" 1B 1796-1798 "Aeropagitica" 1B 1814-1823.

With "The Civil War" (or is it "The Wars of the three Kingdoms?") we find ourselves in strangely familiar territory, a place that looks every bit as violent as the modern world. The mess starts with the title: you call it "the Civil War" if you are an English parliamentarian or anyone who believes that the British Isles are a unitary place that should be ruled from London, but you will favor "The Wars of the Three Kingdoms" if you are a multiculturalist or member of a minority. Here we see the theme of empire versus colonies which would later play out in the American Revolution and other tumultuous events in the history of the British Empire and even in struggles today between Angle-American globalization and local autonomy in the "third world." If one wonders whether militant Islam will ever be reconciled with western secularism, so antagonistic these opposing forces seem, there is perhaps some comfort in the fact that the wars of the 17th century were justified and maintained on religious grounds, and yet nearly all of the sectarian violence dissipated in the Enlightenment of the 18th century.

"Eikon Basilike." The conflicts between Charles I and parliament lays the groundwork for the separation of powers in the US Constitution, as Madison and other American Revolutionaries were as familiar with these conflicts as we today are familiar with the American Civil War. Perhaps the main difference is that the "English Civil War has no winner: no side was able to eradicate the others, so an accommodation or compromise had to be reached in the end. Charles' abrasive presumption that he was an absolute monarch appointed by God comes across very clearly in "Eikon Basilike." Later royalists used the book as if it was prophecy "God in his time," Charles predicts, "will let these [who seized control of parliament] see that those [acts of seizure] were no fit means to be used for attaining His ends." Both sides were claimed to do God's will—with general agreement that God's will would be made known eventually when one side was the winner.

Aside from his arrogance, Charles' biggest problem was loss of control of the army. The money to pay the troops came from parliament, and when Charles disbanded parliament, the troops were disaffected and they ultimately formed a military coup that "purged" Parliament of royalists, so Charles was left to depend on mercenary forces, mainly in Scotland and Ireland. He bought them with promises that further alienated the English and made the court seem to be part of a foreign power. The British monarchy never really recovered from this. The royals were seen as foreigners in England, as had not been the case with the monarchs since the days of the Normans.

If we had to choose one individual for the title of “the first modern Briton,” the best choice might be the blind poet John Milton, for he recognized that individual liberty was to be protected against church and king and whoever would “persuade men into slavery.” His language anticipates Jefferson: “the people, finding no other remedy, should stand up like men and demand their rights and liberties” (**Eikonoklastes** 1776 [symbolic page numbering?]). The exercise of authority over conscience is not to be tolerated. A key to Milton’s mindset is no doubt the fact that his own family suffered deep religious divides: a Catholic grandfather versus a Protestant father, a brother and a wife who were royalists, etc.

It may be odd in American eyes to see Puritanism as the usher of modernity and the causes of liberty, but the Puritanism for which Milton generally speaks is a minority, not a political majority. The “Puritanical” dark side of intolerance appears when absolute or majority power is attained, whether by a militant Cromwell or any other having the reigns of power. Thus the Puritans repeated the history of earlier Christian groups

Milton was not alone in his revolutionary views. “Freethinkers” appear in the literature of this period, especially in the annals of persecutions. One such is the story of Alexander Agnew who believed in bread alone.

28 October 2007: Lesson 18-19

“William Shakespeare” and “Twelfth Night” 1b 1273-1276, 1288-1345

Our textbook editors make a lot of questionable statements in their introductions, but one of the most dubious appears in the head note to Shakespeare on page 1273: “Shakespeare (unlike [poet Ben] Jonson) was not classically inclined.” The fact is that Shakespeare was so steeped in the classics that he was able to make more creative use of them than Jonson or other writers who imitated classical authors in more obvious ways. Despite all of the scholarly work that has been done on Shakespeare’s sources, so clever are Shakespeare’s borrowings from the classics and allusions to the classics that some of them still go unrecognized.

The case in point is Shakespeare’s borrowings from Homer. Around the turn of the seventeenth century, Shakespeare wrote a trilogy of plays based on Homer and Homeric traditions of romance and tragedy that had survived into the Middle Ages: *Twelfth Night*, *Hamlet* and *Troilus and Cressida*. Only the last of these plays takes its content from the medieval “Matter of Troy.” The other two, arguable Shakespeare’s greatest comedy and greatest tragedy, depend on Homer’s *Odyssey* for their plot structures. The return of the father spirit to whip up the son’s revenge against his mother’s suitors is rather directly transposed into *Hamlet*. In *Twelfth Night* the borrowing is more allusive: a drowning at sea, a landing at Illyria (as Ithaca was known in Shakespeare’s time), the donning of a disguise to enter a household of suitors, the finding of the lady of the house true in her love for the traveler and disdainful of rivals. Obviously Viola/Sebastian are not Odysseus, and the contrast makes for some of the wit and charm of the comedy. Caesario’s duel with Aguecheek is mock heroic in just this way: the reminiscence of Odysseus’ battle for Penelope points up the incongruity of the comic duel.

John Chapman was working on his translations of Homer from as early as 1598, and this work certainly must have been known to Shakespeare, as Chapman was Shakespeare’s own rival. It is ironic at best that today Chapman is thought of as a classicist, while Shakespeare is viewed as “not classically inclined.” Shakespeare was no less attracted to Homer than Chapman, and some of his most creative work is Homeric.

27 October 2007: Lesson 18-19

“William Shakespeare” and “Twelfth Night” 1b 1273-1276, 1288-1345

After reading *Twelfth Night*, I took a walk through Towne Center Mall in Boca Raton, home of every form of enchantment in clothing, jewelry, accessories, scents: Saks, Nordstrom, Macy's, Bloomingdale's Neiman Marcus, Gap, Old Navy, LaCoste, Bath and Body Works and many many more. It seemed to me that the thousands shipwrecked there were looking to disguise themselves and so become attractive to the local nobility. Obviously, they were not seeking yellow stockings or garters to cross, but by appearing like mannequins in the windows and posters on the walls, they believed that they would gain love and riches. AT first I thought their belief was ridiculous, but then it occurred to me that it must be true. If it were not true, there would be no such mall, except in stories.

The Shakespeare mall is rather different from Towne Center, antithetical I would say. It's not a place where you go to get your costume for the big ball. In fact, it's not a place you go to at all, but one that comes to you, or rather you simply find yourself there by weird accident, as if in some dream. Nightmare rather. You are not there for any reason, certainly not to buy anything, you have no clue whatsoever why you are there, when quite suddenly you see the perfect stranger you know to be the love of your life. You are so hopelessly and excruciatingly attracted that you even get up the courage to say so, but that's when you discover your beloved to be utterly indifferent and soon annoyed by your poetic raptures. Refusing to take no for an answer, you make a dramatic spectacle of yourself. You adore one who could give a damn that you grovel in tears on the floor, tear your clothes, threaten suicide, and in general make yourself appear as pathetic and melancholy as your acting abilities allow. The sad histrionics go on each day and every hour for a long time: neither you nor the beloved finding the mall exit or any other way to end the cruelty to you and disgust to the beloved. Then one day, just as you are about to explode, you realize that there has been a third person in the mall, one who has been there unnoticed for a long time, one as attracted to you as you are attracted to your beloved. You are not charmed by this suitor right away, but because of your own suffering your pity is awakened, and gradually your rejection softens as you recognize this poor sad person's quite decent qualities. The arguments you have made to your beloved come back to haunt you, and gradually they talk you into accepting your suitor. That's when you find the exit, and leave the mall together. You have learned to accept your fortune, your stars, your fate.

Shakespeare's subject is always emotion, the feelings that happen to us and take charge of our actions and attitude, and drive us crazy unless and until we come to terms. The subject in the comedies is always love, and in the early comedies through *Twelfth Night* it is always romantic love. This emotion is, in Shakespeare, something that happens without willing it to happen. Often it happens contrary to the will and over the objections of reason. The person out of control, infected with this passion, takes himself or herself quite as seriously as one who is tossed in a storm and utterly hopeless, but seen objectively from the outside, this same lover is absurd, an object of fun to others, no different from pretentious Malvolio as seen by the knights in the bushes.

Comedy encourages detachment from our emotions. In the most enlightening kind of comedy, we laugh and then come to recognize that we are laughing at qualities that we ourselves possess, qualities that make us ridiculous to others. It is in this sense that comedy teaches acting to more than the players.

22 October 2007: Lesson 17

"Sir Walter Raleigh" and "England in the New World" 1b 1230-1272

Today's episode might be called Pirates in the Garden of Eden. The most fascinating of the great discoveries of the early modern period was certainly the New World. Early accounts illuminate not only of the new territories and their inhabitants but also of the discoverers themselves.

