

ENGL3393: Chaucer  
Eric Weiskott  
Fall 2018, T/R 3:00-4:15  
Office hours: T 1:00-2:00 (Stokes S407)

Geoffrey Chaucer was the first poet writing in English who was lauded and studied as literature in his own time. His body of writing, covering a breathtakingly wide range of subjects, is a subtle mix of satire and the sublime. This course is an introduction to Chaucer's poetry, including but not limited to his masterpiece, the *Canterbury Tales*. It is also an introduction to the Middle English language. The course is structured around the different genres and literary forms invented or reinterpreted by Chaucer, from tales of courtly love to fabliaux (fables) and dream visions. No prior knowledge of Middle English required.

REQUIRED TEXT (available at the BC Bookstore; the 1987 hardcover is also acceptable)  
*The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (3<sup>rd</sup> ed.) (Oxford, 2008)

### SCHEDULE

#### **Who was Geoffrey Chaucer and what is Middle English?**

Aug 28      *General Prologue*, ll. 1.1-34  
Aug 30      *General Prologue*, ll. 1.35-78 and 1.747-858  
Chaucer's Life ([mediakron.bc.edu/mappingchaucer/chaucers-life](http://mediakron.bc.edu/mappingchaucer/chaucers-life))  
The Canterbury Tales (frame)  
                  ([mediakron.bc.edu/mappingchaucer/the-canterbury-tales-2](http://mediakron.bc.edu/mappingchaucer/the-canterbury-tales-2))  
Pronunciation ([mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation](http://mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation))  
Watch Agbabi perform "Prologue (Grime Mix)" from *Telling Tales*  
([youtube.com/watch?v=-U-ozgjZfjQ](https://youtube.com/watch?v=-U-ozgjZfjQ))

#### **Chivalry and courtly love (romance)**

Sept 4      *The Knight's Tale*, part 1 (1.859-1354)  
                  Butterfield, "Chaucer's French Inheritance" (20-23 only)  
                  \*Discussion post 1 due on Canvas  
Sept 6      *Knight's Tale*, part 2 (1.1355-880)  
Sept 11     *Knight's Tale*, part 3 (1.1881-2482)  
                  \*Discussion post 2 due on Canvas  
Sept 13     *Knight's Tale*, part 4 (1.2483-3108)  
                  \*Introductory meter assignment: "Jabberwocky" and "Renouncement" on For  
                  Better for Verse  
                  ([prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody\\_poem/jabberwocky](http://prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody_poem/jabberwocky))  
                  ([prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody\\_poem/renouncement](http://prosody.lib.virginia.edu/prosody_poem/renouncement))  
Sept 18     *The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas* (7.691-966)  
                  Required film viewing: *Monty Python and the Holy Grail* (1975) (on reserve at  
                  O'Neill)  
                  Day, "Monty Python and the Medieval Other"  
                  \*Discussion post 3 due on Canvas  
Sept 20     *The Squire's Introduction and Tale* (5.1-708)

**Dirty words and dirty deeds (fabliau)**

- Sept 25     *The Miller's Prologue and Tale* (1.3109-854)  
 Manuscripts ([mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/manuscript-guide](http://mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/manuscript-guide))  
 \*Manuscript assignment via Yale Mirador Viewer  
               ([mirador.britishart.yale.edu](http://mirador.britishart.yale.edu)) (manuscript link list available on Canvas)
- Sept 27     *The Reeve's Prologue and Tale* (1.3855-4324)  
 Required film viewing: *A Knight's Tale* (2001) (on reserve at O'Neill)
- Oct 2       *The Cook's Prologue and Tale* (1.4325-422)  
 Casey, "Unfinished Business"  
*Riverside Chaucer*, pp. xxxviii-xli (hardcover xlii-xlv) (*Versification* only)  
 \*Intermediate meter assignment: scan *Cook's Tale* (1.4365-422)
- Oct 4       *The Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue* (7.2767-3462)  
 \*Annotation assignment via Genius ([genius.com/search?q=canterbury+tales](http://genius.com/search?q=canterbury+tales))

