**ENGL 335: Chaucer’s Poetry**

**T/F 2:10-3:25 PM**

**Room: 407 HW**

Instructor: Mr. A. Baldassano

E-mail: [abaldassano@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:abaldassano@gc.cuny.edu)

Office: 1238 HW

Office Hours: Tuesday 11:30-12:30 & by appt.

The Middle Ages, contrary to expectations following its misleading nickname as the “Dark Ages,” certainly were anything *but* stagnant and backward, as even a brief overview of Chaucer’s life during the turbulent fourteenth century will suggest. Born at the beginning of the Hundred Years War between France and England and growing up as a young child during the first outbreak of the Black Death in 1347, Chaucer was no stranger to political as well as daily social turbulence. While this particular childhood biography points to Chaucer’s poetic attention to matters of politics and mortality, an overview of his poetry suggests, moreover, its especial attention to everyday matters and the world of the living. In considering these contexts, students will be encouraged to consider links to other European literature of the preceding and contemporary time periods, as Chaucer’s works are intricately engaged with source materials.

This course, then, is a thorough introduction to the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer. There will be a particular focus on the *Canterbury Tales*, but we will also consider selections from his earlier dream vision poetry. In discussing the broad range of work in Chaucer’s repertoire, we will also practice various approaches to the texts, which include using etymological analysis, classical and medieval dream theory, historical context, contemporary critical approaches, and more, as Chaucer’s poetry is diverse enough to preclude the use of any singular method of approach. By engaging with a variety of approaches, we will be able to conduct lively discussions and provoke further research questions to contribute to the critical conversations about Chaucer and his poetry that have been ongoing for centuries.

No previous knowledge of Middle English is required, and so students will learn, over the course of the semester, to read, translate, and pronounce Chaucer’s English. Students also will be introduced to rudimentary paleography and manuscript illustrations in order to enable work with electronic facsimiles of those manuscripts. Requirements will include regular quizzes, two papers, a midterm, and a final.

**Required Texts**

* course packet of dream visions (provided)
* (available at Shakespeare and Company across the street): Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tale,* edited by Jill Man, Penguin Classics paperback, ISBN

978-0-14-042234-4, price: $21 new, $15 used (also rentable). *\*Please note that this particular edition is required. Absolutely no “Modern English translations” are allowed!\**

**Course Expectations**

*Attendance*: Students who miss four or more sessions without reasonable justifications are likely to fail the course. More than two absences will begin to affect your grade. You are expected to have your texts with you every day; arriving unprepared is equivalent to tardiness or absence.

*Lateness*: Class begins at 2:10 PM every day. We will often begin class with written reading responses and vocabulary quizzes, and late students will not have the opportunity to make up missed assignments. These activities are not mere busy-work; rather, they are designed to help you develop your skills in both reading Middle English and thinking critically about the poetry. Three latenesses will count as one absence.

*Participation*: This course is a seminar-style course, meaning that I will not spend the entire 75 minutes lecturing. Instead, group discussions often will be the majority of the class. Therefore, students must be prepared to ask questions and discuss their ideas about the readings and written assignments. Annotating the texts while reading is an essential way to prepare for class discussions. Quality as well as quantity count for participation.

I encourage open discussion, but “open” does not mean boundless. Derogatory comments and discourse including, but not limited to, racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia, etc., will not be tolerated.

*Classroom Etiquette/Cell phone/Laptop Policy*: Please keep your cell phones on silent during class. There is no texting allowed. Laptops are allowed only for note-taking; internet must be shut off during the duration of the class. Students may drink beverages and eat during class, so long as it is not disruptive (so, please avoid crinkly bags or complex meals that require forks and knives – besides the meal being disruptive, you will need your hands free for writing). You must use the standard editions of our texts for classroom discussions, written assignments, and exams.

*Contact*: I can answer quick questions via e-mail ([abaldassano@gc.cuny.edu](mailto:abaldassano@gc.cuny.edu)). I nearly always respond to e-mails within a day. If you are in need of help with something more complex than what can be covered in a short e-mail, we can meet during my scheduled office hours or make an appointment.

