

ENG330W
Seminar in British Literature

Geoffrey Chaucer

Dr. Jessica Barr
Eureka College
Spring 2011



Email: jbarr@eureka.edu

Office: Burrus Dickinson 301

Office hours: M 11-12, T 11-12, W 1-2, F 9-10, and by appointment

Monday 6-8:45

B-101

Office phone: 6337

Course description

In this seminar, we will explore a selection of Chaucer's works, including some of his short poems, his dream vision poetry, and the famous *Canterbury Tales*. In addition to coming to a deeper understanding of Chaucer's work and his importance to the English literary canon, we will read about and discuss how he fit into his literary and cultural milieu. Supplemental readings and in-class discussion will therefore cover some of the authors, ideas, and practices that were current in later medieval England, including medieval theories of dream interpretation, the French and Italian romance traditions, and religious doctrine, as well as the ways in which the English language has changed since the fourteenth century.

Course goals

By the end of this course, students should be able to do the following:

1. accurately pronounce and translate Middle English poetry;
2. make thematic connections between disparate works by Geoffrey Chaucer;
3. situate key concepts that are present in Chaucer's work (e.g. narratorial self-presentation, courtly and romantic love, virtue) within their broader cultural context; and
4. describe some of the major genres of medieval literature (e.g. fabliau, romance, sermon).

In addition, specific assignments for this course are designed to enhance students' abilities in the following areas:

1. using primary and secondary sources to construct an original argument;
2. develop stylistic and mechanical skills that are essential to academic writing;
3. closely reading individual passages from literary texts; and
4. perceiving and exploring linguistic and etymological changes from the fourteenth century to the present.

Course books

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue*. Ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson. New York: Norton, 2005. (Abbreviated “DV.”)

---. *Dream Visions and Other Poems*. Ed. Kathryn L. Lynch. New York: Norton, 2007. (Abbreviated “CT.”)

Policies and Expectations

Absences: Because we only meet 13 times this semester, each class meeting is crucial. If you miss only one class, you will not be penalized. However, more than one absence—*for any reason*—may result in a lowering of your final grade by as much as 10% (one full letter grade). Four or more absences (more than 25% of the course) will result in an automatic F.

Late papers are usually accepted, but usually with a penalty. If you have an excellent reason for turning a paper in late, contact me at least 48 hours before it is due. Otherwise, you should still hand in your paper, but be prepared to have points deducted for tardiness.

Email: I will try to reply to all emails in a timely manner, but please try to allow at least 24 hours for a reply (e.g. if you email me at 4:00 with a question that needs an answer before 6:00, I may not have time to get back to you). Response papers should be sent to the group folder in Groupwise; all other papers may be handed in either in hard copy or via email.

Grades will be determined according to the following rubric:

| | |
|---------------------------|------------------|
| Response papers: | 10% (100 points) |
| Response paper comments: | 5% (50 points) |
| Critical Summary: | 15% (150 points) |
| Etymological exploration: | 10% (100 points) |
| Final paper: | 35% (350 points) |
| Final exam: | 15% (150 points) |
| Participation: | 10% (100 points) |

See the last part of the syllabus for more details regarding individual assignments.

0%-59.99% = F, 60%-69.99% = D, 70%-79.99% = C, 80%-89.99% = B, 90%-100% = A

Academic Dishonesty

Academic dishonesty constitutes a major breach of the trust that exists between the instructor and the student. It includes passing off another’s ideas as one’s own, any attempt to gain information about a test or exam prior to the test or exam date without the instructor’s consent, and providing unauthorized assistance on a test, exam, paper, or other assignment to another student. Copying text directly off of the Internet obviously constitutes cheating, but so does rewriting materials found on-line in one’s “own words” without proper attribution. Any time that a person uses—in any way—another person’s words or ideas without appropriately crediting them is an instance of plagiarism. Cheating on any assignment—no matter how seemingly trivial—will result in a failing grade for this course. Students who fail for academic dishonesty will not have the option of withdrawing. If you are have ANY doubt about what plagiarism means, or about how to appropriately document sources in your work, please contact me; I will be happy to help.

ADA Statement

Any Eureka College student with a disability or other special circumstances requiring accommodations or other considerations in order to successfully complete the requirements of this course is requested to identify him/herself to the instructor and discuss the matter privately. This disclosure should be made within the first week of the course.

Learning Center

The Learning Center, located on the first floor of Alumni Hall, provides academic services to all Eureka College students. Consultations are available in the areas of math and writing. Study groups, individual academic counseling and course specific tutoring sessions are also available by contacting Jason Zimmerman, Director of the Learning Center, by e-mail or by calling 6520. The Learning Center's hours will be posted around campus within the first two weeks of classes.

