



Dr. Myra Seaman
Spring 2006

TR 12:15-1:30
Maybank 210

This course offers students the opportunity to encounter the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer in its original language, Middle English. In the process, our oral and written engagement with the texts will sharpen students' interpretive and expressive skills. We will employ diverse modern critical approaches in reading these medieval texts while preserving the historical integrity of Chaucer's poetry, by investigating, for instance, the visual arts and the manuscript tradition that inform his production and our reception of the texts. During the semester our readings will include some short lyrics, dream visions, and selected *Canterbury Tales*, as well as some late-antiquity philosophy and modern literary criticism. In the end, I hope that you will come to see the English Middle Ages as a time and place at least as complex, rich, and fascinating as our own.

We will take as a starting point G. K. Chesterton's century-old – and embarrassingly still accurate – observation that

There is something odd in the fact that when we reproduce the Middle Ages it is always some such rough and half-grotesque part of them that we reproduce . . . Few modern people know what a mass of illuminating philosophy, delicate metaphysics, clear and dignified social morality exists in the serious scholastic writers of mediaeval times. But we seem to have grasped somehow that the ruder and more clownish elements in the Middle Ages have a human and poetical interest. We are delighted to know about the ignorance of mediaevalism; we are contented to be ignorant about its knowledge. When we talk of something mediaeval, we mean something quaint. We remember that alchemy was mediaeval, or that heraldry was mediaeval. We forget that Parliaments are mediaeval, that all our Universities are mediaeval, that city corporations are mediaeval, that gunpowder and printing are mediaeval, that half the things by which we now live, and to which we look for progress, are mediaeval."

("The True Middle Ages," *The Illustrated London News*, 14 July 1906)

Chaucer the Poet, Chaucer's Poetry

Week 1

- T 1-10 Course introduction; "Gentilesse," "Truth"
Middle English Exercise 1: Modern English/Middle English Comparison
For those who'd like to look ahead, these sites devoted to Chaucer are good starting points (you may link to them directly from WebCT, on the Links page for the class):
Larry D. Benson's *Geoffrey Chaucer Homepage*:
<http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/>
David Wilson-Okamura's *geoffreychaucer.org*: <http://www.geoffreychaucer.org/>
Joseph Wittig's *Chaucer MetaPage*: <http://www.unc.edu/depts/chaucer/>
Alan Baragona's *Chaucer Home Page*:
<http://academics.vmi.edu/english/chaucer.html>
- R 1-12 *Riverside* Introduction: Chaucer's Life (pp. xv-xxvi)
"Chaucer's Words unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn" (p. 650), "The Former Age" (p. 650), "To Rosemounde" (p. 649)
Middle English Exercise 2: A Quick History of English (WebCT)

Week 2

- T 1-17 Spearing, "Chaucer's Language" (WebCT)
Riverside Introduction: Language/Pronunciation (pp. xxix-xxxiv – these particular pages only)
Middle English Exercise 3: Lexicon (WebCT)
Consult the following websites to investigate Chaucer's form of Middle English (there are direct links to these, on the Links page of the course WebCT site):
"The English Language in the Fourteenth Century: The Status of English"
<http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/language.html>
The Chaucer MetaPage Audio Files
http://academics.vmi.edu/english/audio/audio_index.html
The Chaucer home page's "Chaucer's Pronunciation, Grammar, and Vocabulary" tutorial
<http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/pronunciation/>
"Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer's Middle English" tutorial
<http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/less-0.htm>

Dream Visions

- R 1-19 *Book of the Duchess* (ll. 1-721)
Riverside Introduction: Versification (pp. xlii-xlv)
Middle English Exercise 4: Grammar (WebCT)

Week 3

- T 1-24 *Book of the Duchess* (ll. 721-1334)
Middle English Exercise 5: Pronunciation (WebCT)

Group Presentation A: Late Fourteenth-Century English Politics

- R 1-26 *Parliament of Fowls* (ll. 1-699)
Phillips Chapter 1

The "Sondry Folk" of the *Canterbury Tales*

Week 4

- T 1-31 Introduction to *Canterbury Tales* (Fragment I): *Riverside* pp. 3-9
Phillips Chapter 2
General Prologue (ll. 1-330)

MEMORIZATION 1 DUE

- R 2-2 *General Prologue* (ll. 331-858)
Patterson lecture: "Chaucer" (WebCT)

Group Presentation B: Merchants and the Professions in Fourteenth-Century England