Perhaps most revealing is Raleigh whose Guiana venture was 400 miles on land and river from Trinidad. The dedicatory epistle emphasizes the country as having more gold than Peru or the Indies (1241), yet the preface “to the reader” suggests that Raleigh does not know much about gold or is lying about it: he speaks of “mother of gold,” a white stone from which gold is engendered, as prevalent in Guiana (1243), and he labors to explain why he did not bring gold with him from the voyage. Raleigh’s account of the Amazon River dwellers as Amazons similarly strains credibility and similarly seems designed to appeal to the queen, as does Raleigh’s assertion that the natives in the Orinoco region are warlike enemies of the Spanish (1246). Raleigh’s duplicity toward the King of Aramaia seems obvious, as he tells the old man Queen Elizabeth is interested in “charity to all oppressed nations” (1247). Yet he protests that he would not “abuse Her Highness either with fables or imaginations” (1249). There are many hundreds of thousands of pounds yearly that can be extracted as tribute from Guiana (1250). Raleigh’s writing seems to reflect why he would be mistrusted. Raleigh’s dates 1554-1618. 1592 falling out with Elizabeth; 1595-6 Guiana; 1603-1616 in tower; final voyage 1615-6?

Barlow’s account of Virginia (1584), published in 1600 in Hakluyt’s collection, emphasizes the natural resources and gentle nature of the natives. The people are living in a classical golden age worshipping an idol like Apollo.

Hariot’s account of Virginia (1586) is published by Hakluyt in 1598. It gives greater analysis of the natives, including something of their stories. Their creator god Mantoac establishes the heavenly bodies (conceived of as gods) and creates the first woman. The human race is born from the woman’s union with a lesser god. England technological instruments are seen as works of gods. The English are seen as immortals bringing punishments in the form of plagues and diseases. Hariot himself oddly moralizes that those who became sick were those who resisted the English—as if Hariot believes that in some sense god is at work protecting him.

Drayton’s ode to the Virginia voyage 1606 continues the image of Virginia as paradise, with abundant crops procured without labor (without the curse of Adam). The colonists will be “the happy’st men” because they will be in an Eden.

John Smith’s *True Relation* (1608, revised 1623) gives the fullest account of the Jamestown colony. Smith’s idea that the colonists became slaves to gold offsets Raleigh’s account glamorizing the adventure. Smith’s Powhatan is the first memorable portrait in English of a Native American: an old warrior whose people have been obliterated three times by wars, an intelligent negotiator who seeks the disarmament of the English. The Powhatans massacred the colonists in 1622, and Smith revised his account to capitalize on the event.

John Donne’s Sermon Preached to the Honorable Company of the Virginia Plantation (1622) moralizes that the colonies must be part of Christ’s kingdom, not devoted to commerce and material gain.

16 October 2007: Lesson 16

“The Rise of Print Culture” 1b 1079-1114

- 1439. Gutenberg’s printing machine
- 1474. The first English book, Caxton’s *Recoyell of the Histories of Troye*
- 1482-85. Ranulf Higden’s *Polychronicon*
- 1526. Tyndale’s Bible (banned by Catholic Henry VIII)
- 1539. Coverdale’s Bible. Great Bible in 1540.
- 1557. Formation of the Stationers’ Company (licensed publishers)

- 1559. Act of Supremacy requires books licensed by Canterbury or York.
- 1560. Geneva Bible. Bishop's Bible 1568.
- 1579. John Stubbs punished for criticizing the queen in print
- 1586. Star Chamber undertakes to authorize books
- 1590. Trial of Martin Marprelate (further trial 1593)
- 1590S. Thomas Nashe satirical pamphlets.
- 1597. Bacon's Essays (1st ed)
- 1604. Florio's translation of Montaigne
- 1611. King James Bible.
- 1620. Bacon, Novum Organum
- 1621. Burton, Anatomy of Melancholy
- 1637. William Prynne punished for criticizing Laud in print
- 1678. Bunyan's Pilgrim's Progress

What is it about a book or machined product that's different from a manuscript or handmade product? Mass production for one thing: the machined product is made in quantity and it is affordable. Literacy spreads as a result of the machine. Books multiply and take on specialized characters.

In print, copies are the same or almost the same. It becomes harder to deceive the public about the date of a work or its content, so that fraudulent publications are reduced.

Censorship becomes more or less ineffective as the censors can't keep up with the machine.

Higden, Polychronicon: history books are for young men (to give vicarious experience) and for private men (to make them public leaders).

Martin Marprelate: use of pseudonym to escape censor.

Thomas Nashe: the printer publishes an unfinished copy; a rival knocks off the work with "aprt two." A lying pamphlet is falsely ascribed to him. False interpretations are made of his work.

Montaigne: reads for pleasure, does not study. Lots of varying books are available to him. Writes essays or "trials" of his ideas. Books allow self-expression to flourish. Books can be about the authors.

Whitney: emblem book, poem as speaking picture

Bacon's essay "Of Truth" wants to know why lies are loved when "belief in truth . . . is the sovereign good of human nature." This great question is essayed or tried out from several points of view: philosophical, theological and civil, with no clear resolution.

Bacon's "of superstition" brilliantly contrasts atheism and superstition. "Of studies" prescribes different types of books as remedies for various kinds of mental defects, as math for inattention, law cases for inability to compare, scholastic philosophy for inability to make distinctions.

King James Bible: how disappointed I am to learn that this is one of the poorest interpretations (from a scholarly point of view) available today. Its phraseology and cadences are rooted in my brain from too many church services and private readings so that it, and no other, is "the Bible."

Burton's Anatomy: illustrates the profuse Senecan style of 17th century prose.

12 October 2007: Lesson 15

“Sir Philip Sidney” and *The Apology for Poetry*

We reach the halfway mark in our course, and a chance for reflection on what we are doing. Why are we reading what Sidney calls “poetry”? Haven’t we heard that poetry is a waste of time, a pack of lies, an inducement to perform the bad behavior that it so often depicts? From Socrates to the Taliban, a wide range of critics have leveled these charges against literature. Sidney had heard these charges, too, and he tries to refute them in the kernel of *The Apology*. (See pages 1015-1021.)

Are we wasting our time? Having argued that poetry teaches moral behavior, Sidney puts no stock in the argument that poetry is a waste of time. He tells at length why it is relatively a better use of time to read poetry than history (where the lessons are often bad ones, e.g., that one should act like Caesar and lead a revolt) and better than philosophy (where the lessons are obscure or academic). I am not sure this argument works: I am not sure that poetry is better than history or astronomy or a dozen other subjects. These disciplines don’t all do the same thing, so their comparison is not necessarily material. I would take a different approach from Sidney’s and say that that poetry is a waste of time, and that it is needful for human beings to waste time, in order to relax and recoup from stress. Sidney’s Puritan audience was not especially given to the pursuits of pleasure, so it is not surprising that Sidney omits direct discussion of this point.

Pleasure and instruction have been said to be the twin aims of literature ever since the Roman poet Horace: in *Ars Poetica* he says that poetry delights or instructs—or it both delights and instructs. This formulation suggests some key points for personal review

How is literature instructing me? How can I improve the instruction that it gives?

And/or

How is literature giving me pleasure? How can I increase the pleasure that it gives?

What about poetry and lying? Is British literature—or other literature for that matter—a pack of lies? Sidney takes the view that poetry does not affirm anything, so it cannot lie. Here he seems to be on to something. From the view of literature as a source of pleasure, we could say it is quite important that literature does lie in an obvious way, so that nobody mistakes it for reality: the reader can relax knowing that no real harm is being done, no matter how violent or tragic the tale. When literature is mistaken for truth, we might indeed object to it, but this is unlikely to occur with most of Brit Lit. I don’t expect that any of us will set off in a boat looking for Hythlodæus’ Utopia. We will leave that to the History Channel.

The serious objection to literature in the early modern period, and in all periods, is that it models bad behavior, such as lust and violence. From the Middle Ages strict censorship was imposed on all literature in Britain, mostly from fear of political and religious subversion, but when the Puritans eventually came to power in the seventeenth century, they had a much broader view of the harms that literature may cause. Some of them did their best to destroy all art, and they succeeded in some cases. They were not able to stop the presses, but the theaters were an easier target, so the theaters were closed. Sidney’s treatise did not succeed in stopping them.

In our own time, censorship is quite impractical, but the entertainment industry nonetheless continues to worry about it. It typically ducks the morals charge by arguing that its products are meant only as entertainment, not to be taken seriously, not to be tried at home.

I should agree with this defense, given my view that literature is chiefly for relaxation. However, this defense has little validity, as we know from that fact that ads and celebrities are so influential. Poetry works. It infects its audiences, some of who are so attracted by it that they imitate it, They buy the toys. They wear the clothes. They adopt the talk.

Sidney in fact is right that poetry instructs. The question is whether its instructions are good or bad. Here Sidney falls back on the idea that poetry can be abused, but that this does not mean that all poetry is bad. The printing press, he thinks, has exaggerated the problem of the unworthy poet: “base men with servile wits undertake it [poetry], who think it enough if they can be rewarded of the printer.” This suggests a further key point for personal reflection:

Who are the abusers of literature? What literature is to be avoided?
What shall I read?