**Fallible authors (exemplum)**

- Oct 11      *General Prologue*, portrait of Pardoner (1.669-714)  
*The Pardoner's Introduction and Prologue* (6.287-462)  
 Whitney, "What's Wrong with the Pardoner?"
- Oct 16      Midterm exam (in class)
- Oct 18      *The Pardoner's Tale* (6.463-968)  
 Watch Brinkman, "A Brief History of Rhyme"  
               ([bababrinkman.com/a-brief-history-of-rhyme](http://bababrinkman.com/a-brief-history-of-rhyme))  
 MediaKron workshop; form teams
- Oct 23      *General Prologue*, portrait of Wife of Bath (1.445-76)  
*The Wife of Bath's Prologue* (3.1-856)  
 Watch Agbabi perform "What Do Women Like Bes'?" from *Telling Tales*  
               ([youtube.com/watch?v=8LptEFGhR7A](http://youtube.com/watch?v=8LptEFGhR7A))  
 Watch Breeze, "The Wife of Bath in Brixton Market"  
               ([youtube.com/watch?v=MiyKat1QzbQ](http://youtube.com/watch?v=MiyKat1QzbQ))
- Oct 25      *The Wife of Bath's Tale* (3.857-1264)
- Oct 30      *General Prologue*, portrait of Friar (1.208-69)  
*The Friar's Prologue and Tale* (3.1265-664)  
 Weiskott, "Chaucer the Forester"  
 Paper planning exercise
- Nov 1       MediaKron teams meet
- Nov 6       *General Prologue*, portrait of Summoner (1.623-68)  
*The Summoner's Prologue and Tale* (3.1665-2294)  
 \*Paper skeleton due (1 p.)
- Nov 8       *General Prologue*, portrait of Prioress (1.118-62)  
*The Prioress's Prologue and Tale* (7.453-690)  
*Chaucer's Retraction* (10.1081-92)

**Winged wonders (dream vision)**

- Nov 13      *The Book of the Duchess*, ll. 1-709

\*Popular culture assignment: Discussion post on Canvas analyzing at least three original tweets (not retweets) by Chaucer Doth Tweet (twitter.com/levostregc)

- Nov 15 *Book of the Duchess*, ll. 710-1334  
Butterfield, “Chaucer’s French Inheritance” (entire essay)  
\*MediaKron maps due
- Nov 20 *The House of Fame*, books 1-2 (ll. 1-1090)  
\*Paper due (7-10 pp.)
- Nov 27 *House of Fame*, book 3 (ll. 1091-2158)
- Nov 29 *The Parliament of Fowls*

### Shorter poems (lyric)

- Dec 4 *Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, his Owne Scriveyn*  
*Lak of Stedfastnesse*  
*The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*  
Gower, *O recolende* (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-minor-latin-works-o-recolende)  
Edwards, “Chaucer and ‘Adam Scriveyn’”
- Dec 6 *Anelida and Arcite*  
Review session
- Dec 17 Final exam (12:30pm)

### GRADING

- Annotation assignment 10%  
Discussion posts, including popular culture assignment 10%  
MediaKron mapping project 10%  
Midterm and final exams 20% each (40% total)  
Paper, 7-10 pp. 20%  
Participation 10%

### OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will learn about Chaucer’s poetic corpus and its cultural contexts. Special emphasis will be laid on Chaucer’s many styles and his cosmopolitanism. Along the way, you will gain reading proficiency in the Middle English language and competence in scanning iambic pentameter, which Chaucer invented.

### ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion posts should reflect your initial reactions to the material of the first four weeks. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. This course is accompanied by a website powered by MediaKron, a digital tool developed here at BC. In the second half of the semester, you will work in teams to research, design, and compose an interactive map on MediaKron for one of Chaucer’s tales. For the meter assignments, you will explore meter using the interface on For Better For Verse and then practice on Chaucer’s *Cook’s Tale*. For the manuscript assignment, you will browse the Yale Mirador Viewer and come to class with one observation or question about a Chaucer manuscript. For the annotation assignment, you will create a username on Genius and contribute ten annotations to one or more Chaucer tales. For the

popular culture assignment, you will create a Discussion post analyzing at least three original tweets (not retweets) by Chaucer Doth Tweet. The paper is a research project that engages with prior scholarship and argues for its point of view in detail.

### EXAMS

The midterm will consist of fifty multiple-choice questions about our course readings and key critical concepts from our discussions up to that point, plus two short-answer passage identifications. A make-up midterm will only be given in extenuating circumstances and only if I am informed one week before the exam. The final exam will consist of sixty multiple-choice questions about our course readings and critical concepts from our discussions since the midterm, plus four short-answer passage identifications.

### EXTRA CREDIT

Recitation from memory of the opening sentence of the *General Prologue* (1.1-18) will increase a grade of your choice by 1/3 of a letter (*e.g.*, B on the midterm becomes a B+).

### PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading and/or film viewing. Students should come to class prepared to discuss Chaucer's texts as literature and as language. This is a discussion-based class, and you typically will not need laptops or smart phones.

### ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity ([bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html](http://bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html)). I have a zero tolerance policy for intentional plagiarism. All quotations or paraphrases of sources must be cited parenthetically or in a footnote (examples: [libguides.bc.edu/c.php?g=44446&p=281300](http://libguides.bc.edu/c.php?g=44446&p=281300)).

### ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability seeking accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

### TITLE IX REPORTING

Please be aware that as a Boston College faculty member, I am obligated to report to the Student Affairs Title IX Coordinator any case of sexual misconduct that any student discloses to me.