ENGL310A Chaucer I
The Dream Visions and *Troilus and Criseyde*
Fall 2006
Prof. Sarah Tolmie

CONTACT INFORMATION:
Office Hours Tue/Thur 10:20-11:20
Hagey Hall 266
University extension 6795
PLEASE NOTE: Office hours are limited due to my commuting schedule. I can also
meet students at lunch hour, Tue/Thur 1:15-2:15, if you make an appointment. I am
always reachable by e-mail at stolmie@watarts.uwaterloo.ca.

Course Description
This course is an introduction to the poetic work of Geoffrey Chaucer, the fourteenth-
century poet often hailed as the father of the English literary tradition. All texts will be
read in Middle English, and ongoing instruction in the language will be provided. The
course will examine Chaucer’s earlier literary works, a series of dream vision poems
based on French and Italian models, and his longest single work, the romance *Troilus and
Criseyde*, a virtuoso performance in the most prestigious genre of his day. We will
examine his professional life as a poet, and its attendant problems, largely those of
generic entrapment, leading up to the great experiment of writing the *Canterbury Tales*.

PLEASE NOTE: Middle English is almost a foreign language to modern readers. Regular
attendance in class and work at home on translation during the first weeks of the course
will be necessary to achieve comfortable reading proficiency. Without this initial
investment, you will not be able to keep up with the scheduled readings.

Required Textbook
*The Riverside Chaucer*

Assignments
Midterm (translation) 20%
Oral presentation 10%
Research essay 30% (5% for proposal)
Exam 30%
Participation 10%

Midterm test
This will consist of two passages of Middle English, approximately 10 lines each, to be
translated into modern English prose paragraphs. It will take the full class time, and
cannot be rescheduled unless a doctor’s note is provided.

Oral presentation
These will be ten minutes in length, with time limits strictly enforced. They can be on any
topic related to Chaucer, either on a subject pertinent to the day’s reading, or not. Ideas
first presented here can be further developed into essay topics, if desired. They should involve secondary scholarship — a class handout with a bibliography is advisable, but not required — but can also be an independent close reading of a section of text. Content of the presentation should be primarily analytical. Missed presentations cannot be rescheduled without a doctor’s note and will be given a grade of zero.

**Research essay**

Essays must be 2500-3000 words, formatted throughout in MLA style, and include a bibliography of at least five items, only one of which can be from the internet. Topics must be developed by students individually in consultation with the instructor. One meeting in office hours or a conversation by e-mail is required as part of this process and students are responsible for scheduling this. At this meeting, the student must submit a paragraph-length essay proposal and a preliminary bibliography of three items. This proposal and bibliography is worth 5% of the course grade. Essays will be marked for grammar and formatting as well as intellectual content. Plagiarized essays will be given a grade of zero and may result in a grade of zero for the course. Late essays will be marked down 10% (one letter grade) and will not be accepted after seven days beyond the final deadline. It is also possible for students to devise creative assignments in lieu of essays for this course. These must involve both a creative and a methodological component and require the same process of consultation with the instructor, and a detailed written proposal. Students may submit essays/assignments on a choice of two deadlines, early or late, but the choice is binding: once you have signed up for one deadline, you are committed to it.

**Exam**

This will be during the scheduled examination period. It will involve all of the material on the course, and will be in essay format. There will be no translation on the exam.

**Participation**

Regular attendance in class, competence in in-class reading and translating, and considered responses to the text are critical to success in the course.

**Academic Offenses and Grievance**

The Arts Faculty warning about academic offences is appended. For further information, see “How to Avoid Plagiarism and Other Written Offences: A Guide for Students and Instructors” ([http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html](http://watarts.uwaterloo.ca/~sager/plagiarism.html)). Students who believe that they have been wrongfully or unjustly penalized have the right to grieve; refer to Policy #70 ([http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.html](http://www.adm.uwaterloo.ca/infosec/Policies/policy70.html)).

**Students Registered with the Disabilities Office**

Please inform me if you are registered with the office and have specific requirements, or will be taking tests and exams under their supervision.

