

Chaucer
English 534.001
Spring 2014

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English 534.001
Class Hours: Mon. 7:20 – 10:00
Office Hours: Mon. 6:50 – 7:20 or
by appointment

Syllabus

January 13 The Chaucer Persona
Short Poems: Chaucer's Words unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn; The Former Age; Truth; Gentilesse; Lak of Stedfastnesse; Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan; Complaint to His Purse.

The Book of The Duchess 1-269 (Insomnia intro).
House of Fame Book II: 529-671 (Chaucer's unsuccess at love).

Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas (Chaucer the Pilgrim's Tale). (~250 lines).

January 20 MLK Day

January 31 *General Prologue of the Canterbury Tales* (857 lines)
Due: Prologue Explication

February 7 Courtly Love, Canterbury Style

Knight's Tale Parts One & Two (~1000 lines)

February 14 Courtly Love Continued:

The Knight's Tale Parts Three and Four (~1300 lines)
Due: Knight's Tale Explication

February 21 Courtly Love, Local Style

The Squire's Prologue and Tale (~700 lines)
The Franklin's Prologue and Tale (~900 lines)
Middle English Literacy Quiz

February 28 **Courtly Love, Chaucer Style**

Troilus and Creseyde, book 1 (~1000 lines)
Troilus and Creseyde book 2, first half (1-938)

March 7 **Courtly Love Continued**

Troilus and Creseyde, book II, 938-end
Troilus and Creseyde, book III (~1700 lines)
2nd **Middle English Literacy Quiz**

March 14 **Spring Break**

March 21 **The Wheel of Fortune**

Troilus and Creseyde, book IV (~1700 lines)
Troilus and Creseyde, book V (~1700 lines)

Due: Troilus Explication.
ME Literacy Quiz “Make-Up” (if needed).

March 28 **Love and Mastery** (Note that the Franklin's Tale also belongs here. Make sure you understand how the F's T would fit in Kittredge's Construct).

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale; Friar's Prologue (~1300 lines)
The Clerk's Prologue and Tale (~1200 lines)

April 4 **Love or Marriage** (but definitely not both)

The Merchant's Prologue, Tale and Epilogue (~1200 lines). Note the lines in the tale that suggest the author might not be the Merchant, although it also works as the tale of a newly married and bitter man. Traditionally part of the Marriage Group.

The Physician's Tale (~280)
The 2nd Nun's Prologue and Tale (~540).* This is also the first Saint's Life.

Due: Marriage Debate Explication

April 11 **The Fabiliaux**

Miller's Prologue and Tale (~700)
Reeve's Prologue and Tale (~400 lines)
*The Shipman's Tale** (~450 lines). Note that author of this tale is definitely NOT the Shipman. Interestingly, *The Shipman's Tale* has never been considered part of the Marriage Group, though it could be. It can also be seen as a fabliau from the woman's perspective.

April 18 **More Fabiliaux, more “Quiting.”**

The Friar's Tale (~300 lines)
The Summoner's Prologue and Tale (~620 lines)
The Cook's Tale (~100 lines)
The Manciple's Prologue and Tale (~350 lines)

Due: Fabliau Explication

April 18 **The First Estate** (Note that the 2nd Nun also belongs here. I included her above b/c it also interests me as a construct of marriage. Note also that married female saints are rarer than hen's teeth).

The Pardoner's Intro, Prologue, Tale (~650 lines)
The Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale and Epilogue (~700 lines)
The Prioress' Prologue and Tale (~250 lines)

April 25 **Wrapping up Loose Ends**

The Man of Law's Introduction, Prologue, Tale and Epilogue. Note that Custance is also an unofficial Saint's Life. Chaucer seems to have been very interested in married female Saints. She is not a "recognized" Saint, but you can see the influence of that very popular medieval genre.

Tale of Sir Thopas (as you read this tale, think of the Chaucer Persona, similarities/differences, etc.

The Retraction

Due: Middle English Composition

May 2 **Oral Presentations Due** (attendance is mandatory; make-ups are allowed for dire medical conditions only).

May 9 **Research Paper Due**

Course Description

TEXT: The Riverside Chaucer. Ed. Larry Benson, third edition. Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Please also enjoy, for free, and as often as possible, “Chaucer Hath a Blog.”

<http://houseoffame.blogspot.com/>

(This site has been going on for a number of years now, and contains Chaucer’s varied musings on the modern world – written (naturally) in flawless Middle English, through the pens of some of the best Chaucerians now living. These are the sorts of games Chaucerians play. Quite funny).

Welcome, Chaucerians! I haven’t taught this course since 2009 – far too long. Yes, we come from different backgrounds, and bring different specializations to the table. Some of you have probably only sampled Medieval Chaucer lightly; others may know him well. But I promise that, whichever category you fall into, I will do my absolute best to make sure that you find the experience worthwhile. And it will be fun. Okay, maybe not *entirely* fun at first, while you are struggling with Middle English. But it will definitely be worth it.

Course Objectives

Ultimately, the goal of this course is simple: to read Chaucer in his own language knowledgeably and with pleasure. Along the way however, you will learn a great deal about medieval cultural assumptions and social structure – everything from the social hierarchy of the day to Saints Lives, the importance of astrology and the four medical “humors.” There is so much that Chaucer could assume that “everyone” knew – and we simply don’t now. In short, to read Chaucer is to learn is not only to learn a new literature, but a new world.

