

Three ways of dividing up the Study of Literature in English: A) Period – B) Genre – C) Method

The field of English is most commonly organized according to historical periods; those periods are typically associated with a particular place and a loose constellation of interests. We have tried to keep these periods as broad as possible. If you are interested in a particular sub-period (say, Romanticism, or Postmodernism) or sub-field (say, 20th-century Caribbean, Irish or 19th-century African-American literature) you will be able to note that in the online form.

(1) Medieval (700-1550)

(2) Renaissance or Early Modern (1550-1700)

(3) The Long Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries, including Restoration – Enlightenment – Romanticism and Victorian (1700-1900)

(4) Modern British (1900-present)

(5) Early American, pre-Civil War (1636-1865)

(6) Modern American (1865-present), including African-American, LatinX, Asian-American, Native American, &c.

(7) Global Anglophone (1750-present), including African Literatures, South-Asian Literatures, Diasporic Literatures, &c.

Literary quotations from each period that the English Faculty thinks are paradigmatic, or stirring, or cool

(1) Medieval (700-1550)¹²

Amazement seized their minds,

no soul had ever seen

a knight of such a kind—

entirely emerald green! —*Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Anonymous (the Pearl Poet), late-C14

For out of olde feeldes, as men saith,

Cometh al this newe corn from yeer to yere

And out of olde bookes, in good faith,

Cometh al this newe science that men lere —Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, ca. 1380

¹ Obviously, dividing and grouping literature into periods is artificial, and people will disagree about what truly characterizes an era. Here are two of our own faculty members' descriptions of the Medieval Period: 1) Today's popular media offers two models for the Middle Ages. One resembles the *Game of Thrones*, which traffics in savagery, gloom, torture, and the breakdown of civilization. The other is *The Lord of the Rings*, which promotes the heroic quest, romantic love, the bonds of honor, and the triumph of civilized norms. The "real" Middle Ages, particularly the literature of England from 700 to 1500, exceeds any simple stereotype. It challenges; it fascinates; it combines the weird and the familiar. As empires and nations grow unstable before our eyes, and as the internet shifts the boundaries of our global communities, medieval literature takes on greater urgency and relevance.

² Medieval English literature covers 800 or so years, from 700 to 1500. It took its many shapes in the period between the fall of an empire (the Roman), and the rise of nation states in the sixteenth century. Empires and nations tend to organize all our categories and ideas, cultural as well as political and personal. So what happens in the "middle age," when we have neither empire nor nation? When borders are unclear, shapes shift; often it's unclear whether challenges are in here or out there. And so it is with medieval literature, both its own narratives and its relation to us: is it out there (weird and essentially different?) or in here (we're still living its issues)? Now that empires and nations are shifting boundaries again, medieval writing resonates with our contemporary questions.

(2) Renaissance or Early Modern (1550-1700)

O what a world of profit and delight,
Of power, of honor, of omnipotence
Is promised to the studious artisan!
All things that move between the quiet poles
Shall be at my command: emperors and kings
Are but obeyed in their several provinces,
Nor can they raise the wind, or rend the clouds;
But his dominion that exceeds in this
Stretcheth as far as doth the mind of man;
A sound magician is a mighty god. —Christopher Marlowe, *Doctor Faustus* (1588-93)

‘Tis all in pieces, all coherence gone;
All just supply, and all relation:
Prince, subject; father, son, are things forgot,
For every man alone thinks he hath got
To be a phoenix, and that there can be
None of that kind of which he is, but he. —John Donne, “An Anatomy of the World” (1611)

(3) The Long Eighteenth and Nineteenth Centuries including Restoration – Enlightenment³ – Romanticism and Victorian (1700-1900)

Eighteenth-Century: if you please, no reference to examples in books. Men have had every advantage of us in telling their own story. Education has been theirs in so much higher a degree; the pen has been in their hands. I will not allow books to prove any thing. —Jane Austen, *Persuasion* (1817)⁴

ZOUNDS! -----

----- Z---nds!
—Lawrence Sterne, *Tristram Shandy* (1759)

Romantic: It was already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs. —Mary Shelley, *Frankenstein* (1818)

I love all waste
And solitary places; where we taste
The pleasure of believing what we see
Is boundless, as we wish our souls to be —Percy Shelley, *Julian and Maddalo* (1819)

³ “the aggressively rationalist imperatives of the [eighteenth century] – also produced, like a kind of toxic side effect, a new human experience of strangeness, anxiety, bafflement, and intellectual impasse. The distinctively eighteenth-century impulse to systematize and regulate, to bureaucratize the world of knowledge, identifying what Locke called the ‘horizon . . . which sets the bounds between enlightened and dark parts of things,’ was itself responsible, in other words, for that ‘estranging of the real’ – and impinging uncanniness – which is so integral a part of modernity” (from Terry Castle, from *The Female Thermometer*)

⁴ Virginia Woolf on the C18: Thus, towards the end of the eighteenth century a change came about which, if I were rewriting history, I should describe more fully and think of greater importance than the Crusades or the Wars of the Roses. The middle-class woman began to write. For if *Pride and Prejudice* matters, and *Middlemarch* and *Villette* and *Wuthering Heights* matter, then it matters far more than I can prove in an hour’s discourse that women generally, and not merely the lonely aristocrat shut up in her country house among her folios and her flatterers, took to writing. —*A Room of One’s Own*

And what if all of animated nature
Be but organic Harps diversely framed,
That tremble into thought, as o'er them sweeps
Plastic and vast, one intellectual breeze,
At once the Soul of each, and God of all?

