St Jerome's University
ENGL 310B
Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*
Monday nights, Autumn 2018

Contact Info:
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Course description (from the calendar):
A study of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales.*

Course overview:
Chaucer is a love poet, a satirist, and a late medieval Christian-humanist. *The Canterbury Tales* is his most accessible and popular work, his signature piece. It combines a vision of a symbolic, pilgrimaging fellowship with a collection of stories. The work includes numerous virtuoso achievements in the mouths of arresting figures, such as the Miller's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Prologue, and the Pardoner's Prologue and Tale. For many readers, *The Canterbury Tales* is a landmark in their journey through the country of English literature.

Chaucer displays a profound interest in the English language; he probes human delights, limitations, and the messiness of sociality; and he celebrates the embeddedness of stories in other stories – classical, biblical, oral, learned, class-based, gendered. *The Canterbury Tales* is at once familiar and strange. The challenge of this course is to develop a solid working knowledge of Chaucerian Middle English, to read a wide selection of tales, and to bear in mind questions of literary, historical, and philosophical significance that open up in different ways with each tale read, even as the language delights and reorients us.

Course objectives:
- To introduce students to the fourteenth-century poet Geoffrey Chaucer and *The Canterbury Tales*
- To teach students the importance of Chaucer not only to English literature but to Western thought
- To introduce students to the fascinating early form of English known as Middle English and the richness of the prevailing medieval attitude towards language

Required text:
Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales,* ed. Jill Mann, London: Penguin, 2005.

Course requirements

Recitation and mini-close reading	Various	(15%)
Mid-term	Monday 22 Oct.	(20%)
Term Paper (2100–2300 wds)	Monday 3 Dec.	(30%)
Final Exam	Examination Period	(25%)
Participation		(10%)

Wk 1:	Pilgrimage
	Introduction The General Prologue (1.1–42; random portraits + 361–78; 477–528; 669–858)
Wk 2:	The Classical World
	The Knight's Tale (1.43–78; 859–1913; 2438–end) For mini close-reading: 1.931–47; 1033–55; 1081–91; 2453–78
Wk 3:	From Classical to Christian
	The Miller's Prologue and Tale For mini close-reading: 1.3109–31; 3208–40; 3824–54 The Reeve's Prologue and Tale* For mini close-reading: 4214–27
Wks 4–5:	Pilgrim Interactions
	Introduction and Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale For mini close-reading: 2.33–50 The Wife of Bath's Prologue (3.1–204; 453–80; 587–828) For mini close-reading: 3.115–62 The Friar's and the Summoner's Prologues (3.829–56; 1265-1300; 1665-1708) For mini close-reading: 3.1265–1300; 1665–1708
Wks 6–7:	Tales of Marriage
	`22 October Mid-term (first half of class)` The Clerk's Prologue and Tale For mini close-reading: 4.204–10; 435–41; 1142–62 The Merchant's Prologue and Tale (4.1213–44; 1245–66; 2021–41; 2132–2418)* For mini close-reading: 4.2264–76 The Franklin's Prologue and Tale (5.709–28; 729–52; 895–924; 1499–1513)* For mini close-reading: 738–52
Wk 8:	Tales of Tyranny and Greed
	The Physician's Tale For mini close-reading: 6.19–29 The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale For mini close-reading: 6.400–116; 692–701
Wks 8-9:	The Pilgrim as Artist
	The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas For mini close-reading: 7.691–97; 857–68 The Prologue and Tale of Melibee For mini close-reading: 7.943–52; 967–85
Wks 10-12:	The Last Word?
	The Nun's Priest's Tale* For mini close-reading: 7.3157–71 The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale For mini close-reading: 8.36–42; 43–49 The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue For mini close-reading: 8.657–62 The Manciple's Prologue and Tale For mini close-reading: 9.94–104; 248–56 The Parson's Prologue For mini close-reading: 1.477–528; 10.61–74 Chaucer's Retraction For mini close-reading: 10.1081–85

Mid-term:
The mid-term will involve some combination of: a translation exercise; passage recognition and very brief contextualization; commentary on one or, at most, two passages.

Recitation and very close reading:
Commit 10–15 lines of *The Canterbury Tales* to memory. Recite the lines in class on the day we take up the work. If you want to stage a portion of a "scene" with others, figure out a way to divide the memorization work equally. This exercise will help you get "inside" the poetry. You will probably want to memorize an excerpt from a prologue or tale on which you intend to write your essay, but you don't have to. This assignment will provide an excellent opportunity for you to contribute to class discussion of the work in question, but you will not be responsible for presenting a seminar. You will, however, submit a one-page (max. 300 wd) *very close reading* of *specific* poetic effects achieved through sound or visual presentation (eg enjambment) that encourage a claim about, at best, a line or two of the excerpt in question. You may not simply plagiarize this page in your essay, but you may certainly work it in in modified form.

Research Essay:
Write a 2100–2300 wd essay with a strong thesis, careful close reading, and evidence of consideration of at least two relevant scholarly sources. Possible topics will be suggested in class as the term progresses. In general, the advice from *The Norton Introduction to Literature* applies: "When an assignment allows you to create your own topic, you are much more likely to build a lively and engaging essay from a particular insight or question that captures your attention and makes you want to say something, solve a problem, or stake out a position. The best papers originate in an individual response to a text and focus on a genuine question about it."