10 October 2007: Lesson 14

“Sir Thomas More” and Utopia 1B 714-785

Utopia (1516) was sent to Erasmus to publish in Holland, thereby avoiding censorship in England. Its writing in Latin may have muted any impression that it calls for popular revolution or political change—an English translation did not appear until after Henry’s death, when More’s reputation first began to be rehabilitated. The free discussion of social issues at Cardinal Morton’s household (723-731) takes place about a decade before the coronation of Henry VIII, just before 1500 when More is merely a page. In all of these ways and more *Utopia* carefully nurtures the impression that it is an academic pipedream or philosophical fantasy or tidbit of obscure history rather than a political commentary, but these distancing devices also suggests how dangerous it must have been at this time to engage in critical discussion of social issues. The courts from the courtier perspective had room only for yes men—the novel implication being that subjects can be better informed than rulers, and rulers disregard subjects’ informed advice to the peril of everybody. Here is a first seed of the plant that would eventually overgrow the monarchy. The social model was still the warrior band – Beowulf and his loyal followers – but the problems were not to be solved in the old way.

In book 1, the fictional narrator Hythlodæus attacks capital punishment for theft as an ineffective deterrent, as a cause of murders, and as a failure to address the root causes of thievery, especially the creation of paupers by war, eviction of tenants, and price inflation. These complaints sound curiously modern, especially the notion that food prices depend on supply and demand, and that producers will conspire to inflate prices through monopolies. The depiction of England as a nation of vagrants lorded over by the super-rich strikes a vein in social criticism that will not become dominant in English letters until the 19th and 20th centuries.

Utopia convinces there are timeless human blunders, repeated without end. I could not read the following passage about the conquerors of a foreign kingdom without thinking about Britain and America now in Iraq:

After they had secured it [the foreign kingdom] they saw they would have no less trouble in keeping it than they had suffered in obtaining it. The seeds of rebellion from within or of invasion from without were always springing up in the people so acquired. They realized they would have to fight constantly for them or against them and to keep an army in continual readiness. In the meantime they were being plundered, their money was being taken out of the country, they were shedding their blood for the little glory of someone else, peace was no more secure than before, their morals at home were being corrupted by war . . . and the laws were held in contempt, all because the king, being distracted by the charge of two kingdoms, could not properly attend to either. (734)

Hythlodæus’ analysis is essentially economic, surprising in an age long before the discipline of economics had been invented. He believes that people will be peaceful and law abiding if they are prosperous and happy (736), an idea that would be echoed by Alexis de Tocqueville in his

prescient remarks on young capitalist America in the 1830's. He thinks the government treasury by law should be limited in amount to no more than is reasonably necessary to put down rebellion and resist foreign invasions (736-7) so there is no temptation "to encroach on the possessions of others." But then comes the anti-capitalist formulation that private property is inconsistent with justice and prosperity because "the worst citizens" in capitalism accumulate most of the wealth while the bulk of the people are "downright wretched" (739). Hythlodæus' conclusion that private property must be abolished because the "only road to the general welfare lies in the maintenance of equality in all respects" (739) provokes More the character to disagree: "How can there be sufficient supply of goods when each withdraws himself from the labor of production?" (740) Hythlodæus attempts to provide this demonstration with his description of Utopia, but we have seen a bigger demonstration in the varieties of socialism and communism of the last 100 years.

What would life be like if . . .

4 October 2007: Lesson 13

"Early Modern Period" 1B 667-687 "Government and Self Government" 1B 790-814

Sixteenth-century England is an object lesson in church and state relations, as the Reformation and Counter-Reformation led to martyrdoms, rebellions, repression, and international turmoil.

1509 Henry VIII becomes king.

1516. Martin Luther calls for church reform

1528. Patrick Hamilton, The first Protestant martyr in Scotland, is burned

1533. Henry VIII divorces Catherine of Aragon and marries Ann Boleyn because Catherine has not produced a male heir. (Catherine leaves a daughter Mary, who eventually will become queen.) Due to Henry's problems securing papal approval for his divorce, Act in Restraint of Appeals separates the Church of England from Rome

1534 Act of Supremacy makes the monarch (Henry VIII) head of the Church of England.

1535. Thomas More is executed because he failed to support the Act of Succession which made Anne Boleyn's daughter Elizabeth heir to the English throne. Anne is executed in 1536, and the king marries Jane Seymour eleven days later. They have a son Edward.

1536-1540. Henry VIII confiscates monastery property and sells it to local gentry. Some 10,000 monks and nuns are made homeless.

1547. Henry VIII dies and is succeeded by 9 year-old Edward.

1553. Edward dies naming a cousin Lady Jane Gray as his successor, in place of his sisters Mary and Elizabeth. Lady Jane's reign lasts only a few days when Catherine of Aragon's daughter Mary is proclaimed queen. Mary's mission is to suppress Protestantism and return the Church of England to control of the Pope. Executions earn her the nickname among Protestants "Bloody Mary."

1554. Mary marries King Philip of Spain, despite widespread public opposition in England.

1558. Mary dies, and Elizabeth is crowned. In 1559, The Act of Uniformity outlaws the Catholic mass and other forms of service. In 1560, the Pope declared Elizabeth a heretic. Underground Catholic clergy are persecuted through the 1580s.

1587. Elizabeth orders the execution of her cousin Mary Stuart (Mary Queen of Scots), who had been the focus of various Catholic plots.

1588. The Spanish armada attempts an invasion of England, to restore Catholic rule. Drake defeats the armada and ends the Spanish threats to England, but England and Spain remain at war throughout Elizabeth's reign .

1603. The Nine Years War results in Ireland acknowledging Elizabeth as queen.

1603. Elizabeth dies and is succeeded by her cousin, James Stewart, a/k/a King James IV of Scotland and King James I of England. England, Scotland and Ireland are thus united by common rule. James ends the war with Spain in 1604. English Catholics attempt to assassinate James but are foiled in the Gunpowder Plot of 1605.

1611. The King James version of the Bible is published.

1620. The Mayflower sails to Plymouth.

1625. James dies and is succeeded by his son, Charles I. In 1627, Charles unsuccessfully attempts to invade France to protect the Protestants there.

1629. Puritan and other Protestant forces gain control of Parliament, and protest James' policies in religion and other matters. James dissolves the Parliament and attempts to rule as an absolute monarch.

1642. Civil War breaks out between the Royalist and Parliamentary forces.

1649. The Royalists' defeat leads to the execution of Charles I. Oliver Cromwell puts down revolts in Ireland.

1660. Following Cromwell's rule of "Lord Protector," the monarchy is restored with Charles II succeeding his father. The powers of the king are largely ceremonial, as they are today.

1 October 2007: Lesson 12

Vernacular Religion and Margery Kempe 1A 559-591

The religious drama that we have sampled from the mystery and morality plays represents a systematic attempt to render a non-English religion as English, and our readings today illustrate other aspects of the same development.

Probably the most important change for literacy was the development of Protestantism which, in England, was the work of John Wyclif more than any other reformer. His central idea was a literary one, that the Bible should be accessible to all, in English, and all should have the right to understand it and debate it. The church should not have any right to control its distribution or interpretation. Toward this criticism, the church took a defensive posture by condemning Wyclif in 1381, and it enlisted state support for burning heretics in general, and the great age of religious persecution was begun, led by the church-supported Lancastrian kings Henry IV, V and VI. Margery Kempe's autobiography illustrates both the rising nonconformism of Christians and the increasing intolerance of the church and state.

Margery makes an interesting contrast to the Wife of Bath (as I have argued, the personification of mother nature). Margery is a woman of the world who pretends insofar as possible not to be.

She has abandoned her business ventures and her marriage bed and ordinary clothes, choosing to dress in pure white, as if a virgin, the bride only of Jesus. The autobiography raises questions for modern readers as to Margery's mental stability. Her frequent and exaggerated tears and joys seem to indicate a bipolar condition; her visions and auditory hallucinations of Jesus may represent longed-for breaks with reality. Reading her between the lines, she apparently is traveling the countryside, presenting herself as a kind of saint, and taking up collections from the citizenry, in exchange for her promises to use her direct line to Jesus to pray for them. The archbishop is amazed at how much money she has taken from men (Chapter 54, page 591). In her own way, she is as original and domineering as Chaucer's Alison.

If this view is right, Margery is in business competition with the friars and clergy, which is at the root of her arrests, imprisonments, and theological examination by public inquisition. Should the church have looked aside when its business was being undercut by persons claiming a direct relationship with Jesus? The dissenters of the day are fairly uniform of their condemnation of the materialism of the church (see the Wyclifite sermon on the avarice of bad shepherds 562-564, see also Mirk's *Festial* on the value of poverty 564-566). Wyclif wanted to confiscate the church's accumulated wealth for the state, an idea that Henry VIII would implement with the closing of the monasteries and formation of the Church of England. We can see the whole struggle of reformation and counter-reformation in economic terms. Who would get God's money?