*Academic Integrity*: Any instance of plagiarism (even one sentence in a first draft!) will be reported immediately to the dean. The college officially states that:

Hunter College regards acts of academic dishonesty (e.g., plagiarism, cheating on examinations, obtaining unfair advantage, and falsification of records and official documents) as serious offenses against the values of intellectual honesty. The College is committed to enforcing the CUNY Policy on Academic Integrity and will pursue cases of academic dishonesty according to the Hunter College Academic Integrity Procedures.

*Writing Center*: The Hunter College Reading/Writing Center offers FREE one-on-one tutoring. You may visit the center at any stage of the writing process—brainstorming, drafting, outlining, revising, etc. The writing center tutors are other students, so they will not grade or proofread your paper, but they will help you become a stronger writer. The Reading/Writing Center is located in the Thomas Hunter building (room 416) and is open on **TBD**. For more information, visit their website: http://rwc.hunter.cuny.edu/index.html

*Statement of Accommodation*: In compliance with the American Disability Act of 1990 (ADA) and with Section 504 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973, Hunter College is committed to ensuring educational parity and accommodations for all students with documented disabilities and/or medical conditions. It is recommended that all students with documented disabilities (Emotional, Medical, Physical and/ or Learning) consult the Office of Access ABILITY located in Room E1124 to secure necessary academic accommodations.  For further information and assistance please call (212- 772- 4857)/TTY (212- 650- 3230).

*Reading Assignments*: Careful and engaged reading of every assigned text is not only required, but essential to your success as a developing writer/reader and the course as a whole. The texts that we will be reading are difficult, and so you may need to read multiple times to gain a fuller understanding. Write in the margins. Take notes and jot down questions. Look up words you don’t know. Mark off passages that you, personally, find particularly interesting, or particularly confusing, etc. You must bring the assigned text(s) to class and be ready to discuss what you have read. In-class writing assignments and quizzes will be based on out-of-class readings, and so you must keep up with assigned readings.

*Writing Assignments/Presentations and Grading Policies*: In the next sixteen weeks, you will do a lot of writing and revising. This includes formal essays, in-class writing assignments, and response papers. Late papers will be graded accordingly. In-class writing assignments and quizzes will be graded and cannot be made up.

Although your essays will undergo several revisions, the grades you receive on your papers will reflect your work on your final essays *and* drafts. Your writing will only improve if you genuinely work hard on your drafts and then make significant changes in your final essays.

* **Reading quizzes/attendance/participation (20%)**

You will take several quizzes at the beginning of class throughout the semester. These quizzes are not meant to trick you, but to encourage you to keep up with the readings and focus your thoughts for contributions to class discussions. Typically, you will be asked to respond to a discussion question which, if you have completed the reading, should be easy enough to answer, and will help focus your thoughts for class discussion. Your participation grade, as discussed above, is based on your attendance and the quantity and quality of your comments. Do not be afraid to talk!

* **Midterm (15%)**

We will discuss midterm requirements closer to the date of the exam.

* **Short essay (15%)**

Your first written paper will be a 4-5 page close-reading of a selection from one of Chaucer’s dream visions. We will discuss specific requirements in class.

* **Research paper (due in stages) (40%)**

You will write an 8-10 page research paper on a topic of your choice. Again, we will discuss specific requirements in class, but expect to select a particular methodological approach and to work with at least four scholarly sources (and remember, sources published on the internet are not acceptable scholarly sources!).

* **Final Tuesday, 5/19 11:30-1:30 [subject to change] (10%)**

Your final will include two medium-length essays designed to review some of the semester’s critical discussions of the texts and their contexts. More details to follow as we get closer to the final.

**Schedule of Readings** (schedule subject to change throughout semester)

Readings are to be completed *for the day they are scheduled*.