Select Bibliography:

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*, trans. V.E. Watts, London: Penguin, 1969.
John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, Oxford: OUP, 1985.
Piero Boitano and Jill Mann, ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Chaucer,* 2nd ed., Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003.
Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose,* trans. Harry W. Robbins, New York: Dutton, 1962.
Corinne Saunders, ed., *A Concise Companion to Chaucer,* Oxford: Blackwell, 2006.
David Steinmetz, "The Superiority of Pre-Critical Exegesis," in *The Theological Interpretation of Scripture: Classic and Contemporary Readings*, ed. Stephen E. Fowl, Oxford: Blackwell, 1997, 26-38.
Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age*, Boston: Belknap Press, 2007.
Rowan Williams, Introduction in *Dostoevsky: Language, Faith, and Fiction*, Waco: Baylor UP, 2008.
---, *Lost Icons*, Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 2000.

Paper submission and late policy:
Papers are due by email on Monday 3 December at midnight. Late papers will be docked 2% per day; late papers will also not necessarily receive comments. Papers will be returned electronically with comments.

UW Policy Regarding Illness and Missed Tests:
The University of Waterloo Examination Regulations (www.registrar.uwaterloo.ca/exams/ExamRegs.pdf) state that:

- A medical certificate presented in support of an official petition for relief from normal academic requirements must provide all of the information requested on the "University of Waterloo Verification of Illness" form or it will not be accepted. This form can be obtained from Health Services or at www.healthservices.uwaterloo.ca/Health_Services/verification.html.
- If a student has a test/examination deferred due to acceptable medical evidence, he/she normally will write the test/examination at a mutually convenient time, to be determined by the course instructor.
- The University acknowledges that, due to the pluralistic nature of the University community, some students may on religious grounds require alternative times to write tests and examinations.
- Elective arrangements (such as travel plans) are not considered acceptable grounds for granting an alternative examination time.

Official statements on other relevant University of Waterloo policies:

"Academic Integrity: In order to maintain a culture of academic integrity, members of the University of Waterloo community are expected to promote honesty, trust, fairness, respect and responsibility. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.]

Grievance: A student who believes that a decision affecting some aspect of his/her university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. Read Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances, Section 4, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.htm. When in doubt please be certain to contact the department's administrative assistant who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity to avoid committing academic offenses and to take responsibility for his/her actions. A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offense, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offenses (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about "rules" for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course professor, academic advisor, or the undergraduate associate dean. For information on categories of offenses and types of penalties, students should refer to Policy 71, Student Discipline, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties check Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under Policy 70, Student Petitions and Grievances (other than a petition) or Policy 71, Student Discipline may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes he/she has a ground for an appeal should refer to Policy 72, Student Appeals, http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy72.htm.

Note for students with disabilities: The Office for Persons with Disabilities (OPD), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities without compromising the academic integrity of the curriculum. If you require academic accommodations to lessen the impact of your disability, please register with the OPD at the beginning of each academic term."

The Intellectual Milieu

By Chaucer's day, leading intellectuals had decreed that the realm of ordinary life and that of the supernatural were entirely separate. It seemed an attractive proposition: grace was something extraordinary and came to humanity (and all of creation) from beyond, from a God obviously detached from and above the created order. This view, however, represented a radical shift, and it fell to poets like Dante and Chaucer, mystics like Julian of Norwich and Catherine of Siena, political reformers like William Langland, philosophers like Nicholas of Cusa, and artists like the anonymous maker of the *Lady and the Unicorn* tapestries, to remind people of an earlier insight: that nature itself resists the kind of easy definition that might allow people to label it, box it, manipulate it, mine it, clear-cut it, conceptualize it, commodify it, and in turn do the same to people, to the things that people do (like get an education), and to God. *Chaucer's time period is one of artistic response to the separation of the natural from the supernatural.*

In preserving nature from such a seductive picture of self-containment, this smaller band of intellectuals was actually calling people back to a *more difficult* way of thinking of things, one which became increasingly counterintuitive until the advent of existentialism (with honourable mention to Nietzsche). This more difficult position did not simply involve seeing the whole of reality as one, which sacrifices irreducible difference to homogeneity. Rather, it involved recognizing an ontological distinction between God and that-which-is-not-God *and* the presence of God in that-which-is-not-God. This paradox is common to ancient Greek and Christian thought alike. On this understanding, the continuity between God (or the Good) and creation underwrites the meaningfulness and rationality of the universe; the discontinuity between them allows one fully to appreciate individuality and freedom.

The ancient view acknowledges a kind of fittedness to the created order. Rationality amounts to an inhabiting, like love, which cannot help but demonstrate itself and yet is perennially mystified by its own beginnings. *Strange though it may seem given the way many people project rigidity or barbarism onto the Middle Ages, such non-foundationalism became the occasion for the flourishing of humanism in Europe towards the end of the Middle Ages.*

In *The Canterbury Tales,* one can see that *any* society needs to worry about rationality gone amok: the desire for control, which in the Middle Ages primarily manifests itself as tyranny. (What does tyranny look like today?) A good Greek ruler can accomplish a lot for the good of all people, but even a good ruler is stumped by life's tragic possibilities. For Chaucer, Christianity declares, in *some* sense, that there will always be hope, but mostly its message is one of disruption. Disruption is for him a good thing; life constantly upsets human efforts to control and manage it, just as it insists on hope in the face of persistent, tragic failure (like that of the house of Thebes). A good author wouldn't dare to claim to have the last word, but can model what it looks like to persist in a recognizably human conversation that constantly invites creative responsiveness.