**Schedule of classes (subject to revision upon student or instructor demand)**

Week 1     Tue 12 Sept    Introduction to Chaucer; introduction to Middle English
Thur 14 Sept  Reading Practice: *Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse, Adam Scriveyn*

**Week 2**  
Tue 19 Sept  *The Book of the Duchess*  
Thur 21 Sept  *The Book of the Duchess*

**Week 3**  
Tue 26 Sept  *The Book of the Duchess*  
Thur 28 Sept  *The Parliament of Fowls*

**Week 4**  
Tue 3 Oct  *The Parliament of Fowls*  
Thur 5 Oct  *The Parliament of Fowls*

**Week 5**  
Tue 10 Oct  *Parliament/ The House of Fame*  
Thur 12 Oct  *The House of Fame*

**Week 6**  
Tue 17 Oct  *The House of Fame*  
Thur 19 Oct  *The House of Fame*

**Week 7**  
Tue 24 Oct  MIDTERM TRANSLATION TEST  
Thur 26 Oct  *Troilus and Criseyde Book I*

**Week 8**  
Tue 31 Oct  *Troilus Book I***EARLY DUE DATE FOR ESSAYS***  
Thur 2 Nov  *Troilus Book II*

**Week 9**  
Tue 7 Nov  *Troilus Book II*  
Thur 9 Nov  *Troilus Book III*

**Week 10**  
Tue 14 Nov  *Troilus Book III*  
Thur 16 Nov  *Troilus Book IV*

**Week 11**  
Tue 21 Nov  *Troilus, Book IV*  
Thur 23 Nov  *Troilus Book V*

**Week 12**  
Tue 28 Nov  *Troilus Book V*  
Thur 30 Nov  *Troilus, the whole text ***FINAL DUE DATE FOR ESSAYS***

**Week 13**  
Tue 5 Dec  Thematic wrap-up; Exam Review
Chaucers Wordes Unto Adam, His Owne Scriveyn

Adam Scriveyn, if it ever thee bifalle
Boece or Troylus for to writen newe,
Under thy long lokkes thou most have the scalle,
But after my makyng thow wryte more trewe;
So ofte aday I mot thy werke renewe,
It to correcte and eke to rubbe and scrape,
And all is thorough thy negligence and rape.

The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse

To yow, my purge, and to noon other wight
Complayne I, for ye be my lady dere.
I am so sory, now that ye been lyght;
For certes but yf ye make me hevy chere,
Me were as leef be layd upon my bere;
For which unto your mercy thus I crye,
Beth hevy ageyn, or elles mot I dye.

Now voucheth sauf this day or hhit be nyght
That I of yow the blissful soun may here
Or see your color lyl the sonne bryght
That of yelownesse hadde never pere.
Ye ben my lyfe, ye be myn hertes sterre.
Quene of comfort and of good companye,
Beth hevy ageyn, or elles moot I dye.

Now purse that ben to me my lyves lyght
And saveour as doun in this world here,
Syn that ye wole nat ben my tresorere;
For I am shave as nye as any frere.
But yet I pray unto your curtesye,
Beth hevy agen, or elles moot I dye.

Lenvoy de Chaucer

O conquerour of Brutus Albyon,
Which that by lyne and free eleccion
Been verray kyng, this song to yow I sende,
And ye, that mowen all oure harms amende,
Have mynde upon my supplicacion.
The following is a sample translation passage. You will need to complete two of these on your midterm test.

The Book of the Duchess
ll. 616-31

... Allas, how myghte I fare werre?
My boldnesse ys turned to shame,
For fals Fortune hath pleyd a game
Atte ches with me, allas the while!
The trayteresse fals and ful of gyle,
That al behoteth and nothing halt,
She goth upryght and yet she halt,
That baggeth foule and loketh faire,
The disputes debonaire
That skorneth many a creature!
An ydole of fals portrayure
Is she, for she wol sone wrien;
She is the monstres hed ywrien,
As fylthe over-ystrawed with flourles.
Her moste worshippe and hir flour is
To lyen, for that is her nature...