I strongly encourage you to take your papers to the Learning Center's Writing Tutors; this is an excellent—and *free*—service that can greatly improve the effectiveness of your written work.

Course synopsis (may be subject to change)

Please note that assignments are listed on the days that they are *due*.

1/17: Martin Luther King, Jr. Day: no class. *Be sure to complete the reading assignments for 1/24 before our first meeting.*

1/24: On e-reserve: "Chaucer's Life," from *The Riverside Chaucer*.
In DV: "A Quick Course in Chaucer's Language" (xvii-xx) and the following short poems: "Chaucer's Words to Adam, His Own Scribe" (pp. 216-17); "Merciless Beauty" (pp. 217-18); "To Rosemounde" (pp. 218-19); "Truth" (pp. 219-20); "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse" (pp. 225-26)

1/31: *The Book of the Duchess*, lines 1-751 (DV)
A medieval dream vision: Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, excerpt from *The Romance of the Rose* (DV pp. 275-81)

Group 1 response papers due on Friday, 1/28, by 8:00 pm

2/7: *The Book of the Duchess*, lines 752-1334 (end) (DV)
A medieval love vision: Guillaume de Machaut, excerpt from *The Fountain of Love* (DV pp. 284-299)

Group 2 response papers due on Friday, 2/4, by 8:00 pm

2/14: *The Parliament of Fowls* (DV)
A source text: Alain de Lille, excerpt from *The Complaint of Nature* (DV pp. 273-74)

Group 3 response papers due on Friday, 2/11, by 8:00 pm

2/21: *The Legend of Good Women*, "Prologue," "Cleopatra," "Thisbe," and "Dido" (DV pp. 117-156)
A critical response: Elaine Tuttle Hansen, "The Feminization of Men in Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women*" (DV pp. 352-65)

Group 1 response papers due on Friday, 2/18, by 8:00 pm

- 2/28: *The Legend of Good Women*, all remaining legends (DV pp. 156-189)
Critical Summary due
- 3/7: *General Prologue* lines I.43-78; “The Knight’s Tale,” parts 1 and 2 (I.859-1880) (CT)
Group 2 response papers due on Friday, 3/4, by 8:00 pm
- 3/14: Spring Break
- 3/21: “The Knight’s Tale,” parts 3 and 4 (I.1881-3108 [end])
Group 3 response papers due on Friday, 3/18, by 8:00 pm **If you know that you will be unable to submit your paper over the break, please submit it before you leave campus.**
- 3/28: *General Prologue* lines I.545-66; “The Miller’s Prologue and Tale” and “The Reeve’s Prologue and Tale”
A sample fabliau: “The Three Guests of Heile of Bersele” (CT pp. 341-43)
Group 1 response papers due on Friday, 3/25, by 8:00 pm
- 4/4: *General Prologue* lines I.285-304; “The Clerk’s Tale”
Paper proposal due; individual appointments with professor
- 4/11: *General Prologue* lines I.331-60; “The Franklin’s Tale”
Group 2 response papers due on Friday, 4/8, by 8:00 pm
- 4/18: *General Prologue* lines I.118-62; “The Prioress’s Tale”; “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”
Re. “Prioress”: Pope Gregory X, from “On Christian Mistreatment of Jews” (CT pp. 449-50)
Re. “Nun’s Priest”: Macrobius, from “On Dreams” (CT pp. 461-62)
Group 3 response papers due on Friday, 4/15, by 8:00 pm
- 4/25: *Easter Monday: no class*
Small-group workshops with professor (to be scheduled): Final paper draft due in workshop.
Etymological exploration due in my office by 3:00 on Wednesday, 4/27.
- 5/2: *General Prologue* lines 477-528; “The Parson’s Tale”; “Chaucer’s Retraction.” Class meets at professor’s home for A Medieval Banquet (of sorts) and A Debate: Did Chaucer intend his retraction seriously?

Final paper due in my office or mailbox (#118) by 3:00 pm on Friday, 5/6.

Final Exam: Monday, 5/9, at 6:00 pm.

Assignments

This is a “W”-designated course. As such, it requires a lot of writing, including a multi-step paper for which you will submit a proposal and a draft to be workshopped by a few of your peers. “W” courses are premised on the fact that writing is itself a learning process, and that one’s ideas and the sophistication of one’s thought can be improved through the practices of writing, drafting, and revising. In addition, this course is designed to increase your ability to research effectively for an English paper and to understand and synthesize secondary scholarship about literature.

