

St Jerome's University
ENGL 310B
Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales*
Asynchronous Remote Winter 2021

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 to his wonderful work *The Canterbury Tales*
- To teach students the importance of Chaucer to English literature and 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 texts:

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

Norm Klassen, *The Fellowship of the Beatific Vision*, Eugene: Cascade, 2016.

Course requirements

Readings (x3)	Fridays in January	(15%)
Mid-term	Friday 5 March	(25%)
Reading	Friday 19 March	(15%)
Essay outline	Friday 9 April	(5%–10%)
Term paper (2100–2300 wds)	Monday 19 April	(35%*)
CERB		(10%)
Thursday get-togethers	6–7 pm EST 14 Jan.; 4 Feb.; 4 Mar.; 1 Apr.	

*The weighting of the essay will depend on the value of the outline. All assignments are due at 11:59 pm on the given date. Most due dates are Fridays, but note that the final essay is due on a Monday. Late papers may be docked 2% per day; late papers will also not necessarily receive comments.

Course Schedule

This is essentially a guided reading course. I will post videos at the start of the week, but you have everything you need for a number of weeks in the poetry and the accompanying book that I wrote coming out of twenty years of teaching and thinking about The Canterbury Tales. You are free to work ahead, if that helps you with your schedule (there are deadlines in place to discourage one from falling behind), but I highly recommend following the rhythm of the course.

Last term, I encouraged students to embrace a contemplative way of being, necessity being the mother of invention and genuine contemplation being harder and harder to come by in highly technologized societies. I continue to want that for you (and for myself). Paradoxically, contemplation is interwoven with being social. One's own health depends on others. What that looks like can take many different forms, so this statement is not at all meant as a rebuke to introverts, among which I count myself. Beyond surface personality labelling, human togetherness is a profound mystery. One's own health, in turn, benefits others. We all contribute to one another's wellbeing. Again, this is a mystery, and yes, there is a chicken-and-egg question here to compound it. Actually, mystery may be a misleading word, because it suggests a puzzle to be solved. It's a phenomenon; how and what we are as humans is phenomenal. Furthermore, Chaucer simply assumes the social nature of human being. It would be crazy to imagine reading him in isolation.

Last term I assigned discussion groups; office hours were optional and few people took advantage of them. In this course I want to be more part of the action. Instead of discussion groups, I'm asking you to submit three short videos of you reading Chaucer out loud. I'll see you this way, and so will two of your peers: we'll get to see one another's faces and to hear one another's voices. I've set this up on Learn>Submit>Video Assignment. Later in the term I want you to produce another, longer reading and I will splice them together so that we are all part of one massive reading. (There's more on this below!) I would also like to have four synchronous get-togethers along the way as we pilgrimage through this weird term. I'm scheduling these for four Thursdays at the relatively mellow time of 6:00 pm EST. I'm not assigning grades for these, but I urge you to consider them socially obligatory. I will also keep an office hour every Thursday at this same time.

*My aim is to keep your workload reasonable. Normally, there are 2.5 hrs together in class and you are expected to do required readings as well. A five-course load is roughly the equivalent of a full-time job. In remote learning, the video component, especially zoom meetings, is considered more taxing than ordinary interaction. There's an irony here: full-body, in-person stimulus is **less** taxing than the seemingly reduced load of only having to attend to sight and sound. In this course, I am going to keep the video component as succinct as I can (that will be tough the first week). The primary emphasis should be on reading the poetry. Just because of the structure of the term, I am going to load videos on Mondays and encourage the reading of the poetry and my analysis (in that order) through the week. Even though the videos will be available at the start of the week, it would be a good idea to read the poetry before either watching the video or reading my book, as one is meant to do in an ordinary course. However, you may prefer to watch the intro video first as a way of orienting you to what's coming. Here we go!*

Wk 1: Pilgrimage

Video: Intro to course; intro to Middle English; intro to Wk 1 readings (11 Jan)

Reminder: 4-line reading due by Friday 15 Jan.