Another complaint of the dissenters is that the church is teaching that it is enough for believers to know how to say the Lord's Prayer and the Nicene Creed—believers don't need to understand what they are saying, don't need to know the language of the liturgy (567). Recall John in the Miller's tale espousing this line, when he thinks that Nicholas has gone mad by spying into God's secrets (ll 346-348, page 366). It is enough to believe, he says, in one of Chaucer's most ironic lines. We are on the brink of a major revolution in learning, as the old rote memorization methods of previous ages come under attack from people who want to read and think for themselves.

27 September 2007: Lesson 11

***Mankind* 1A 631-657**

If the morality plays seem somewhat modern, it may be because they have influenced Bertolt Brecht, T.S. Eliot and many other modern playwrights. The moralities are not dramatized sermons but psychodramas, revealing the mental conflicts that people in general have and showing how these conflicts are best resolved. In the 15th century morality *Mankind*, the instruction is to think of the soul, and not the body, and believe that God's mercy is alive and well, so that the soul can endure, despite life's hardships and temptations.

The teaching about God's mercy may be premodern, but the dramatic form is surprisingly advanced. The theater of the morality tradition is the mind. The plot in *Mankind* is the brain's vacillation between good thoughts (Mercy) and bad thoughts (Newguise, Nowadays, Nought, Mischief). Even the devil Titivillus is internalized, as he enters and charms Mankind while he is asleep. In modern psychological terms, Titivillus is a personification of the unconscious animal brain that all of us humans have lurking underneath the conscious cortex—the uniquely human brain that goes to sleep and loses control at night. This animal brain prompts us precisely to care for the body: it wants us eating in the tavern and having frequent sex without marriage or other restrictions. On the other hand, the human brain that controls these animal urgings thinks of the long-range consequences of behavior and advises that we check the animal urgings that will be dangerous to our life in the longterm.

An interesting study could be made, comparing and contrasting the two brains, Mercy's scenes versus the vices' scenes. One point of contrast is language: Mercy's language tends to be Latinate, while the vices predominantly use primitive Anglo-Saxon words, obscenity and pig Latin.

Mercy delivers speeches for contemplation, but the vices are full of raucous action. Certainly Mercy is sad while the vices are merry.

Of special interest theatrically is the interaction of morality play characters with the audience. In *Mankind*, Mercy preaches directly to the audience in his prologue and epilogue, and he is frank in his speech ("Mercy is my name that mourneth for your offence," l. 18), but on numerous other occasions in the play various characters step forward to make a direct address, which other characters in the play do not hear. An example is the character Mankind's introduction. He tells the audience who he is ("My name is mankind. I have my composition/ Of a body and soul, of condition contrary," l. 194-195), but Mercy, who is standing nearby, does not hear this introduction, and so, when the dramatic action resumes, Mankind must introduce himself to Mercy ("I am unsteadfast in living, my name is Mankind" (l. 214). The play is interrelated with the real world, not set apart from it. The actors have the power to go back and forth between.

The ability of characters to step out from their roles and engage the audience directly is a convention that carries down from the moralities through the ages of British theater. For example, in Shakespeare, characters may address the audience directly in speeches or brief "asides" (as we will see in the Fool Feste in *Twelfth Night*) or they may speak to themselves in soliloquies, some of which are not overheard (e.g., Viola in *Twelfth Night*) and some of which are overheard (Malvolio in *Twelfth Night*). This gives the dramatist great flexibility in revealing inner thoughts or in commenting on the action of the play.

24 September 2007: Lesson 10

"Medieval Biblical Drama" 1A 531-559

The obvious observation about "**The Second Play of the Shepherds**" is how little of it is Biblical. There is almost as much of the Noah story in "The Millers Tale" as there is of the nativity in the Wakefield play. It is only lines 637-754 that have a basis in Luke (the only one of the four gospels that has a nativity story), and even those lines are highly imaginative, as the playwright invents dialogue with Mary, the shepherds' addresses to the infant, and the gift-giving. At the reformation, when the Tudors shut down the old religious drama in England, the protestant criticism in part was that this theater of mystery plays did not properly represent the Bible. (The Puritans would later shut down all theater, but that story is still a couple hundred years ahead in 1642.)

The criticism of the mysteries is unfair from a literary perspective. The Wakefield Master is not asking what happened historically when Jesus was born, but what might happen today, in rural Wakefield, if Jesus was born in this place and time. He assumes that the shepherds, despite their problems, would come to be filled with joy and thanksgiving. They would come to recognize the infant as the savior who has been predicted by the prophet Isaiah, just as easily as they see through the deception and recognize that Mak and Gill's baby is their missing sheep.

The difficulty in the recognition of Christ is the central problem in Christianity. (Why was the Messiah not recognized during his lifetime on earth?) The problem is a little too serious to address directly in a play, but the Wakefield Master finds a way to investigate it by comic analogy in the Mak episodes. There the shepherds are initially asleep on the job, not realizing except through some dream intimations that their sheep is missing. Once the shepherds have awakened and realize the loss, Mak and Gill attempt to fool them with the pretense that the sheep is a human baby. Once the shepherds recognize that the baby is not human, Mak and Gill resort to a final desperate strategy of trying to convince them that the baby has been bewitched by an elf. The implication is that there are several obstacles to recognizing Christ: first, not realizing that he is missing, not understanding that a savior is predicted by prophecy; second, imagining that he is merely human; third, believing that he belongs to some supernatural agency lower than God. To

the shepherds who see through all of these disguises, angels appear in their sleep and convey them to the birth of Christ.

Mak is the driver of the play's theatricality. He is the deceiver, whether we take him allegorically for the devil or symbolically for the folly or blindness of the shepherds themselves. He puts on the airs of a yeoman (landowner with political connections), of a sophisticated Londoner (with a "southern tooth"), of a hypocritically pious shepherd, of a poor simple husband with starving family, and of a welcoming host—all disguises that the audience is allowed to see through but that the shepherds must figure out for themselves. Mak is thus the creator of the illusion within the play. His various guises and tricks put him at the head of a long British tradition of comedy featuring knaves or wits tricking gulls or fools. We will later see examples in Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* and Sheridan's *School for Scandal*.

The York crucifixion is conceptually similar to the Wakefield nativity. What if Jesus was being crucified today in York? Who would do the dirty work? How would they bring themselves to such inhumanity? The main answer is that these are knights carrying out orders of their lords and leaders. They regard their victim as a "traitor," who deserves to die the cruelest death especially as he claims to be the king. It is possible that this play refers subtly to the persecution of Yorkist claimants to the throne by their enemies of Lancaster (Henry IV, Henry V, or Henry VI).

20 September 2007: Lesson 9

"The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale" 1A 375-403

There was a big battle of the sexes in early European cultural history. The pre-Christian matriarchies did not surrender to the Christian patriarchies without a fight. And maybe they didn't surrender at all. It might be argued that western feminism, women's rights movements and the like are carry-overs of the ancient tradition of female power that just will not go away, no matter how strongly or how long it is attacked. In any case, medieval literature is filled with Guineveres, Morgan le Fays, Lady of the Lakes and other descendants of the Mother Earth goddesses of stone age Europe. This literature right into its finest expression in the Elizabethan period is filled with "courtly love" centered on the queen and her numerous male worshippers. The men come and go, but the queen never dies. (Sorry, no more puns, if I can help it!)

In general the romances are not self-conscious about the battle of the sexes. They simply present a Christian patriarchy overlaid over the top of an underlying pre-Christian matriarchal base. They do not work out the conflicts between the two strata. For example, dying Arthur is taken off in the lake by Morgan and other queens, but then he is also perhaps buried among the monks and hermits at Glastonbury chapel (288-289). Malory doesn't decide which story is right. The two endings exist side by side, as a single manuscript can have multiple writers who add new matters to the old.

In Chaucer, however, we not only have great romance ("The Knight's Tale," Troilus and Criseyde), and great parody of romance ("The Miller's Tale"), but self-conscious and innovative romance ("The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale"). The Wife's prologue reflects a catalogue of reading that Chaucer has done on the subject of marriage. To the Wife he assigns the holy sources: gospel stories of the wedding at Cana (and the reproof of the Samaritan widow), Paul's reluctant acceptance of marriage, the Genesis command to multiply, Jesus' multiplication of loaves, and the old testament polygamists. To the Wife's late husband Jankyn, Chaucer assigns anti-feminist non-Biblical sources against marriage. The marital strife of Alison and Jankyn thereby becomes a literary contest in which the male has the inferior authority. Like Mother Earth, Alison destroys her husband's texts and moves on.