—Samuel Taylor Coleridge, “The Aeolian Harp” (1795)

Victorian: Your pier-glass or extensive surface of polished steel made to be rubbed by a housemaid, will be minutely and multitudinously scratched in all directions; but place now against it a lighted candle as a centre of illumination, and lo! the scratches will seem to arrange themselves in a fine series of concentric circles round that little sun.

—George Eliot, *Middlemarch* (1872)

(4) Modern British (1900-present)

‘The horror! The horror!’ —Joseph Conrad, *Heart of Darkness* (1899)

Really, universally, relations stop nowhere, and the exquisite problem of the artist is eternally but to draw, by a geometry of his own, the circle within which they shall happily appear to do so.

—Henry James, preface to Roderick Hudson, 1907

James Joyce to Frank Budgen: How a man ties his shoelaces or how he eats his egg will give a better clue to his differentiation than how he goes forth to war.

Virginia Woolf in “Modern Fiction”: let us record the atoms as they fall on the mind in order in which they fall, let us trace the pattern, however disconnected and incoherent in appearance, which each sight or incident scores upon the consciousness.

If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever.

—George Orwell, *1984* (1948)

But surely to tell these tall tales and others like them would be to speed the myth, the wicked lie, that the past is always tense and the future, perfect. And as Archie knows, it's not like that. It's never been like that.

—Zadie Smith, *White Teeth* (2000)

(5) Early American, pre-Civil War (1636-1865)

Find out just what any people will quietly submit to and you have the exact measure of the injustice and wrong which will be imposed on them. —Frederick Douglass, “Speech on West India Emancipation” (1857)

I felt a Funeral, in my Brain,
And Mourners to and fro
Kept treading - treading - till it seemed
That Sense was breaking through -

—Emily Dickinson (1862)

...there was no lack of variety [on the riverboat]. Natives of all sorts, and foreigners; men of business and men of pleasure; parlor men and backwoodsmen; farm-hunters and fame-hunters; heiress-hunters, gold-hunters, buffalo-hunters, bee-hunters, happiness-hunters, truth-hunters, and still keener hunters after all these hunters. Fine ladies in slippers, and moccasined squaws; Northern speculators and Eastern philosophers; English, Irish, German, Scotch, Danes; Santa Fé traders in striped blankets, and Broadway bucks in cravats of cloth of gold; fine-looking Kentucky boatmen, and Japanese-looking Mississippi cotton-planters; Quakers in full drab, and United States soldiers in full regimentals; slaves, black, mulatto, quadroon; modish young Spanish Creoles, and

old-fashioned French Jews; Mormons and Papists Dives and Lazarus; jesters and mourners, teetotalers and convivialists, deacons and blacklegs; hard-shell Baptists and clay-eaters; grinning negroes, and Sioux chiefs solemn as high-priests. In short, a piebald parliament, an Anacharsis Cloots congress of all kinds of that multiform pilgrim species, man.

As pine, beech, birch, ash, hackmatack, hemlock, spruce, bass-wood, maple, interweave their foliage in the natural wood, so these mortals blended their varieties of visage and garb. A Tartar-like picturesqueness; a sort of pagan abandonment and assurance. Here reigned the dashing and all-fusing spirit of the West, whose type is the Mississippi itself, which, uniting the streams of the most distant and opposite zones, pours them along, helter-skelter, in one cosmopolitan and confident tide. —Herman Melville, *The Confidence Man* (1857)

(6) Modern American (1865-present)

including African-American, LatinX, Asian-American, Native American, &c.

You see he does not believe I am sick! —Charlotte Perkins Gilman, “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892)

This is the time of year
when almost every night
the frail, illegal fire balloons appear. —Elizabeth Bishop, “The Armadillo”

I tried all things, only some were immortal and free. —John Ashbery

Or does it explode? —Langston Hughes

A simple word (followed usually by a vigorous crossing of index fingers).

Zafa.

It used to be more popular in the old days, so to speak, in Macondo than in McOndo. There are people, though, like my tío Miguel in the Bronx who still zafa everything. He’s old-school like that. If the Yanks commit an error in the late innings it’s zafa; if somebody brings shells in from the beach it’s zafa; if you serve a man parcha it’s zafa. Twenty-four-hour zafa in the hope that the bad luck will not have had time to cohere. Even now as I write these words I wonder if this book ain’t a zafa of sorts. My very own counterspell.

—Junot Diaz, *The Brief Wondrous Life of Oscar Wao* (2007)

(7) Global Anglophone (1750-present)

including African Literatures, South-Asian Literatures, Diasporic Literatures, &c.

The master of ceremonies leaped on to the platform and called for silence. He addressed the audience and told them that this was a competition for thieves and robbers, real ones - that is, those who had reached international standards. Stories of people breaking padlocks in village huts or snatching purses from poor market women were shameful in the eyes of real experts in theft and robbery

—Ngugi wa Thiong’o, *The Devil on the Cross* (1987)

Perhaps it’s true that things can change in a day. That a few dozen hours can affect the outcome of whole lifetimes. And that when they do, those few dozen hours, like the salvaged remains of a burned house—the charred clock, the singed photograph, the scorched furniture—must be resurrected from the ruins and examined. Preserved. Accounted for. Little events, ordinary things, smashed and reconstituted. Imbued with new meaning. Suddenly they become the bleached bones of a story.” —Arundhati Roy, *The God of Small Things* (1997)

Excuse me, sir, but may I be of assistance? Ah, I see I have alarmed you. Do not be frightened by my beard: I am a lover of America. I noticed that you were looking for something; more than looking, in fact you seemed to be on a *mission*, and since I am both a native of this city and a speaker of your language, I thought I might offer you my services. —Mohsin Hamid, *The Reluctant Fundamentalist* (2007)