

ENLT 235: Literature in the Age of Chaucer
Spring 2006

This course fulfills several curricular requirements.

- For *English majors*, it satisfies the Area A (Medieval/Renaissance) requirement, one course of the GE writing intensive requirement, and the theory-intensive requirement.
- For *other majors* it satisfies the GE area culture (CL) and writing intensive (W) requirements.

Prerequisites: see page 138 of the 2005-06 Undergraduate Catalogue. Before you take this course you must have satisfied the GE competency requirement for writing (usually by taking WRTG 107), and you must have taken ENLT 140 or its equivalent (ENLT course numbered 120-179).

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Course description: the course will explore non-dramatic English literature of the fourteenth century, focusing on selected tales from Chaucer's Canterbury Tales and examining these against the context of other late medieval writings, including Piers Plowman, poems of the Gawain poet, and the writings of Margery Kempe and Julian of Norwich. In the case of the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, we will examine the text from the perspective of modern literary theory, as well.

Course aims: the course will introduce you to late medieval literature and to some of the theoretical perspectives informing current readings of it. After completing the course, you will recognize major literature of the late fourteenth century and understand something of the cultural and literary contexts contributing to the production of these works; you will also read, write, and discuss literary texts more analytically.

Ways of achieving aims: The readings, including a variety of genres, will be organized thematically so as to provide easier access to medieval traditions and cultural contexts (pilgrimage, gender roles, etc.) So that you may take part in class discussion successfully, you should read all assignments before the beginning of class on the day the reading is listed on the syllabus. After reading and discussing texts, you will write about them, in **six essays** of at least **835 words each**. You should also expect exams which will test your knowledge of literary texts and the contexts of these texts.

Evaluation: 60% Six Short essays (essays on topics #1, 3, and 4 are obligatory; the other three essays should be selected from among the topics listed for #2, 5, 6, 7, 8 below).

30% Examinations (Midterm 10%; Final 20%)

10% Class participation

Required texts:

- Beidler, Peter, ed. Geoffrey Chaucer: The Wife of Bath. Casebook Studies in Contemporary Criticism. Bedford, St. Martin, 1996.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. The Canterbury Tales: Fifteen Tales and the General Prologue. Ed. V. A. Kolve and Glending Olson. New York: W.W. Norton, 2005.
- Dunn, Charles W. and Edward T. Byrnes, eds. Middle English Literature. New York: Garland, 1990. [Since this book will be used primarily for background, I will place it on reserve in the library.]
- Langland, William. Piers Plowman: An Alliterative Verse Translation. Trans. E. Talbot Donaldson. Ed., intro'd, and annotated by Elizabeth D. Kirk and Judith H. Anderson. New York: W.W. Norton, 1990.
- Miller, Robert P., ed. Chaucer: Sources and Backgrounds. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Patience, and Pearl: Verse Translations. Trans. Marie Borroff. New York: W.W. Norton, 2001.
- Wilson, Katharina M., ed. Medieval Women Writers. Athens, GA: U of Georgia P, 1984.

Note: all English literature courses require Gibaldi's MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers, latest edition. If you do not already have this book, you should buy it.

Papers: due on the date assigned (see the attached schedule). Papers should be typed or printed following MLA guidelines. These include black print, left justification, one-inch margins and double-spacing. As Gibaldi points out, research papers do not need title pages, but do need a heading on the first page. I have indicated the heading I want on the essay assignment page. Clip pages together with a metal paper clip. Late papers will be penalized 8 points for each day they are late; no paper will be accepted after an entire set has been graded and returned.

Attendance: More than four absences will earn you an F in this course. Use your cuts accordingly. If you miss an examination, I will give a make-up only if you provide me with a letter from your dean explaining why I should do so. You are responsible for all material covered and all announcements made in class, whether or not you are present. If you leave class, you are not in attendance—leaving to get a drink, etc., counts as a late. I count two late-arrivals as one absence.

Participation: If you attend regularly, you will earn a C. If you want a better grade, you should respond to questions, ask questions, and respond to one another's comments—in other words, take part. Feel free to agree or disagree with me or other students, and be ready to support your point by giving reasons.