As an earth goddess might, the Wife also argues from design that we are given sex organs, so they are to be used. She embraces marriage as the form in which she may exert her power over men. Like the lady of the lake, she takes men's treasures (in a sense she is the land) and buries their bodies too, only to turn to a new mate she has lined up each time before the funeral. Her husbands naturally are jealous and seek to property from her, and not to pay their "debt," but all in vain. The cleverness with which Chaucer embeds (sorry again) the great themes of Mother Earth in Dame Alison appears in the fact that so many readers (including professional critics and Chaucer scholars) miss the point altogether.

The Wife's Tale is set many hundreds of years back in the time of the elf queen who danced to make the earth fertile; these spirits were driven off, in the Wife's opinion, by Christian friars who now are the ruling spirits in the bushes and trees. In those days, when a knight committed rape, he was given over to the queen's judgment and forced to recognize the will of women to control their lives. The knight who would acknowledge this power would be transformed by love.

In Chaucer we are dealing with a whole new level of literary sophistication. He dazzles like Homer and Dante in the sheer number and variety of stories he knows, and the ability to inter-relate them. Like Shakespeare and Dickens, he has an amazing command of language that provides him with the ability to describe and mimic a variety of interesting characters. It may not have been difficult for him to put a romance in the mouth of a knight. To put it also into the mouth of a drunken miller and shrewish widow is another feat altogether! The English eccentric is being born.

19 September 2007: Lesson 8

Geoffrey Chaucer 1A 293-298 and Chaucer's "Miller's Tale" 1A 358-374

I got a break from writing for a few days due to hospitalization for kidney stones. Why would patient rooms in our local hospital have no internet connections but feature a prominent and loud TV that the controlling patient can torture his roommate with? As I tried to read Chaucer, my first roommate stuck into my eyes and ears 10 consecutive hours of NFL football and all of the commercials plus pregame and postgame jock talk. On this man's release, just as I thought I would gain the remote, I was transferred to a new room where my new buddy who was very deaf had me engage a steady stream of sentimental military soap operas and gross documentaries about violent animals.

The hardest adjustment I had to make to hospital life was giving up the TV remote to strangers whose sole interests lay in killing time. It did not occur to me that this situation was like in the Canterbury Tales, in which each pilgrim is forced to march for days at a time listening to strangers tell weird stories that put down their fellow travelers. Maybe it was the lack of rhyme on TV.

In any case, I wasn't getting very far with Chaucer during this imprisonment. I wanted to get down this idea about the Miller's Tale that occurred to me in the ER, but in my rush to the hospital I had brought nothing to write with. For at least two days I tried to think through the idea so that I would remember it later on, when I finally would win my release, but I just could not concentrate, and the original flash of insight that might have carried a journal entry or two slowly faded, so that now I scarcely remember anything at all about it. Maybe it was just a fantasy brought on by the morphine? Anyway, someday I will write a story in which a patient is wheeled room to room where he inane bits of different TV shows, and it will rhyme!

13 September 2007: Lesson 7

Caxton's Prologue and three episodes from *Morte Darthur* 1A 259-289.

Caxton's prologue (1485 AD) is presented by our editors in the original spelling. If you want to know why English spelling is harder than the spelling of almost any other language, this preface is a strong clue. Caxton and the other early printers established conventions of spelling that still remain today. What was phonetic English in their day is not phonetic today, but spelling has not kept pace with the changes. Caxton's English was evolved only slightly beyond Chaucer's Middle English, which students can hear on the course CD. (E.g., note how the silent E is not silent in Middle English.)

Caxton gives an early justification for fiction. It is **both moral and enjoyable**, he says (following the prescription of the Latin poet Horace). He claims that from his book "noble men may see and learn the noble acts of chivalry, the gentile and virtuous deeds that some knights used in those days by which they came to honor, and how those who were vicious were punished and often put to shame and rebuke" (261, spelling modernized). Caxton is interested in promoting acts of "courtesy, humanity, friendliness, hardiness, love," among others (261), possibly because the nation was just coming through the long period of civil war known as "The Wars of the Roses." We can question how well Malory's book accomplishes these idealistic aims. If the story has been moralized intentionally (as seems obvious), then we should not expect much historical accuracy.

Caxton also writes that Malory's work is an abridgment of much longer books in French. These books are enjoyable but of dubious historicity. His preface advises that his book "shall be pleasant to read in, but to give faith and belief that all is true that is contained herein, you are at your liberty" (261).

"The Miracle of Galahad" is an excerpt from Malory's story of the Holy Grail, the legend recently popularized by Dan Brown. The English legend in Malory has it that Joseph of Arimathea brought the cup of the Last Supper and the lance from the crucifixion to Britain soon after Jesus' death, and the church began in Britain with Joseph as the first bishop. Jesus and Joseph and the grail and lance appear to Galahad, Percival, and Bors; Bors returns Camelot (in Logres) with the story which then gets written in great books that are kept in libraries at Salisbury. (The final battle between Arthur and Mordred is later said to have occurred at Salisbury (283). This is south central England, old Saxon territory, a place where Britons and Saxons once fought.)

Note the cathedral web site (cathedral completed in 1258)
<http://www.salisburycathedral.org.uk/>

"The Poisoned Apple" is an excerpt in which Lancelot redeems Guinevere in trial by combat. She is innocent of poisoning Sir Mador de la Porte at a banquet. All in attendance at the banquet turn on her, and even Arthur will not defend her, as he must be her judge. A fire is prepared to burn her, if her champion loses the trial. In trial by combat, might makes right. Under these circumstances, a woman is certainly farthest ahead, if she can enlist the support of the physically strongest man around. Guinevere's problem is not that she is having sex with Lancelot, but that she becomes jealous of his philandering and tells him to go away.

Lancelot is French, and in Malory's French sources he is the real hero of the Arthurian matter. All of the problems in Arthur's kingdom are the result of Arthur and/or Guinevere and/or Gawain driving Lancelot out of their allegiance. Had Lancelot remained with Arthur, Arthur would never have lost his kingdom.

"The Day of Destiny" tells of the final battle between Mordred and Arthur. On the surface of the story, this is the most dysfunctional family since the Caesars of Rome. Malory has Mordred as the son of Arthur and Arthur's sister, Morgan. He has Gawain as the son of Morgan and King Lot of Orkney. Morgan gets around with the men. She is a prolific mother.

What's really happening? Here's the best guess. Morgan is the goddess of the pagan Britons. Men like Arthur and King Lot "marry" her in that they pledge their children to her service. When the Christians show up, and transform Arthur and the rest from pagan icons into Christian heroes, they do not understand the religious aspects of the story or else they do not want Christians to understand those religious aspects, so they make the stories out to be literal and gasty: for example, the Arthur and Morgan engaged in sexual taboos and begot a child who was an evil sinner, unwelcome by the church. The Brits do not let go of their heroes, even after the Christians hijack the literature and insert their "moral" values into the manuscripts.

Scholars have long recognized that there are interesting pagan details deeply embedded in Malory and his French sources. For instance, "Lancelot of the Lake" clearly refers to a lake of divination, where pagan priestesses made the dead appear in the water and communicate to the living. The lake is located between the world of the living and Avalon. Therefore, the dead are taken by female mourners out into the lake for burial. If Arthur's remains are to be found anywhere, they are at the bottom of a lake, perhaps in the south or west of England. Excaliber is there, too. You will know that you are in the right place if Gawain's ghost arises from the waters and tells you when you are going to die.

One of the interesting features, if this interpretation is right, is that Malory has no clue of the real or original meaning of the story he is telling. He is merely a prisoner, passing the time in a pleasant fantasy, and Caxton is merely a publisher trying to sell books to the upper class. Here we have a lesson in the transformational nature of literature, how an old story is made over by new writers and new technology.

10 September 2007: Lesson 6

Sir Gawain and the Green Knight 1A 200-258.

"Sir Gawain and the Green Knight" is one of the most elegant of the English romances, a jewel so highly regarded by literary people that it is found not only in all substantial anthologies of historical British literature but also in many collections of world literature. And in Tolkien's faithful translation, too, it is a real fantasy adventure that attracts and transports us to a mysterious but charming and ultimately friendly world of "once upon a time." Some of the wonder of this poem is that it allows us to imagine ourselves participating a New Years amusement for a refined courtly readership.

Unlike Marie's artful brevity and suggestive understatement, the Gawain poet provides very elaborate descriptions in which the details provide a strong illusion of settings, moods, and interactions between characters. We never quite lose sight of the fact that Marie is recounting a tale that she has heard, but in "Gawain" we lose awareness of the poet and the fact that we are simply reading or hearing a story. This is a more typically novelistic technique, transitioning further away from oral story-telling toward modern reader fiction where the writer or presenter is more or less invisible so that the illusion seems stronger.

