

**English 303: Chaucer
Spring 2008**

Ms. Dobbs

Office: Mears 213, ext. 3108

Office Hours: TTh 4:15-4:45; W 3:30-5 or by appointment

But, natheless, certeyn,
I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn
That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly
On metres and on rymyng craftily,
Hath seyde hem in swich Englissh as he kan
Of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man;
And if he have noght seyde hem, leve brother,
In o book, he hath seyde hem in another.

The Man of Law's Introduction, ll.45-52

His art was an art of analysis, one that demanded well-honed techniques of indirection and ambiguity that would urge an audience less toward judgment than toward the ability to frame intelligent or provocative questions. (*Languages of Power in the Age of Richard II*, L. Staley, 68)

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This seminar involves a close study of most of the *Canterbury Tales*, with emphasis on kinds of narrative, acts of interpretation, the nature of language, women's voices, and anything else that interests us.

Your most important responsibility in the course is to prepare readings well enough to participate intelligently in discussions. Allow yourself **four to five hours** for this preparation; come to class with good notes from which you could present an explication if called upon to do so.

(In your reading, be sure to use of the Glossary at the back of our text. Other reference works that could be useful are: the *Middle English Dictionary* (MED) by Kurath & Kuhn (PE679.M54), Davis's *A Chaucer Glossary* (PR1941.C5x), Tatlock & Kennedy's *Concordance to the Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer* (PR1941.T3), and Benson's *A Glossarial Concordance to the Riverside Chaucer* (PR1941.B46). The first is in the reference section of the library; the rest are on reserve under our course number.)

Your other responsibilities are to: 1) present at least two oral explications of readings; 2) pass surprise quizzes; 3) write an argument (1250 words) comparing either *The Miller's Tale* and *The Reeve's Tale* (due in class on February 19th) or *The Friar's Tale* and *The Summoner's Tale* (due in class on March 4th); 4) give a ten-minute oral presentation of this argument (during that same class); 5) at your convenience, but no later than April 11th, have a conference with me about a possible seminar paper topic; 6) write an argument (3000-3750 words) on that topic (due in my office by noon on May 7th); and 7) give a fifteen-minute oral presentation on work-in-progress on the seminar paper (April 29th or May 1).

Please note that **late work is not accepted**. Your course grade will be determined on these percentages: intelligent participation in seminar discussions, 30%; oral explications, 15%; formal oral presentations, 10%; reading Middle English and occasional unannounced quizzes, 5%; 1250-word argument, 15%; seminar paper, 25%.

The required text for this course is *The Canterbury Tales* (2000), edited by Larry Benson. It has useful "Explanatory Notes" (333 ff) that you should try to read in conjunction with assignments. However, if pressed for time, opt for a second reading of a tale.

When you begin work on your seminar paper, the website of the New Chaucer Society at <http://artsci.wustl.edu/~chaucer/bibliography.php> and the Internet MLA International Bibliography, within The Literature Resource Center and accessed through Burling Library's "Databases and Indexes" at

<http://www.lib.grinnell.edu/research/Databases/index.htm>, could be useful. But I suggest not reading secondary literature about Chaucer or the tales before you've developed your project, because too early a reading of criticism may impede your understanding rather than advance it. You might, however, find *Sources and Analogues of the Canterbury Tales*, vols. 1 & 2, edited by Correale and Hamel (2002), interesting. I've put them on reserve for us.

Foreign Language Option: If you have sufficient knowledge of Latin, Italian, or French, you might choose to base your seminar paper on a translation of something in one of these languages. "Sufficient knowledge" generally means you've reached the 300-level in language study. The Latin option involves reading passages from Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* (Book II, Prose 1 and Poem 8; Book III, Poem 9); the Italian, reading one of a couple of tales from Boccaccio's *Decameron*; and the French, reading two fabliaux, "De Berangier au Lonc Cul" and/or "Le Meunier et les II Cleres." If you're interested in this option, please meet with me before Spring Break.

SCHEDULE

WK. CLASS

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| 1 | A | <p>Introduction to the course
Lecture: How to Pronounce the 14th century East Midland Dialect of Middle English
Practice reading (already!): from <i>The Nun's Priest's Tale</i></p> <p>Over the first weeks of the semester, I'll briefly set out, not necessarily in this order, some thoughts about Chaucer, our guesses as to his audience, the historical background of late 14th-century English, pilgrimage both in general and that to Canterbury, and the unique and wonderful structure of framed collections of tales.</p> <p>Besides the preparation for next time set out below, you should begin working with tapes of the <i>General Prologue</i> in the Music Listening Room (C391cs; on reserve under English 303). Also, for a bit less than an hour on the first three Friday afternoons of the semester (1/25, 2/1, 2/8) at a time that would work for the greatest number of interested people, I would be happy to have a Middle English Reading Group (MERG) for the members of this class. You would be able to practice Middle English and get a head start on the next Tuesday's reading. Please let me know by next class if you're interested.</p> |
| | B | <p>Background Reading Assignment: "Chaucer's Life" xiii-xxiii, "Chronology of Life and Times" xxiii-xxv.).
<i>General Prologue</i>, I, 1-360 (Be prepared to read a passage of at least five lines.)</p> |
| 2 | A | <p><i>General Prologue</i>, I, 361-858 (Be prepared to read an entire portrait.)
"Language and Versification" xxvi-xxxviii (skim xxix-xxxviii, but use for future reference)</p> |
| | B | <p><i>The Knight's Tale</i>, I, 859-1354</p> |
| 3 | A | <p><i>The Knight's Tale</i>, I, 1355-1880</p> |
| | B | <p><i>The Knight's Tale</i>, I, 1881-3108</p> |
| 4 | A | <p><i>The Miller's Prologue and Tale</i></p> |
| | B | <p><i>The Reeve's Prologue and Tale</i></p> |
| 5 | A | <p>Presentation and discussion of arguments (February 19)</p> |

- 6 B *The Man of Law's Introduction, Prologue, and Tale*
 A *The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale*
- B *The Friar's Prologue and Tale*
- 7 A *The Summoner's Prologue and Tale*; presentation and discussion of arguments (March 4)
- B *The Clerk's Prologue and Tale*
- 8 A *The Merchant's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue*
- B *The Franklin's Prologue and Tale*
- 9 A *The Pardoner's Introduction, Prologue, and Tale*
- B *The Shipman's Tale*
- 10 A *The Prioress's Prologue and Tale*
The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas
- B *The Prologue and Tale of Melibee*
The Monk's Prologue
- 11 A *The Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue*
- B *The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale*
- 12 A *The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale*
- B Work on seminar paper
- 13 A Work-in-progress presentations
- B Work-in-progress presentations
- 14 A Complete work on seminar paper

Seminar paper due in my office, Wednesday, May 7 by noon.

- B *The Manciple's Prologue and Tale*
The Parson's Prologue
 "Heere taketh the makere of this book his leve" (page 310)
 Which tale would you choose as the prize-winner in the tale-telling contest?