Response papers (10%). Every week (or nearly), one-third of the class will submit response papers to the entire class through the shared folder in Groupwise. Each student will therefore submit a total of 3 response papers throughout the course of the semester. Response papers should be at least 500 words long, and will be due on the Friday before class meets.

Before class meets on Monday evening, all students are expected to read the submitted response papers and write up comments on them; you will bring these to class and submit them to me at the end of each class meeting. They will count towards your grade (see below).

Students will be told on the first day of class on which dates they will share their papers.

Response papers should *not* be about your personal experience of reading, but rather about the ideas that occur to you as you read. You may also ask questions about the reading (especially as the language can be rather difficult), make connections between different texts, or discuss anything else that occurs to you as you read. I will give you a grade and feedback on each of your response papers, so you’ll have a way of knowing whether you’re on the right track.

Each response paper will be worth 33 points (x 3 papers = 99). Everyone gets 1 bonus point, for a total of 100 in this category.

Response paper comments (5%). As noted above, you will submit your notes on other students’ response papers to me at the end of every class meeting. There is no required length for notes; I just want to see thoughtful, critical engagement with each response paper. You may ask questions, note down what you thought was interesting, argue with the response paper, or contribute additional support to the response paper’s argument(s). You are responsible for commenting on the other response papers on the weeks when your own response papers are due.

Because there are nine response papers, you will receive 5 points for each set of comments (= 45 points). Everyone will also get 5 free points, for a possible total of 50 in this category.

Critical Summary (15%). A 4-page, double-spaced paper in which you will summarize and synthesize two critical articles about one of the Chaucer poems that we read in the first month of the course. You do not need to make an original argument in this paper; you should, instead, focus on clearly and accurately representing the articles that you have read and how they relate to one another. I will provide you with a list of article options early in the semester. Due 2/28.

Etymological exploration (10%). As you read, keep an eye out for words that have changed meaning from Chaucer’s day to the present. We will discuss these weekly. At some point in the semester, you will hand in a short (2-page, double-spaced) paper tracing the ways in which one such word’s meaning has changed and what that might mean for our present usage of the word. Use the Oxford English Dictionary, look up instances of the word’s use, and describe (or speculate about) its evolution. You may also discuss your reason for selecting your particular word. The absolute deadline for this paper is 4/27, but you may hand it in anytime before then.

Final paper (35%). A 10-page paper that involves library research and the incorporation of secondary sources. On April 4, you will submit a proposal for your paper (a tentative thesis, outline, and bibliography) and schedule a meeting with the professor to discuss your paper. Over the following few weeks, it is expected that you will be researching and drafting your paper. We will not have class in the last week of April because of Easter Break; during that week, students will workshop drafts in small groups with the help of the professor.

Note: There's a major conference in medieval studies at Western Michigan University in Kalamazoo, MI in May of every year; they do accept undergraduate papers, and abstract submissions are due on September 15. You might think about submitting a paper for this conference, especially if you're interested in graduate study.

This paper is worth 350 points. The proposal and the first draft will each be worth 25 points. Workshop participation will be worth 50 points. The remaining 250 points will be for the paper itself.

Final exam (15%). The exam will be in three parts: Middle English reading (scheduled individually): *50 points*. Modern English rendering of a Middle English passage (during exam): *50 points*. Essay (during exam): *50 points*.

During the scheduled final exam, you will be given a passage from a Chaucer poem that we have not read for the course. Your assignment will be to provide a Modern English rendering of the passage and to relate the passage to topics and texts that we have covered in class. A part of the exam will also consist of your reading to me a passage in Middle English (with correct pronunciation); this portion of the exam will take place prior to the final exam date. More specific details about the exam will be given closer to the end of the semester.

Participation (10%). This is a seminar; each student is expected to contribute actively to discussion every week and to listen respectfully to other students. Engaging in activities unrelated to the course during class time, such as sleeping or filling out your day planner, will lower your participation grade. Needless to say, texting or other cell phone use during class is not permitted.

There are a few things that I would like you to watch out for as you read in preparation for each class session:

- 1) *Complicated syntax that you can't follow and words that you can't figure out how to pronounce.* We'll spend a portion of each class meeting reading aloud and unpacking complicated passages. I will expect each of you to occasionally suggest passages for further exploration and decoding.
- 2) *Words whose meanings have changed.* During every meeting, we will spend a little while talking about English etymology and the development of the language. Try to find at least one word per reading assignment that you would like to learn more about in class.