For modern writers, "Gawain" is still a clinic on how to construct a plot and control the pace of action. There is suspense in earlier writing, notably in the monster episodes of *Beowulf*, but the Gawain poet really understands how to milk a story so that readers take interest in the beginning, and so that their curiosity builds with mysterious intrigue during middle of the tale, until it is finally resolved in a dramatic and surprising climax at the end. This poet is maybe the first to use an investigator-hero through whose limited point of view much of action appears, and it is what Gawain doesn't know that makes for reader interest. Gawain's quest can be seen as a prototype of adventure-mystery. What our editors call "Part 4" (lines 1999-2532), the trip to the Green Chapel, is especially suspenseful in its slow-moving presentation of bleak landscape and ominous details.

The archaic language in “Gawain,” especially the use of an old-fashioned, outdated alliterative line taken from ancient oral poetry, helps the fantasy by marking the world of the poem as remote from the everyday world of its readers’ experience. It gives an old English flavor but is not old English. The poem clearly illustrates the general ideas we have established that imaginative literature in general is a tension reliever, and that literary romance in particular can be suitable for papering over unpleasant realities, such as usurpation of the British kingdom by Arthur’s father or marauding and pillage by Arthur himself.

If we are looking for realism, the image of Arthur in “Gawain” is a real howler, a boy king who more than anything else loved to have a good time and give rich gifts to always-loyal heroes. This is a king that every baron may wish he could have but that never existed. At the time that “Gawain” was written, the boy king Richard II (ruled 1377-1399) was under the control of powerful barons, some of whom eventually would depose and murder him, putting an end to long line of Plantagenet kings who had succeeded William of Normandy, igniting the long civil war that historians call the “Wars of the Roses.” We do not know the identity of the author, or the exact circumstances, under which “Gawain” was written, but it is a good guess that it presents an idealized version of what Richard’s court should be. See the picture of poor young Richard in our textbook; it’s color plate 8.

Gawain is tested. If he is an old fashioned pillager who will not respect the social order in foreign territories, he will be destroyed. It isn’t sex that will keep him alive. If he follows his code of courtly conduct, showing good manners towards lords and ladies abroad, they will welcome him just as much as he is welcomed at home in Arthur’s court. This is the Christian golden rule applied to knighthood. We are entering the age of diplomacy where it is more important to speak well than to fight well. This seems to me a little more civilized than our own time.

Note the emphasis on manners in English literature from *Beowulf* to “Gawain” to Shakespeare’s *Twelfth Night* to the age of manners in the 17th and 18th century. This is a highly moralistic literature, attempting to develop and glorify socially useful manners—and to make fun of or criticize various forms of anti-social behavior.

Note “Gawain” and *Twelfth Night* as holiday entertainments: a promising essay topic.

6 September 2007: Lesson 5

Arthurian myth 1A 163-180; Marie de France 1A 181-200.

Was there ever an Arthur? It is not a simple question, and the answers are all theoretical. Geoffrey of Monmouth has long been suspected of having made up Arthur from his own fertile imagination, notwithstanding his statement that his *History of the Kings of Britain* (cir. 1138) is only a translation of an ancient British book that was given to him by Walter, a colleague at Oxford University.

Whether Geoffrey personally invented them or whether they were invented earlier by Walter or somebody else, fictitious elements are prominent in Geoffrey’s stories. The magic-assisted birth of Arthur, for instance, cannot have happened as Geoffrey relates it. In those days, Merlin’s wisdom notwithstanding, there were no drugs that could change Briton King Uther Pendragon into a look-alike act-alike Gorlois, Duke of Cornwall. Only Merlin can make such things happen, and only in literature.

Take away Merlin, however, and Geoffrey’s story begins to make some sense. What really happened? In the real world, Arthur was not born from the union of beautiful Ygerna and a drug-doped Uther. If Ygerna was Arthur’s mother, then surely her husband Gorlois must have been the

father. These Cornish parents evidently had no close kinship to the royal British line of Uther, so the probable succession of the crown from Uther must have been by force and not by right. Merlin drugs us as readers so that Cornish Arthur appears to us to be Uther's legitimate Briton heir. When the spell wears off, we can see Geoffrey's story as an ordinary history in which a duke steals a kingdom, and then the theft needs to be covered up so that people think that the thief was wronged, and the thief's heir deserves to rule the kingdom.

Gorlois must have defeated Uther, and so (in a manner of speaking) transformed himself into Uther as king of the Britons. The kingdom overthrown in these western wars then was ripe for Germanic invasion into Scotland and the St Albans region (north of London), just as Geoffrey's history relates. Gorlois was poisoned by these Saxons (not without cause), and so poor Arthur succeeded to this unstable crown at a young age. He found himself dependent on gift-giving to powerful lords as his only means of shoring up political and military support for the new dynasty. That is why historical Arthur attacked the Saxons, not to save Briton like Winston Churchill facing down Hitler, not even to avenge his father's poisoning, but in order gain treasure with which he could pay his British backers. (As Geoffrey puts it, Arthur "made up his mind to harry the Saxons, so that with their wealth he might reward the retainers who served his own household' [175]). Arthur was successful for a time in taking Saxon riches, and that is why his exploits were not described in any detail in any Anglo-Saxon sources or in Latin writing like Bede's history. They did not mention him because he did exist—they seldom wrote about matters actually existing.

I am suggesting that historical Arthur was anything but the king of courtesy and refinement who appears in the later medieval courtly romances. His pillaging was so distasteful that those who profited by it needed to color it with fantasy to make it palatable. They glorified the plundering, and told themselves over and over again in Arthurian legends ad nauseam that these acts were truly noble and Christian and the best there ever was. As Lenin said, a lie told often enough becomes the truth. Bad people don't imagine themselves as such. They cover their deeds with absurd claims to embody the highest ideals. They belittle or dehumanize their enemies. They come to believe their own rhetoric.

Literature is often used for political propaganda. The founding of kingdoms, empires, churches and other social institutions can be presented in fantastic tales in which the group participants are asked to believe, to testify to their irrational loyalty. Geoffrey's use of Virgil's *Aeneid* to tell of the founding of Britain shows that he was very conversant with this political use of pseudo-history. (The *Aeneid* being the Roman story justifying the Roman destruction of Greece and the eastern Hellenistic kingdoms).

Much as the Romans accepted Aeneas as their founding father, the British people have recognized Arthur as their great champion or archetype. What does the widespread acceptance of this myth actually tell us about Britain? Is this a nation of thieves, who derive their support by stealing from neighbors, even while they cultivate pleasant lies about their civility and good manners? Or is this just an American take on the divorced mother country? (Several of Dr. G's ancestors fought for the right side in the Revolution.)

2 September 2007: Lesson 4

Irish narrative and verse; Ethnic and religious encounters of the Saxons 1A 96-135.

The Longman anthology disappoints in providing so little from the early Irish—and this Irish presentation is confusingly mixed in with Saxon materials, between *Beowulf* and the miscellany perspectives section called "Ethnic and religious encounters" which shows how the Angles and Saxons from Scandinavia were assimilated by the British and then conquered by the Normans. Students outside the UK must find this confusing.

If I were editing the textbook, it would begin with classical and Roman materials; next would come the British-Irish-Celtic materials; then would come *Beowulf* and the Saxons. A bit of timeline should help clarify what should come where in the opening part of the anthology.

Prehistoric

500,000 BC. Neanderthal type individuals are hunter-gatherers in Wales.
 26,000 BC. "Red Lady of Paviland" (homo sapiens species) hunts mammoths in Wales.
 26,000 – 12,000 BC. Ice Age Britain is uninhabited, covered with ice; English channel is dry
 12,000 BC. Oldest skeletons of the modern human type date from this period
 9,000 BC. Cheddar Men living in a cave in Wales with DNA matching modern Britons
 6,000 BC. Farming is introduced in Britain

Roman

1,000 BC? Legendary Trojan Brutus founds Britain by taking land from giants
 450 BC. Ancient Greeks trade with Britain, known as "Tin Islands."
 55-54 BC. Julius Caesar invades "Britannia" from Gaul, fights Britons
 43 AD Full-scale Roman invasion launched by Claudius and Vespasian leads to occupation.
 410 AD. Romans pull out of Britain, leaving a power vacuum

Anglo-Saxon

425? AD. British Vortigern hires Saxon mercenaries under Hengest, pays with land in Kent
 Hengist slaughters British princes at peace table; Britons flee to Wales
 After Vortigern come Uther Pendragon and Arthur as British Kings.
 This is the story of the coming of the Saxons according to Geoffrey of Monmouth.
 449 AD. Saxon invasions of British Isles begin, according to Bede's dating
 625 AD?. Sutton Hoo ship
 627 AD. Northumbrian King Edwin adopts Christianity and destroys the old idols
 731 AD Venerable Bede writes *The Ecclesiastical History of the English People*
 787 AD Viking invasions of the British Isles begin
 871 AD. Alfred becomes king of Wessex, attempts to unify English
 893 AD. Bishop Asser writes the Life of King Alfred
 890-1066 AD. The Anglo Saxon Chronicles are maintained.
 1066 AD. William of Normandy defeats Harold and the Saxons at Hastings.