Plagiarism: The University of Scranton's Academic Code of Honesty follows the Modern Language Association in defining plagiarism as “giving the impression that you have written or thought something that you have in fact borrowed from someone else” (II.A). Plagiarism on papers, exams, or quizzes will be penalized in accordance with the University's Academic Code of Honesty. If you have any questions as to whether or not you should use quotations or how you should cite a particular source, consult the MLA Handbook for Writers of Research Papers (our discipline's standard) and then see me. To learn more about the University's policy on plagiarism, go to: http://www.scranton.edu/student_handbook/ Academic Code of Honesty Section II A. Plagiarism.

Schedule of Readings and Assignments (2006): the following schedule follows a thematic progress geared to examining the literature of the late fourteenth-century in terms of the society and the literary traditions informing the literature. In the first weeks we will examine the nature of pilgrimage from the perspective of Chaucer and Langland. At the same time we will learn about the division of medieval society into “estates.” As we look at the remaining literature, the idea of estates will help guide our readings, although we will progress into other areas as well. A good part of the course will be concerned with literature written from the perspective of the “second estate”—courtly, chivalric literature, and those literary forms such as romance which are typical of that culture.

Week 1, Jan. 31-Febr. 2

- Tuesday: Introduction to the Age of Chaucer: the period, the course, the assignments. Introduction to Chaucer’s language. Background on Chaucer’s language: Kolve and Olsen: xv-xix.
- Thursday: Read Chaucer’s General Prologue, with a special focus on the portraits of the Knight, the Monk, the Parson, and the Plowman. Cultural context: read “Pilgrimage” (Kolve and Olsen 326-32); “[On the Estates]” (Kolve and Olsen 333-35); “[On Monks]” (Kolve and Olsen 337-39).

Week 2, Febr. 7- 9

- Tuesday: **Short Essay #1 on the General Prologue due.** Read Piers Plowman, Prologue, Passus I, II, III. Cultural context: read Kolve and Olsen [“On Dreams” 461-62].
- Thursday: Read Piers Plowman, Passus IV, V, VI, VII.

Week 3, Febr. 14-16 (Happy Valentine’s Day!)

- Tuesday: **Short Essay #2 due.** Read Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Prologue; contexts: read Miller 452-56; 467-73.
- Thursday: Read Chaucer’s Wife of Bath’s Tale; Kolve and Olsen 359-69.

Week 4, Febr. 21-23

- Tuesday: **Short Essay #3 due.** Read Beidler, “Marxist Criticism,” 155-88.
- Thursday: Read Beidler, “Feminist Criticism,” 255-89.

Week 5, Febr. 28-Mar. 2

- Tuesday: Read Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale, Parts I & II. Literary context: read Miller 66-68, 190-91. Handout.
- Thursday: Read Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale, Parts III & IV. Literary context: Miller 289-90 (the tale’s conclusion); 208-09 (courtly love). **Short Essay #4 due.**

Week 6, March 7-9

- Tuesday: Read Chaucer’s Miller’s Tale. Literary context: read Kolve and Olsen 341-43.
- Thursday: Read Chaucer’s Pardoner’s Prologue and Tale. Literary context: read Kolve and Olsen 431-38.

Week 7, March 14-16

- Tuesday: Review the Clerk's portrait in the General Prologue, then read Chaucer's Clerk's Prologue and Tale, Parts I & II. Literary source: Kolve and Olsen 407-21. **Short Essay #5** due.
- Thursday: Read Chaucer's Clerk's Prologue and Tale to the end.

Week 8, March 21-23.

- Tuesday: **In-class Midterm exam**
- Read Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Fitts 1 & 2. Cultural and literary connections, read Dunn and Byrnes 205-07, 376.

Note: the quarter ends March 24.

Week 9, March 28-30

- Tuesday: Read Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Fitt 3 & 4. **Short Essay #6 due.** Context: Miller 200-03.
- Thursday: Read the first half of Patience

Week 10, Apr. 4-8

- Tuesday: Read the second half of Patience
- Thursday: Tuesday: Read The Booke of Margery Kempe (Medieval Women Writers 297-319)

Week 11, Apr. 11-13

- Tuesday: Review the Prioress's portrait in the GP, then read Chaucer's Prioress's Prologue and Tale. Context: read Kolve and Olsen 439-50.
- Thursday: No class: Happy Easter.