F 1/30: Intro to Chaucer’s life and times + reading Middle English

T 2/3: *Book of the Duchess* + [Bb] Ovid, from the *Metamorphoses*: Ceyx and Alcyone + [Bb] Macrobius, from the *Commentary on Scipio’s Dream*

F 2/6: *Book of the Duchess* + [Bb] Mary Wack, from *Lovesickness in the Middle Ages: The Viaticum and its Commentaries*

T 2/10: *House of Fame* + [Bb] Ovid’s *House of Fame or Rumor* + [Bb] Dante Alighieri, from the *Divine Comedy*

F 2/13: *House of Fame* + [JSTOR] “Imagination and the Complex Movement of Chaucer’s *House of Fame*,” Steven Kruger, *The Chaucer Review* 28.2 (1993), 117-134

T 2/17: *Parliament of Fowls* + [Bb] Cicero, from *Scipio’s Dream* + [Bb] Alain de Lille, from the *Complaint of Nature*

F 2/20: *Parliament of Fowls* + [Bb] “Ecofeminism and the Father of English Poetry: Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*,” Lesley Kordecki, *Interdisciplinary Studies in Literature and Environment* 10.1 (Winter 2003), 97-114

T 2/24: *General Prologue* + “Who was Chaucer?,” Paul Strohm [http://www.theguardian.com/books/2015/jan/24/who-was-chaucer-canterbury-tales]

F 2/27: *General Prologue* + **Paper #1 due**

T 3/3: *Knight’s Tale*

F 3/6: *Knight’s Tale* + [JSTOR] “Forsworn and Fordone: Arcite as Oath-Breaker in the ‘Knight’s Tale’,” Catherine A. Rock, *The Chaucer Review* 40.4 (2006), 416-432

T 3/10: paleography workshop & Chaucer Research Workshop

F 3/13: **MIDTERM DUE**

T 3/17: *Miller’s Prologue & Tale* + [Bb] “Chronicle Accounts of the Peasants’ Revolt,” in *Medieval England, 1000-1500: A Reader* (NY: Broadview, 2001): 350-57

F 3/20: *Miller’s Prologue & Tale*

T 3/24: *Reeve’s Prologue & Tale*

F 3/27: *Reeve’s Prologue & Tale*; *Cook’s Prologue & Tale*

T 3/31: *Man of Law’s Prologue, Tale, & Epilogue* + [Bb] “Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifeminism, and Heresy in Chaucer’s *Man of Law’s Tale*,” Susan Schibanoff, *Exemplaria* 8.1 (1996), 59-96

F 4/3: **Spring Recess**

T 4/7: **Spring Recess**

F 4/10: **Spring Recess**

T 4/14: *Wife of Bath’s Prologue* + [JSTOR] R. Howard Bloch, “Medieval Misogyny,” *Representations* 20 (1987): 1-20

F 4/17: *Wife of Bath’s Tale* +**Research Paper Proposal Due**with annotated bibliography of 5 secondary sources, in MLA format

T 4/21: *The Friar’s Prologue & Tale* + [JSTOR] Brantley L. Bryant, “‘By Extorcions I Lyve’: Chaucer’s *Friar’s Tale* and Corrupt Officials,” *The Chaucer Review* 42.2 (2007): 180-95

F 4/24: *The Summoner’s Prologue & Tale*; [Bb] Peter Travis, “Thirteen Ways of Listening to a Fart: Noise in Chaucer’s *Summoner’s Tale*,” *Exemplaria* 16.2 (2004)

T 4/28: *The Clerk’s Tale* + [Bb] Francis Petrarch, from *Letters of Old Age*

F 5/1: *The Franklin’s Prologue & Tale*; [JSTOR] Kathryn Lynch, “East Meets West in Chaucer’s *Squire’s* and *Franklin’s Tales*,” *Speculum* 70 (1995): 530-51

T 5/5: *Pardoner’s Prologue & Tale*; [JSTOR] Glenn Burger, “Kissing the Pardoner,” *PMLA* 107.5 (1992): 1143-1156

F 5/8: *Prioress’s Tale*; [Bb] Sylvia Tomasch, “Postcolonial Chaucer and the Virtual Jew,” in *The Postcolonial Middle Ages*, ed. Jeffrey Jerome Cohen (NY, 2000), 243-60

T 5/12: **LAST DAY** *Nun’s Priest’s Tale* + Chaucer’s *Retraction*

F 5/15: **Paper #2 due**