Norman and Plantagenet

1138. Geoffrey of Monmouth writes *the History of the Kings of Britain*, introducing Arthur
 1278. Edward I "discovers" King Arthur's bones in Glastonbury
 1400. Death of Geoffrey Chaucer and King Richard II closes the Plantagenet period

1439. Johann Gutenberg invents moveable type, inaugurating the age of print

1 September 2007: Lesson 4

Irish narrative and verse; Ethnic and religious encounters of the Saxons 1A 96-135.

Although the literatures and languages of the Irish, Anglo-Saxons, Vikings, and Normans are all distinct, and there is a long history of warfare and hostility among these language groups, science has recently begun to show that the traditional histories of Britain are very wrong in their assertions about where the people of the isles originally came from, and how diverse they are. The popular belief is that Celts reside only or primarily on the "Celtic fringe" of Scotland, Ireland and Wales. Genetic research shows, however, that that the large majority of all Britons are Celts descended from Spanish tribes that began arriving after the Ice Age about 7,000 years ago. This

is described at length in Oxford geneticist Bryan Sykes' Saxons, Vikings and Celts: The Genetic Roots of Britain and Ireland (W.W. Norton 1006).

Sykes indicates that in England, about 64 per cent of people are descended from these Celts, outnumbering the descendants of Anglo-Saxons by about three to one. The proportion of Celts is a bit higher in Scotland, at 73 per cent. Wales is the most Celtic part of mainland Britain, with 83 per cent. There is even a Celtic majority in the outlying areas of Orkney and Shetland, where roughly 40 per cent of the population is of Viking ancestry.

"If one thinks that the English are genetically different from the Scots, Irish and Welsh, that's entirely wrong," Sykes says. "In the 19th century, the idea of Anglo-Saxon superiority was very widespread. At the moment, there is a resurgence of Celtic identity, which had been trampled on. It's very vibrant and obvious at the moment . . . Basically the cornerstone of Celtic identity is that they are not English. However, to try to base that, as some do, on an idea that is not far beneath the surface that Celtic countries are somehow descended from a race of Celts, which the English are not, is not right. We [Brits] are all descended from the same people. It should dispel any idea of trying to base what is a cultural identity on a genetic difference, because there really isn't one."

Sykes' study linked the male Y-chromosome to the birthplace of paternal grandfathers to establish a historic distribution pattern. It also checked the maternal lines via mitochondrial DNA. The female lines are very interesting, as 95% of all native Europeans belong to one of seven maternal clans. These seven Eves are calculated to have lived 10,000 to 45,000 years ago, the earliest and most prolific one in Greece.

30 August 2007: Lesson 2 & 3

***Beowulf* pages 1A 27-92. What does this old English poem have to do with string theory?**

A few days ago I was reading both *Beowulf* and a book purporting to contain a current scientific description of the universe. As I read these two books, they began to come together, and after I finished reading, I could hardly tell them apart.

In my journal I wrote that literature is like the string which in string theory connects our physical universe to a parallel one which surrounds us, but which we cannot see, that separate but overwhelming and inexplicable place said to contain "dark matter" and "dark energy." Literature takes us through its wormhole to a similarly invisible heaven, that fantasy-world of simulated dreams in which we can relax, rest, and finally perhaps get some real sleep. Literature thus meets an essential biological need that humans have, because of the anxiety that their foresight uniquely brings them, their certain knowledge that they are doomed. Adam and Eve were the first to realize this problem, so it seems appropriate that their first child was the forefather of earliest bards (see Genesis 4:21), even though apparently both Cain and his descendant Grendel (*Beowulf* lines 94-96) were insomniacs!

The biological function of literature is on display in *Beowulf*. The spell-songs of the scop at Heorot accompany the beer and the boasts as warriors try to stand down from the terrors of the day. As the defender of sleep, the conqueror of the night-stalking terror Grendel, Beowulf himself makes an ideal dream-hero. He will destroy the heathen fantasy, so that Genesis may safely be sung by the scop in the hall (lines 81-89). The great father then will protect all of his sons as they dream in the dark.

Wearing the mask of a scop, the *Beowulf* poet, whoever he was, sings a new song. Going to sleep after a banquet has a metaphorical meaning under the poet's Christian transformation. This is made explicit in the moral of Grendel's final retreat from the meadhall where so many diners have made his dinner:

Flee it who will, a well-earned fate

Is not often altered, for every earth-dweller
 And soul-bearing son must seek out a spot
 To lay down his body, lie on his death-bed,
 Sleep after feasting

(lines 879-883)

The transition to sleep, which the ancient scop hoped to induce in after-dinner crowds, is transformed to an image of the transition to the hereafter. The real creativity of the *Beowulf* poet lies in the credible pose he strikes as a scop, for in his day job he is merely a missionary looking for language that pre-Christian Danes, Swedes, Geats, and Frisians may want to hear.

Heorot before the arrival of *Beowulf* is under the domination of a man-eater, and King Hrothgar pursues the policies of Unferth, one who slays his own brother and will be going to hell because of it. Translation: Heorot has been a place of grisly human sacrifice, a terror to the whole community. Deeper translation: Heorot has been a traditional hero shrine at which the ancestors have been consulted through libations, music, and songs praising them.

Sometimes the elders swore before altars
 Of old war-idols, offering prayers
 For the soul-slayer to succor their people.
 Such was their habit, the hope of heathens:
 with hell in their hearts, they were lost to the Lord.
 They never would know the Almighty's mind
 or worship the world's one true protector.
 Sorry are those who sear their souls,
 Afflicted by flames they freely embraced.
 No cheer for the chastened! No change for the better!
 But happy is he who trusts in heaven
 And lives to his last in the Lord's keeping.

(lines 151-162)

By casting out the demon Grendel, *Beowulf* silences Unferth and wins rich gifts from grateful Hrothgar. The missionary calling evidently is a means to collect treasure from pre-Christian kings, thanks for ridding them of dangerous and counter-productive religions. If he no longer has to sacrifice his men to Unferth's monsters, Hrothgar perhaps can build an army to defend himself. He will fare better than Heremod, the previous king of Danes who was overthrown for tolerating killings of his own people (lines 802-807). Imagine yourself as pre-Christian Germanic king cir. 700 CE, sending your treasure off in burial ships or hiding it in the dirt with the bones of your deceased men, and you may begin to appreciate what *Beowulf* counsels.

Bits of literature interconnect when a nerd like Dr. G multitasks. While reading *Beowulf* he also happens to be reading about string theory. As his brain labors to make sense of these disparate strings of words, it begins to tell Dr. G that there are similarities in these readings, and that the similarities are not merely coincidental. It joins the two texts in a complex metaphor that delights it no end. As if it has made some ingenious discovery, it encodes in Dr. G's neural memory that *Beowulf* is like string theory, and string theory is like *Beowulf*. They are indeed joined in Dr. G's little grey cells and synapses which have now been formed into one network that gloats over itself and urges Dr. G to spread this good news to students, to readers of literary publications, to anybrain that may it may infect.

In his fertile brain, the *Beowulf* poet put together Christian and pre-Christian stories he knew. He combined them, sometimes convincingly and sometimes not, into what has become in our time a very famous but still curious literary relic. His technique was poetic, but his purpose was to change minds. He perhaps did not know that songs build common brain structures among their singers, but he certainly realized (as everybody does) that songs can be infectious. It must have

fascinated him. To produce such an imitation, he must have been extremely well versed in the literature he was helping to destroy. In any event, he used literature in an attempt to gain a cult of English-speaking followers and obtain a share of their adulation and wealth.

We know of such Christian propagandizing by monks in Britain, thanks to the story of Caedmon, the earliest English poet whose name is known to us. Caedmon's story is told by the Northumbrian monk Venerable Bede in his ***Ecclesiastical History of the English Nation***, book 4, chapter 25 (composed in Latin, 731 CE). Brother Caedmon's English literary endeavors were strongly encouraged at his monastery, where perhaps few understood English well enough to translate into it. Allow me to cut and paste the tale:

THERE was in this abbess's monastery a certain brother, particularly remarkable for the grace of God, who was wont to make pious and religious verses, so that whatever was interpreted to him out of Scripture, he soon after put the same into poetical expressions of much sweetness and humility, in English, which was his native language. By his verses the minds of many were often excited to despise the world, and to aspire to heaven. Others after him attempted, in the English nation, to compose religious poems, but none could ever compare with him, for ***he did not learn the art of poetry from men, but from God***; for which reason he never could compose any trivial or vain poem, but only those which relate to religion suited his religious tongue; for having lived in a secular habit till he was well advanced in years, he had never learned anything of versifying; for which reason being sometimes at entertainments, when it was agreed for the sake of mirth that all present should sing in their turns, when he saw the instrument come towards him, he rose up from table and returned home.

