

ENGL 3220: British Literature since 1750:
“The Idea of the Author in Modern British Writing”
Dr. Carey Mickalites
Fall 2023

In their *Lyrical Ballads*, Romantic-era poets Wordsworth and Coleridge set out to revolutionize the language of poetry by emphasizing the idiom of common folk, while their “Preface” also helped to define our understanding of the role of the poet in society. Over a century later, T.S. Eliot would publish several critical essays that sought to cultivate a small and select audience for the difficult and experimental poems he and his fellow modernists were writing. Eliot’s contemporary and friend, Virginia Woolf, would make a major contribution to early feminism by insisting on a cultural space and material support for women writers. And in the second decade of the twenty-first century, the young Irish writer Sally Rooney would become an international star author for books that reflect on her generation’s scepticism about capitalism, celebrity, and the questions of authentic romantic attachments. Literature, that is, is not only written according to the writer’s designs, it is also inescapably enmeshed in larger material and social conditions that go into making up “the author,” including (and perhaps especially) the immense role that marketing plays in shaping what counts as serious “literature.”

This section of 3220 will study a range of selected works by Romantics, modernists, and contemporary writers from the UK and Ireland, and will focus on how they negotiate the idea of the author as both a singular and celebrated being and a product of larger social forces. Along the way we will attend to how the very idea of what an author is, or what constitutes authorship, changes over time according to evolving social, political, and economic structures in British history.