Week 12, April 18-20

- Tuesday: No class: Spring break
- Thursday: Read Chaucer's Franklin's Prologue and Tale, lines 1-414. **Short Essay #7.**

Week 13, April 25-27

- Tuesday: Read Chaucer's Franklin's Prologue and Tale to the end.
- Thursday: Read Julian of Norwich (Medieval Women Writers 269-96). Cultural and literary contexts: Miller 344-48; Dunn and Byrnes 106-07; 109.

Week 14, May 2-4

- Tuesday: Read the first third of Pearl.
- Thursday: No class: I will be attending the Medieval Congress in Kalamazoo, Michigan, from Wednesday through Sunday.

Week 15, May 11-13: Read the rest of Pearl. Short Essay #8 due on Thursday.

List of Essay Topics
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As you write these short essays, think of them as a chance to explore your ideas of what a particular text is about. I do not mean that you should comment on your emotional reaction to a particular text (although that may well be the reason you choose to write about it). Rather, you should try out interpretations, put your ideas into written form as part of the process of interpretation, and support your interpretations with evidence. You should seek to make connections, suggest relationships, or offer explanations for similarities and contrasts you see among different parts of a text. Or you may find that you want to trace connections between a literary text and other readings which I list as background.

Write essays on six of the following topics. You must write an essay on #1, 3, and 4; the other three topics should be selected from among #2, 5, 6, 7, 8. Each essay will be a minimum of 837 words (about three pages, depending on the font you use).

Follow MLA format and include a Works Cited page.

Due dates are listed in the tentative schedule of assignments and readings.

Please use the following heading for all essays:

Student Name
Dr. Beal
Essay #
Date Due
Word Count:

1. Write on one of the following topics:

- The General Prologue. Locate a figure of speech or a literary image that needs to be interpreted in the poem. Identify it and explain its significance for the immediate passage and for the larger context (the portrait in which it appears, for instance.)
- Examine a portrait from Chaucer's General Prologue in light of contemporary estates criticism, as exemplified by Gower's discussion of Monks in Kolve and Olsen. You may want to look at the passages in Miller providing medieval assessments of various estates: Knights (156-210); Parsons, Clerks, Monks, and Nuns (215-28); Plowmen (233).

2. Piers Plowman

- Compare and contrast two figures in the poem which are gendered and/or identified in terms of their role in society. Be careful not to submit a couple of laundry lists: suggest why Langland presents the figures, what the point of their contrasting/complementary presence might entail. If you select a figure with a social role (a knight, the King), you may want to look at medieval descriptions, found in Miller's text, of the proper roles of these figures.
- Imagine a scene described in Piers Plowman and put yourself in the poem. What do you see? Where are you? How does your presence in the poem affect

what is going on, if it does? What do you come to learn about the poem as you put yourself in it?

3. Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale

- Read the Wife of Bath's Prologue or Tale very carefully. In addition to herself (and she is, of course, very important), what other female characters are mentioned? What behaviors, values, or associations do these have? How do these figures complement, support, or undercut the narrator's self-presentation? Your essay will discuss a minor female character to indicate how it works, perhaps as a foil for the narrator.
- Is Alice of Bath a victim, a predator, both, or neither? Support your argument with textual references that demonstrate your understanding of Chaucer's Middle English.
- Discuss how economics affects Alice of Bath's understanding of marriage and sex. Support your argument with textual references that demonstrate your understanding of Chaucer's Middle English.

4. Theoretical Perspective:

Rewrite essay #3 from the perspective of one of the critical positions studied in Beidler.

5. Knight's Tale and Miller's Prologue and Tale.

- Knight's Tale. Write an essay comparing a passage of Chaucer's tale with its analogue in Boccaccio's Teseida or Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy. Your aim is to ask why or how Chaucer adapts his source, and to suggest an answer, which you support with carefully selected textual details.
- Miller's Tale. Write a short essay exploring Chaucer's use or adaptation of a specific literary technique such as effictio mentioned in the anthology by Miller. Identify a short passage where the technique is used, then suggest what effect the technique has on the context, both the immediate passage and the tale as a whole.