First Thursday Gathering: At the Tabard (14 Jan. 6:00 pm EST)

The Symbolism of Pilgrimage

TCT: The General Prologue (1.1–42)

FBV: (21–28; 38–42; 42–58)

Portraits and the Plan in the Prologue

TCT: The General Prologue (the Knight: 1.43–78; the Monk: 1.165–207; the Guildsmen: 1.361–78; the Wife of Bath: 1.445–76; the Parson: 477–528; the Plan 747–858)

Wk 2: The Classical World

Video: Intro to Wk 2 (18 Jan)

Reminder: 4-line reading due by Friday 22 Jan.

The Problem of Tyranny

TCT: The Knight's Tale (1.859–1913; 2438–3108)

FBV: 61–85

Wk 3a: From Classical to Christian

Video: Intro to Wks 3 and 4 (25 Jan)

Reminder: 6-line reading due by Friday 29 Jan.

The Real Context of the Miller's Prologue and Tale

TCT: The Miller's Prologue and Tale (1.3109–3854)

FBV: 85–91; 136–40.

Other Fabliaux*

TCT: The Reeve's Prologue and Tale (1.3855–4324)*

TCT: The Shipman's Tale (7.1–434)*

Wks 3b–4: Pilgrim Interactions

The Man of Law, the Host, Chaucer, and the Parson

TCT: Intro and Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale (2.1–98; 1163–90)

Video: Summary of Wk 3b–Wk 4 readings (1 Feb)

Second Thursday Gathering: Dartford (4 Feb. 6:00 pm EST)

The Wife of Bath and the Pardoner

TCT: The Wife of Bath's Prologue (3.1–204; 453–828)

The Wife of Bath, the Friar, and the Summoner

TCT: from the Wife of Bath's Tale, The Friar's Prologue, and the Summoner's Prologue (3.829–56; 1265–1300; 1665–1708)

Wks 5–6: Forms of Tyranny and the Women Who Oppose Them

Video: Intro to Wks 5–6 (8 Feb)

A Husband and a Wife

TCT: The Clerk's Prologue and Tale (4.1–1212)

FBV: (95–106)

Other Husbands and Wives*

TCT: The Merchant's Prologue and Tale (4.1213–2418)
(esp. 4.1213–66; 1816–65; 2021–41; 2132–2418)*

TCT: The Franklin's Prologue and Tale (5.709–1513)
(esp. 5.709–28; 729–52; 895–924; 1499–1513)*

Reading Week (13–21 Feb)

Video: Recap and Intro to Wk 6 (22 Feb)

A Judge and a Virgin Daughter

TCT: The Physician's Tale (6.1–968)

FBV: (106–117)
A Ruler and a Saint
TCT: The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale (8.1–553)
FBV: (117–127)

Wks 7–8: The Prudent Pilgrim as Linguistic Artist

Video: Intro to Wks 7–8 (1 March)

Reminder: Mid-term due 11:59 pm Friday 5 March

Third Thursday Gathering: Lo Sittingbourne (4 Mar. 6:00 pm EST)

The Problem of Reality

TCT: General Prologue (1.715–46); The Miller's Prologue (1.3167–86)

FBV: (143–59)

Drasty Rhyming

TCT: The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas (7.691–918); The Prologue to the Tale of Melibee (7.919–66)

FBV: (159–72)

The Inner Word

FBV: (173–88)

Sexy Prudence

TCT: from Tale of Melibee (967–1010; 1392–1442; 1806–1886)

FBV: (189–92)

Wks 9–12: The Last Word?

Video: Intro to Wks 9–12 (17 March)

Enveloped in Language (17 March)

TCT: The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale (6.287–968)

Video: The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

Diabolic Silence (24 March)

TCT: The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue (8.554–719)

Video: The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue (24 March)

Imprudent Clarity (24 March)

TCT: The Manciple's Prologue and Tale (9.1–362)

FBV: (192–97)

Words for Us All (31 March)

TCT: The Parson's Prologue (10.1–74)

FBV: (197–202)

A Word of Belonging (31 March)

TCT: Chaucer's Retraction (10.1081–1092)

FBV: (202–205)

Fourth Thursday Gathering: Bob-up-and-down under Blee (1 April. 6:00 pm)

Conclusion (7 April)

FBV: (207–209)

Video: Summary of the Course (7 April)

