

Coming Spring 2024
ENGL 262, SECTIONS 1 AND H01—BRITISH LITERATURE 2
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MWF 11:30 AM-12:20 PM

**What do you
mean by
“British,”
anyway?**

The question at left will be our guiding question, because it was a guiding question of the literature we will be reading (roughly from 1789 to the present). As the British Empire extended its reach to the Americas, Africa and southern Asia, it not only transformed but was transformed by the peoples it colonized, complicating the definition of national borders and cultural identity. Nor were these concerns unknown within “Britain” itself. “Great Britain” was a fairly recent invention (Scotland had only been formally incorporated with England and Wales in 1707), the “United Kingdom” more recent still (Ireland was annexed in 1801) and none of these dates marked either the beginning or the end of long-standing political conflicts. Other internal divisions of geography, class, sex, race, religion and language persisted. Sometimes it seems that the harder a nation tries to achieve unity, the more insistently it is reminded of how heterogeneous it really is. The prospect can be both exciting and scary.



Under this broad heading, however, we will explore other questions that focus on method:

How do literary texts relate to their historical contexts?

Elizabeth Gaskell’s *Cranford* on communities of women • Ian McEwan’s *The Cockroach* on Brexit • David Hare’s *Beat the Devil* on COVID-19

How does literary form relate to literary “content”? Scots dialect in Sir Walter Scott’s fiction •

Metrical verse in Lord Tennyson’s *Idylls of the King* • Nineteenth-century novelistic style in Zadie Smith’s *The Fraud*

How does literature grapple with the “big questions”? *History of Mary Prince*, *A West Indian Slave* on emotion • Kiran Desai’s *The Inheritance of Loss* on nostalgia • Mike Bartlett’s *King Charles III* on leadership

How do literary texts talk to other texts? Political philosophy in Edmund Burke’s *Reflections* • Monuments in Anna Barbauld’s *1811* • Theology in T.S. Eliot’s *Four Quartets* **More!**

This version of ENGL 262 may be taken as either a regular or an Honors course. The two sections will meet at the same place and time. All students will complete assignments most likely including analytical essays, a midterm and a final exam. Honors students will have some additional responsibilities.