6. Write on one of the following topics:

- Write a short essay exploring an aspect of the Clerk's Tale utilizing what you have learned from your readings to date. You might, for instance, focus on Chaucer's use of sources, or of literary techniques, or cultural backgrounds regarding the role of lords in estates theory. Again, look for inconsistencies, disjunctions, connections, or surprises, and focus on one of these as a way into your exploration.
- Analyze a short passage of the Clerk's Tale in detail. Discuss the significance of the passage for the longer tale, and as you do so think about imagery, stylistic technique, sound effects, and allusion.

7. Write an essay about Patience. The topic and treatment is up to you.

8. Write about language in Pearl. Find a stanza of Pearl you like, then compare with the equivalent stanza in Dunn and Byrnes. What difficulties would a translator face?

Guide to Comments on Your Essay

When I return an essay, go over the essay and my comments, and use this handout to help you understand the successful elements and the problems I've encountered while reading your essay. Think about these successes and problems as you write future papers. The letters and numbers in the margin of your paper can be matched with positive comments, problems, and revision techniques listed below.

_A. Content

- _ 1. Opening:
 - _ a. Interesting: neither too much nor too little information.
 - _ b. Puzzling: I need more context or a fuller explanation of how we all view this topic if I am going to understand where you are heading..
 - _ c. Too much context: make this information concise.
 - _ d. Too many assumptions. Either your readers will not have connections for these ideas, or we may not agree with how you portray our common knowledge.
 - _ e. Boring! Think harder about how to interest your reader in your topic.

- _ 2. The main focus of your essay:
 - _ a. I can easily find your main claim and look forward to reading further.
 - _ b. I'm having trouble finding your main claim or thesis. Is there a single sentence in the essay indicating your topic? Usually, this statement will appear toward the beginning. If it appears later, or is implied instead of stated directly, you need to revise.
 - _ c. Your main focus is too obvious. Most readers would either agree or ask "So what?"

- _ 3. Evidence
 - _ a. You've included appropriate examples, illustrations, or textual material from the text to help readers understand your position and the solutions you propose.
 - _ b. This paper provides insufficient evidence to substantiate your proposed solutions. Provide more and better support or data for what you argue.

- _ 4. Connections between assertions and evidence
 - _ a. I can see how the evidence you provide supports the argument: you've provided adequate warrants.
 - _ b. How this evidence fits within the framework of your argument is unclear. Make the connection for readers or find new evidence.

- _ 5. Conclusion of the Essay
 - _ a. Well-planned and executed.
 - _ b. Adequate, but could be improved.
 - _ c. Weak.

_ B. Coherence

_ 1. Your chunks of text flow smoothly and are easily understood. The order in which you present your material is effective, and you've included appropriate transitions to help me follow your argument from one idea to the next.

_ 2. At least one of your passages confuses me. Either connect it with the rest of the paper or check whether it falls in an appropriate logical order of subclaims.

_ 3. You have used an inappropriate word or words in at least one passage, making it confusing. Insert a word or words that more closely approximates what you intend.

_ C. Sentence Level Problems: I have placed a check before any line with a spelling, punctuation, or mechanical error. Below are specific problems that you should revise in future papers.

- | | |
|---------------------------|---|
| _ 1. Comma error | _ 5. Sentence fragment |
| _ 2. Semicolon error | _ 6. Comma splice |
| _ 3. Quotation mark error | _ 7. Spelling error |
| _ 4. Pronoun error | _ 8. This sentence needs a strong character and action--not a verb of being |
| _9. Other | |

_ D. Citations

_ 1. Internal references are clearly marked, in proper MLA format.

_ 2. Internal citations need attention: either you have not clearly marked your source or you have not cited it using proper MLA format. (Check Gibaldi for the proper way to cite this source.)

_ 3. You followed the appropriate format for quoting prose or poetry.

_ 4. You have not followed the appropriate format for quoting prose or poetry.

_ 5. Your Works Cited page follows correct MLA format throughout.

_ 6. Your Works Cited page either does not give the information a reader needs, or it does not follow MLA format in presenting that information. Check Gibaldi for the proper way to present your Works Cited page.