Week 5

- T 2-7 Mann, "Introduction," *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* (WebCT)
Knight, "The *Canterbury Tales*" (WebCT)

Fortune's Wheel

- R 2-9 Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (part 1)

Group Presentation C: Ancient Texts in Medieval Europe

Week 6

T 2-14 Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy* (part 2)
Chaucer, "Fortune"

R 2-16 **EXAM 1**

Week 7

T 2-21 *Knight's Tale* (ll. 859-2200)
Phillips Chapter 3

Group Presentation D: The Knight: Myth and Fourteenth-Century Reality

R 2-23 *Knight's Tale* (ll. 2201-3108)

The Quytting Begins

Week 8

T 2-28 *Miller's Prologue and Tale* (ll. 3109-3562)
Phillips Chapter 4

DRAFT DISCUSSION

R 3-2 *Miller's Prologue and Tale* (ll. 3563-3854)

F 3-3 **PAPER 1 DUE by 12 p.m.**

SPRING BREAK

Week 9

T 3-14 Knapp, "Robin the Miller's Thrifty Work" (WebCT)

R 3-16 *Reeve's Prologue and Tale*
Phillips Chapter 5

Questioning Marriage, Questioning the Marvelous

Week 10

- T 3-21 Introduction to *Canterbury Tales* (Fragments II-III): *Riverside* pp. 9-12
Wife of Bath's Prologue
Phillips Chapter 8

Group Presentation E: Medieval Misogyny and Misogamy (esp. Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*)

- R 3-23 *Wife of Bath's Tale*

MEMORIZATION 2 DUE by 3 p.m.

Week 11

- T 3-28 Dinshaw, "'Glose/bele chose': The Wife of Bath and Her Glossators" (WebCT)

- R 3-30

EXAM 2

Week 12

- T 4-4 Introduction to *Canterbury Tales* (Fragments IV-V): *Riverside* pp. 12-14
Clerk's Prologue and Tale
Phillips Chapter 10

- R 4-6 Mann, "Suffering Woman, Suffering God" (WebCT)

Group report F: The Medieval University/Medieval Students

- F 4-7

ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY DUE by 12 p.m.

Week 13

- T 4-11 *Franklin's Prologue and Tale* (ll. 709-1624)

Phillips Chapter 12

Warren S. Smith, "Dorigen's Lament and the Resolution of the *Franklin's Tale*" (WebCT)

Colin Wilcockson, "Thou and Tears: The Advice of Arveragus to Dorigen in Chaucer's *Franklin's Tale*" (WebCT)

- W 4-12 Paper proposal due (via WebCT) by noon

Escapes and Transformations

- R 4-13 Introduction to *Canterbury Tales* (Fragments VI-X): *Riverside* pp. 14-22
Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue ; *Physician's Tale*
Phillips Chapter 13 and 19

Week 14

- T 4-18 *Pardoner's Tale, Shipman's Tale*
Phillips Chapters 14-15

Group Presentation G: Medieval Saint's Lives

DRAFT DISCUSSION

MEMORIZATION 3 DUE by 3 p.m.

- R 4-20 LAST CLASS: *Second Nun's Tale; Retraction*
Phillips Chapter 20

- F 4-21 **PAPER 2 DUE at 2 p.m.**

- R 4-27 **12-3 Final Exam**

Schedule subject to change

Required Texts:

Chaucer. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Ed. Larry D. Benson (Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

Boethius. *Consolation of Philosophy*. Trans. Joel C. Relihan (Hackett Publishing Co., 2001).

Helen Phillips. *An Introduction to the Canterbury Tales: Reading, Fiction, Context* (St. Martin's, 2000).

A few critical readings will be found on WebCT, as listed on the syllabus.

Student Responsibilities:

We will construct this course together, with our experience in the classroom depending on our collective preparation and our commitment to making that experience as satisfying as possible for all of the class's members. To that end, I advise the following:

Read the assigned material before class and come to class prepared to discuss the reading. I will lecture only rarely; class will generally progress according to group discussion, so the success of the class depends upon each of you.

For every assigned literary text, you should read the introductory material preceding the poem. For each Chaucer text, the Explanatory Notes (beginning on p. 795) are at the back of your *Riverside*. Reading these notes alongside the assigned poem or tale may at first prove distracting, but once the system is familiar the notes will in many cases provide you information necessary to a thorough understanding of the text. I will assume that you have read these notes and the introductions, along with the assigned text, before class.