This will take time however. In the course of learning to become Modern Medievals therefore, we will strive for the following measurable outcomes:

Student Learning Outcomes

1. Students will be able to master the literary diction necessary to comprehend Middle English.
2. Students will be able to analyze the cultural assumptions inherent in medieval texts – assumptions no longer current today.
3. Students will be able to produce a research paper with a focused argument, a comprehensive review of the relevant scholarship, and conclusions based on close literary analysis of the text.

Grading Criteria

Middle English Literacy Quizzes:	10%
Middle English Composition	10%

General Prologue Explication	10%
Knight's Tale Explication	10%
Troilus Explication	10%
Marriage Tale Explication	10%
Fabliau Explication	10%
Oral Presentation of Research:	10%
Research Paper	20%

Grading Criteria, Explicated

The grading criteria in this class is traditional in one respect: it culminates in a research paper due the Monday of exam week, in lieu of a final exam. Papers must include a Works Cited page in MLA format that includes at least 7 peer-reviewed sources; at least 6 of these 7 must be peer-reviewed articles taken from literary journals. At least one of these articles must be taken from the *Chaucer Review* (because this is the pre-eminent journal in the field). Papers should be 10-15 pages long – longer than a conference paper, but not so long you couldn't present it, judiciously pared.

Students must be far enough along on their research papers to present a 10 minute oral presentation of their work to the class on May 2nd. Presentations will be graded on the following criteria:

- 1) Presentation includes **a clear thesis that reflects current critical work in the field**. This means that theses must be clearly focused, must show a knowledge of recent critical work in the field, and must offer something more.
- 2) Presentations must clearly indicate **how the thesis will be defended**. This may be done by summary and/or example. Given the time limits, defense of the thesis is necessarily limited, but listeners should have some idea how – and why – you are likely to succeed. Think of this as the “evidence” portion of the presentation.
- 3) Presentations must be made within time constraints, audible, organized, and be easy to follow. Anyone who's presentation takes less than 5 minutes will be penalized, and those who take longer than 10 will be ruthlessly cut off. Make sure everyone in the room can hear and follow you. This is the “conference practice” portion of the presentation.

Medieval Literacy quizzes will be simple “translations;” everyone in class will receive a Middle English passage taken from the readings in the last two weeks, and asked to modernize it. Students are encouraged to be relatively literal in their approach, while still writing modern English – if I can't tell whether you understand a given word, I will assume you don't, and grade accordingly. Students are however welcome to add explanations where they feel necessary.

Here students will be graded on a fail/pass/plus basis. To “pass” a quiz, students must accurately modernize 70% of the passage; 80% or better gets a “plus.” Everyone will take at least two literacy quizzes, and will have the option of taking at least three. Anyone earning a “plus” on one or more quiz automatically gets an A on 10% of the course allotted to this. Students who pass at least one quiz without earning a “plus” will get a B.

Middle English Compositions should be short: 2 pages is sufficient. Here you may let your creativity flourish. Write your own tale if you wish (prose is fine here!). Alternatively, write an entry for Chaucer Hath a Blog (you do not have to actually submit it; just use that site as your model). All you have to do, basically, is write something (be it essay or creative) **in Middle English**. Please do not worry unduly

about this. Do try to be accurate (feel free to lean on the glossary in the back of the Riverside, use the Middle English Dictionary (our library has a copy), or any other Middle English source you have available. Do not however let fear of errors deter you: any good faith effort will receive at least a B. This is an excellent assignment for reinforcing an active (as opposed to passive) comprehension of Middle English dialect.

The rest of your grade will be based on Explications taken from the works assigned in the last two weeks. Explications are **NOT** translations: these are literary explications. Feel free to choose whatever passage interests you, within the limits of the assignment (Knight's Tale, Troilus, etc). You may choose longer or shorter passages. Remember however that you will be expected to give me a **close reading** of the passage, paying attention to literary devices, etc. Your explication must have a strong thesis, and clearly support it. For more information about explications please read the following description online: my understanding of a literary explication agrees.

<http://www2.webster.edu/~armbruka/eng11030/handouts/whatisanexplication.htm>

Plagiarism

Instructors in the Department of Literature and Languages do not tolerate plagiarism and other forms of academic dishonesty (including collusion and selling academic products). Instructors uphold and support the highest academic standards, and students are expected to do likewise. Students guilty of plagiarism may be failed for the course.

Penalties for students guilty of academic dishonesty include disciplinary probation, suspension, and expulsion. (Texas A&M University-Commerce Code of Student Conduct 5.b[1,2,3]).

Courtesy Statement:

"All students enrolled at the University shall follow the tenets of common decency and acceptable behavior conducive to a positive learning environment." (See Student's Guide Handbook, Policies and Procedures, Conduct).

Americans w/Disabilities Act Statement:

Americans w/Disabilities Act Statement: Students requesting accommodations for disabilities must go through the Academic Support Committee. For more information, please contact the Director of Disability Resources & Services, Halladay Student Services Bldg., Room 303D, (903) 886-5835.