Having done so at a certain time, and gone out of the house where the entertainment was, to the stable, where he had to take care of the horses that night, he there composed himself to rest at the proper time; a person appeared to him in his sleep, and saluting him by his name, said, "Caedmon, sing some song to me." He answered, "I cannot sing; for that was the reason why I left the entertainment, and retired to this place because I could not sing." The other who talked to him, replied, "However, you shall sing." "What shall I sing?" rejoined he. "Sing the beginning of created beings," said the other. Hereupon he presently began to sing verses to the praise of God, which he had never heard, the purport whereof was thus:

We are now to praise the Maker of the heavenly kingdom, the power of the Creator and his counsel, the deeds of the Father of glory. How He, being the eternal God, became the author of all miracles, who first, as almighty preserver of the human race, created heaven for the sons of men as the roof of the house, and next the earth . . .

This is the sense, but not the words in order as he sang them in his sleep; for verses, though never so well composed, cannot be literally translated out of one language into another, without losing much of their beauty and loftiness. Awaking from his sleep, he remembered all that he had sung in his dream, and soon added much more to the same effect in verse worthy of the Deity.

In the morning he came to the steward, his superior, and having acquainted him with the gift he had received, was conducted to the abbess, by whom he was ordered, in the presence of many learned men, to tell his dream, and repeat the verses, that they might all give their judgment what it was, and whence his verse proceeded. They all concluded, that **heavenly grace had been conferred on him by our Lord**. They expounded to him a passage in holy writ, either historical, or doctrinal, ordering him, if he could, to put the same into verse. Having undertaken it, he went away, and returning the next morning, gave it to them composed in most excellent verse; whereupon the abbess, embracing the grace of God in the man, instructed him to quit the secular habit, and take upon him the monastic life; which being accordingly done, she associated him to the rest of the brethren in her monastery, and ordered that he should be taught the whole series of sacred history. Thus Caedmon, keeping in mind all he heard, and as it were chewing the cud, converted the same into most harmonious verse; and sweetly repeating the same, made his masters in their turn his hearers. **He sang the creation of the world, the origin of man, and all the history of Genesis** : and made many verses on the departure of the children of Israel out of Egypt, and their entering into the land of promise, with many other histories from holy writ; the incarnation, passion, resurrection of our Lord, and his ascension into heaven; the coming of the Holy Ghost, and the preaching of the apostles; also the terror of future judgment, the horror of the pains of hell, and the delights of heaven; besides many more about the Divine benefits and judgments, by which **he endeavored to turn away all men from the love of vice, and to excite in them the love of, and application to, good actions**; for he was a very religious man, humbly submissive to regular discipline, but full of zeal against those who behaved themselves otherwise; for which reason he ended his life happily.

For when the time of his departure drew near, he labored for the space of fourteen days under a bodily infirmity which seemed to prepare the way, yet so moderate that he could talk and walk the whole time. In his neighborhood was the house to which those that were sick, and like shortly to die, were carried. He desired the person that attended him, in the evening, as the night came on in which he was to depart this life, to make ready a place there for him to take his rest. This person, wondering why he should desire it, because there was as yet no sign of

his dying soon, did what he had ordered. He accordingly went there, and conversing pleasantly in a joyful manner with the rest that were in the house before, when it was past midnight, he asked them, whether they had the Eucharist there? They answered, "What need of the Eucharist? for you are not likely to die, since you talk so merrily with us, as if you were in perfect health." "However," said he, "bring me the Eucharist." Having received the same into his hand, he asked, whether they were all in charity with him, and without any enmity or rancor? They answered, that they were all in perfect charity, and free from anger; and in their turn asked him, whether he was in the same mind towards them? He answered, "I am in charity, my children, with all the servants of God." Then strengthening himself with the heavenly viaticum, he prepared for the entrance into another life, and asked, how near the time was when the brothers were to be awakened to sing the nocturnal praises of our Lord? They answered, "It is not far off." Then he said, "Well, let us wait that hour;" and signing himself with the sign of the cross, he laid his head on the pillow, and falling into a slumber, ended his life so in silence.

Thus it came to pass, that as he had served God with a simple and pure mind, and undisturbed devotion, so he now departed to his presence, leaving the world by a quiet death; and that tongue, which had composed so many holy words in praise of the Creator, uttered its last words whilst he was in the act of signing himself with the cross, and recommending himself into his hands, and by what has been here said, ***he seems to have had foreknowledge of his death.***

Amen.

27 August 2007: Lesson 1

Preface 1A p. xxi. "What is British Literature?"

"British" is used as a geographical term, referring to the British Isles. This is broader than "English," which refers only to England and would imply that only works written in English language would be covered in the course. It is broader than "Great Britain" because it encompasses the Republic of Ireland. It is broader than the historical Britains, who were the Celtic inhabitants of the isles prior to the coming of the Romans.

"Literature" is defined oddly as "artistically shaped works written in a charged language, appealing to imagination at least as much as to discursive reasoning." This is a poor definition in that it creates confusion as to what works are artistic, what language is charged, and what appeals to imagination as much as reasoning. Fortunately, the editors don't stick to their definition when selecting texts for the anthology. Although many of the selections are fictional stories, poems and plays, there are also lots of nonfiction texts, which I take to be as important as the fantasy stuff in the history of literature. I take "literature" to mean things made out of letters; that's the literal meaning, and I think that's the meaning that the editors actually use in selecting texts. The anthology is very good in providing a broad range of writings.

"The Middle Ages" 1A p. 3-26

The editors give general background to the Middle Ages. Key concepts they emphasize include:

- Medieval Britain is multilingual (using Latin, Old English, Middle English, early Welsh, early Irish, Norman French etc.) and also multicultural, with various ethnic groups competing through a series of invasions (Roman invasion of celtic Britain, Saxon invasion after withdrawal of the Romans, Viking invasions against the Saxons, Norman conquest of the Saxons, etc.).
- “Pagan and Christian” cultures are part of the story, too, with most of people converted during the Saxon period. The Old English epic Beowulf seems to belong to the transitional time. Different brands of Christianity were in conflict when the Normans brought in new forms of monasticism and church-state relations (see “Social and Religious Order”), also when mysticism and church reformation became prominent in the 14th century.
- Social development featured the emergence and subsequent decline of a class-based feudal society. The model was referred to as “the three estates” because it was divided into those who fought (the aristocrats), those who prayed (the clergy), and those who worked (the peasants). It seems outrageous to us today that one-third supported the other two and had to face a long struggle to acquire political representation and social power. The emergence of the merchant class and the reformation of the church were the primary challenges to the old model of three estates.
- Women’s roles appear to differ substantially in the various cultures. There are records of important queens and goddesses in celtic and preChristian Britain. Women played some important roles in the early church in Saxon times, but do not appear to have held many political or ecclesiastical cards in Norman society, where they became the object of “courtly love” (see p. 17-18). Marie de France is the earliest known woman writer in the British Isles. Women in the middle ages generally are seen through men’s eyes.
- Literacy developed with the coming of the Normans and eventual development of formal education under the auspices of the church. Early schooling was based on “the trivium,” learning Latin grammar, rhetoric and dialectic (p.15). This was both oral and text-based. Our studies in “English” today are not so different, as they begin with Academic Writing and Speech.

Questions for the day

Questions for today include:

- What do you want to get out of this course?
- What background do you have in British literature? (or British history or culture)
- What draws you to the study of literature?

Dr. G was drawn to the study of literature, and early British Literature in particular, in high school and college. This interest resulted from a combination of very good teachers, the attractiveness of the literature itself, and personal need to occupy the mind with interesting and pleasant diversions. Dr. G today still finds literature therapeutic, especially in winding down from whatever tensions may happen to exist in his so-called life.

Dr. G is always reading several books that meet his needs for escape, and these can be nonfiction as well as fiction. Indeed, nonfiction often works better, as it is “serious” enough to demand his attention. A current book he is reading discusses string theory in physics, which postulates the existence of separate universes, perhaps connected by worm holes or other strange strings. Whether or not string theory is correct, it makes a great metaphor for art. Literature creates the other universe; our reading is the worm hole or string that gets us into it. Once there, we are in a heaven of sorts, a golden world, a dream, an eternity where we do not have to worry about our problems. This enables us to relax, rest, and go to sleep, which meets an essential biological need.

When our editors define literature as that which appeals mostly to imagination, this is probably what they mean: they are looking for texts that get us off to dreamland. Your dog doesn't need literature because a dog brain doesn't worry very much (until the postman arrives at the gate). Since Adam and Eve, the brains of men and women have conceived that life brings troubles, and finally death. When organic human beings are replaced by robots, literature will no longer be necessary. For the time being, it works great!

Other media can serve similar entertainment functions, but reading is a superior discipline in that one has a large measure of control over it, and much of it is specifically designed for our enjoyment. This is in contrast to TV and other media that increasingly are designed to make viewers unhappy about themselves, their bodies, their possessions, the food they eat, the sex they have, etc.