To encourage you to develop your ideas about the readings, you will be writing regularly in response to the reading assignments. Before each class meeting you will submit a **written response** of around 200 words via WebCT. I will provide a prompt for each response. A few classes (particularly early in the semester) will include two written assignments (one the daily response, one a special Middle English language exercise). You will be allowed to miss 3 responses over the course of the semester.

Participating in class is vital to your success in the course. As a result, 3 **absences** are permitted, no questions asked; after that, any additional absences will lower your final grade by 5 percent. If you miss a class, you are still responsible for that day's work, including turning in any work due *before class* and getting the gist of class discussion. Translation quizzes will be given at the start of class. Make-up quizzes are not allowed; the lowest grade (a zero, in the case of an absence) will be dropped.

Since the **deadlines** for written work are so clearly spelled out in the syllabus, *late papers will not be accepted except in VERY extraordinary circumstances*. In order to receive course credit, you must complete all of the written assignments. All students, needless to say, must follow the College of Charleston's academic integrity policy, which forbids cheating, attempted cheating, and plagiarism. Any student found guilty of these offenses will receive a failing grade for the course.

Papers must be typed, double-spaced, with one-inch margins; citations must follow MLA conventions. Papers will be graded for grammar, style, and structure as well as for content; I'm always happy to discuss your writing and ideas, so please make use of my office hours (not to mention the Writing Lab). In addition to turning in a hard copy of your papers, you will need to submit a copy of each electronically through WebCT (a procedure I will demonstrate early in the semester). The first paper is eligible for revision; if you want to revise, you must see me to discuss your revision, which must be turned in within 10 days of the graded papers' being returned to the class. The grade for the assignment will be determined by averaging the grade on the first and second graded versions.

In each paper, you will need to use outside sources. Paper 1 will need to include only one critical source, while Paper 2 will incorporate some of the information you discover while producing your Annotated Bibliography.

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The **Annotated Bibliography** must contain at least 10 secondary sources (7 of these must be critical resources such as articles or book chapters); only ONE of these sources can be an article assigned for class discussion. Many such sources are on reserve at the library, although many other possible sources exist. (Your second paper will include at least 5 of these sources, 3 of which must be critical articles.) You can find very helpful sample annotations at

<http://panther.bsc.edu/~shagen/sampanno.htm>

The **Group Presentation** is intended to provide information for the class that will offer us additional avenues for interpreting the primary material. Topics and dates are listed in the schedule. Be prepared to sign up for a project at the second class meeting. Presentations will be 15 minutes long, followed by a class discussion and Q&A period, and accompanied by a bibliography of sources used for the report. Each member of the group must participate in the presentation.

We will have weekly **Translation Quizzes**, which will require you to provide a Modern English translation of a passage (generally of about 10 lines) that I will excerpt from that day's reading assignment. I will be concerned with the accuracy of your translation – with your understanding of Chaucer's syntax and vocabulary within the particular context – rather than with the aesthetics of the Modern English itself. Your translation should, at the very least, make sense according to the norms of modern English, but it should convey as much as possible the moment-by-moment meaning you perceive in the particular passage.

For help in preparing for these quizzes, you may want to visit Prof. Benson's sample quiz at <http://icg.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/sam-quiz.htm>; he offers a translation of a passage and notes what particular words and structures in the passage he as a professor finds most important. Our quizzes, and my expectations, will be similar.

Memorizations inspire the greatest anxiety for most students, but this assignment is all about process, not product (hence their accounting for only 5% of your grade). In memorizing Middle English, you begin to distance yourself from the visual appearance of the words on the modern page and instead start to hear them as aural texts, approaching what they would have been for Chaucer's earliest audiences. Memorizing also forces you to grapple with issues of pronunciation that are too easily neglected while reading silently.

Grade Breakdown:

2 papers and annotated bibliography	30%
2 mid-semester exams	20%
final exam	15%
group presentation	10%
daily written responses	10%
weekly translation quizzes	10%
3 memorizations	5%

The following grade scale will be used in grading individual assignments: A = 94-100; A- = 90-93; B+ = 87-89; B = 84-86; B- = 80-83; C+ = 77-79; C = 74-76; C- = 70-73; D= 60-69; F = 0-59.

The following grade scale will be used in determining final grades: A = 90-100; B+ = 86-89; B = 80-85; C+ = 76-79; C = 70-75; D= 60-69; F = 0-59.

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