Reminder: Essay Outlines due Friday 9 April

Reminder: Essay due *Monday* 19 April

Readings (15%):

One benefit from taking this course in-person is hearing Middle English regularly. In the past I have endeavoured to teach the course on a MWF pattern to facilitate this benefit. Among other practices, I have given opportunity for people to read aloud to one another in the relative safety of small groups. Necessity, though, is the mother of invention. We can compensate in the following way:

(1) each Friday in January (15, 22, 29) submit a video in which you read two, two, then three rhyming couplets (4 lines; 4 lines; 6 lines). There's no need to say anything about the lines or why you chose them, though it would be a nice way to connect if you want! Just remind me of the lines. (15% for all three, marked as a whole, not individually: ie, don't worry about how the first one sounds, just try to do better and better; you'll be amazed at how much you improve over time!)

Basic guidelines for pronunciation:

1. Lengthen the vowels. Concentrate on a, e, and i.

a can be short, as in bat, fat, rat; often, though, it's long, as in father or all.

-open your mouth; let your jaw and your tongue drop; hold the sound for a ridiculously long time

e can be short, as in set, get, met; often, though, it's long, as in eight or weight (even though there is no i to alert you)

-open your mouth; drop the jaw and the tongue; spread out the corners of your mouth; hold the sound for a ridiculously long time

i can be short, as in thin, tin, bin; often, though, it's long, as in machine

- spread out the corners of your mouth like you're the Joker; don't let anything drop; perch your tongue behind your lower teeth; hold the sound for a ridiculously long time. It's easy-peasy.

-say the pronoun "I" this way: not "Aye, Captain," but "one e please." Saying "I" properly is an easy win.

2. Think French. Concentrate on the -ioun ending.

this ending has two syllables

-say the i in the long way: it gets its own syllable

-say ou like you are saying ooh, la, la! or like Alexis saying "Ew, David!"

3. Think German. Concentrate on the gh and the ch sounds.

-make things sound rough, like a blender or a coffee grinder getting started.

N.B. Resource! The General Prologue, with one of the earliest manuscripts, read in ME with accompanying modernization. A very cool (new) resource. www.sd-editions.com/CantApp/GP.

Portrait Reading (15%)

Choose one of the portrait descriptions of a pilgrim or group of pilgrims from the General Prologue. Make a video of you reading it. Feel free to be dramatic and creative with it. You have almost the whole term to get comfortable with the language. You'll be fine. I will splice them all together and add the intro and conclusion to make a video of the whole GP for us to enjoy. The portraits vary in length. **Starting at 12:01 am Monday 18 Jan, it's first come, first served!!!** Declare your choice on the dedicated discussion board.

Mid-term (25%):

The mid-term is based on Wks 1–6 and consists of two questions: (1) characterize the interactions of the pilgrims, supported by close reading of specific phrases and short passages; (2) describe Chaucer's concern with the problem of tyranny as he presents it with reference to Creon and to one other problematic powerful figure considered in the course so far. NB: your task in (2) especially is to demonstrate your understanding of the argument that has been presented in the course. (Approx. 1200–1300 wds)

Research Essay (35%—outline):

Write a 2100–2300 wd essay with a strong thesis, careful close reading, and evidence of consideration of at least two relevant scholarly sources. 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.”

The Essay Outline (5%–10%):

Submit, by Friday 9 April, an essay outline including a clear thesis statement, major and minor premise, and skeleton of the essay’s structure. Include a sample paragraph in which you discuss a *single phrase or line of poetry*. I am looking for your ability to do close reading, to be observant (alliteration, assonance, enjambment, internal rhyme, polyvalence and pun, repetition, rhythm, syntax, tone, visual effect, etc) and to read poetry for the relationship between form (eg what’s in the list) and content (what the poem seems to be saying). If the outline is sufficiently detailed, and it is to your advantage, I will give it a mark out of ten. Otherwise, I will give it a mark out of five. I will return the outlines as quickly as possible with suggestions for exploration or if I think there are serious issues with the proposed plan.

Select Bibliography:Primary Sources

Augustine, *The City of God; On the Trinity; Confessions*

Boethius, *The Consolation of Philosophy*

Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun, *The Romance of the Rose*

Evocative Novels

Sigrud Undset, *Kristin Lavransdatter* (1922), trans. Tiina Nunnally, 2005.

Set in medieval Norway, this trilogy follows the life of the spirited daughter of a local lord.

Eugene Vodolazkin, *Laurus* (2012), trans. Lisa C. Hayden, 2015.

Set in post-medieval Russia, this novel follows the life of an orphaned boy taken in by the local herbalist and healer.

Other Sources

John Bossy, *Christianity in the West, 1400-1700*, Oxford: OUP, 1985.

D.S. Brewer, *A New Introduction to Chaucer*, London: Routledge, 1998.

C.S. Lewis, *The Discarded Image*, Cambridge: CUP, 1963.

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.

Online Resources

The General Prologue, with one of the earliest manuscripts, read in ME with accompanying modernization. A very cool (new) resource. www.sd-editions.com/CantApp/GP.

The Harvard Chaucer website. <https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/>

Dante’s *Divine Comedy*. <https://digitaldante.columbia.edu/dante/divine-comedy/>

Info about the *Roman de la Rose*.

<https://www.gla.ac.uk/myglasgow/library/files/special/exhibns/month/feb2000.html>

The Intellectual Milieu

By Chaucer's day, some 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 and nascently modern picture of self-containment, this 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). For a start, there was recognition of continuity or synthesis between the realm of God and that of humans and nature. For instance, the word *pneuma* could refer to wind, breath, or spirit, and the distinction between these realities was not at all clear (or even important). This understanding was common to ancient Greek and Christian thought alike.

The Judeo-Christian tradition did introduce a distinction, *though without sacrificing this pre-modern understanding of a synthesis*. It involved (1) recognizing an ontological distinction between God and that-which-is-not-God *and* (2) continuing to acknowledge the presence of God in that-which-is-not-God. 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. Rationality amounts to an inhabiting, and is inseparable from love. Reason and love cannot help but demonstrate themselves, but they simultaneously confound any search for beginnings, order, or clarity that attempts to escape mystery. *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.*

Human history of the sort Chaucer portrays amounts to a partial record of flawed attempts to be reconciled to mystery, to overcome it, or to manipulate it to personal advantage. 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. 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 that there will always be hope, but mostly it disrupts human efforts (in politics, in religion, and in private life) to control and manage reality. A good author wouldn't dare to claim to have the last word him or herself, but he or she can model what it can look like to live in the recognition of a shared mystery, a shared reality.

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 their university life has been unfair or unreasonable may have grounds for initiating a grievance. [Read the St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/upload_file/PLCY_AOM_Student-Petitions-and-Grievances_20151211-SJUSCapproved.pdf](#). When in doubt, please be certain to contact the St. Jerome’s Advising Specialist, Student Affairs Office, who will provide further assistance.

Discipline: A student is expected to know what constitutes academic integrity, to avoid committing an academic offence, and to take responsibility for their actions. [Check www.uwaterloo.ca/academicintegrity/ for more information.] A student who is unsure whether an action constitutes an offence, or who needs help in learning how to avoid offences (e.g., plagiarism, cheating) or about “rules” for group work/collaboration should seek guidance from the course instructor, academic advisor, or the Associate Dean. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Discipline_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf](#). For information on categories of offences and types of penalties, students should refer to University of Waterloo Policy 71, Student Discipline, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy71.htm. For typical penalties, check the Guidelines for the Assessment of Penalties, www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/guidelines/penaltyguidelines.htm.

Appeals: A decision made or penalty imposed under the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Petitions and Grievances](#) (other than a petition) or the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Discipline](#) may be appealed if there is a ground. A student who believes they have a ground for an appeal should refer to the [St. Jerome’s University Policy on Student Appeals, www.sju.ca/sites/default/files/PLCY_AOM_Student-Appeals_20131122-SJUSCapproved.pdf](#).

Note for students with disabilities: [AccessAbility Services](http://www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/), located in Needles Hall (Room 1401) at the University of Waterloo, 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 AccessAbility Services at the beginning of each academic term, www.uwaterloo.ca/accessability-services/.