Vocabulary: behoteth, promises wrien, turn or change ywrien, hidden

Samples from the History of English

Old English: Beowulf, ll. 1-25 (8th-10th c.)
Hwæt, we Gar-Dena in geardagum,  
þæodcyninga þrym gefrunon,  
hu ða æþelingas ellen fremedon!  
Oft Scyld Scæfing sceapena þreatum,  
monegum mæþum meodosetla  
ofteah,  
egsode corlas, syðdan ærest weard  
feasceafu funden; he þæs frofre gebad,  
weox under wolcum weorðmynndum þah,  
oð þæt him æghwylc ymbsettendra  
ofer hronrade hyran scolde,  
gomban gyldan; þæt wæs god cyning!

Yo! We have heard of the noble deeds of the Spear-Danes,  
of the nation-kings, in days of yore,  
how the princes performed courageous deeds.  
Often Scyld Scæfing [shield, son of sheaf] deprived troops of  
enemies, many kindreds, of mead-benches,  
[and] terrified warriors, after he was first  
found destitute; he experience a compensation for that,  
[he] grew under the skies, flourished in glories,  
until each of the neighbouring kingdoms [lit. around-sitters]  
over the whale-road had to obey him,  
to give him treasure; that was a good king!
Old Norse: Snorri Sturluson, Prologue to Edda (early 13th century)

Almáttir guð skapaði himin ok jörð
ok alla þá hluti er þeim fylgja,
ok síðarst menn tvá
er ættir eru frá komnar, Adam ok Evu,
ok fylgaðið þeira kynslóð
ok dreifiðið um heim allan.
En er fram liðu stundir,
þá ójaðaðið mannþókit:
váru sumir góðir ok rétt trúadir,
en myklu fleiri snerusk
epir gírnðum heimsins
ok órekktu guðs boðorð,
ok fyrir þvi,
drekti guð heiminum í sjávargangi
ok ilum kvíkvendum heimsins
nema þeim er í márkinnin váru med
Noa.

Almighty God created ["shaped"] heaven and earth
and all of the things ["lots"] that belong to it ["follow it"]
and last two people
from whom generations are descended, Adam and Eve,
and their progeny multiplied
and dispersed around the whole world.
But as the ages passed from this,
then mankind became unequal:
some were good and rightly orthodox,
but many more turned aside
after worldly desires
and ignored God’s commandment,
and on account of this,
God drowned the world in surgings of the sea
and all living things in the world
except those who were in the ark with Noah.

Early Middle English: Laðamon, Brut, ll. 10559-10573 (c. 1250)

Þa cleopede Arður ludere stæfne:
“Lou war her bißore us heðene hundes,
þe sloðen ure alderen mid luðere heore craften,
and heo us beoð on londe læðest alre þinge.
Nu fusen we hom to and stærclíche heom leggen on,
and wrekken wunderliche ure cun and ure riche,
and wrekken þene muchele scome þat heo us iscend habbeoð
þat heo over ûðen komen to Dertemuðen;
and alle heo beoð forsworene and alle heo beoð forlorene—
heo beoð fordermed alle mid Drihttenes fulste.”

Influence of French: Sir Orfeo, ll. 1-13 (c. 1300)

We redeþ oft and findeþ ywright,
And þis clerkes wele it wite,
Layes þat ben in harping
Ben yfounde of ferli þing.
Sum heþe of wer and sum of wo,
And sum of joie and mirþe also,
And sum of trecherie and of gile,
Of old aventours þat fel while,
And sum of bourseþ and ribaudy,
And mani þer beþ of fairy.
Of al þinges þat men seþ,
Mest o love, for sœþe, þai beþ.
In Breteyne þis layes were wrou̧t,

West Midlands dialect: *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, ll. 1-19 (late 14th century)

Sïpen þe sege and þe assaut watz sesed at Troye,
þe borð brittene and bret to broun dez and askez,
þe tulk þat þe trammes of tresoun þer wro̧t
Watz tried for his tricherie, þe trewest on erthe,
Hit watz Ennias þe athel and his highe hynde
þat sïpen depreced provindes and patrounes bcome
Welneþe of al þe wele in þe west iles.
Fro riche Romulus to Rome richis hym swyþe,
With gret bobbaunce þat burðe he biges upon fyrist
And nevenes hit his aune nome as hit now hat;
Ticius to Tuskan and teldes bigynnes,
Langaberde in Lombardie lyftes up homes,
And fer over þe French flod Felix Brutus
On mony bonkkes ful brode Bretayn he settez

Wyth wynne;

Where werre and wroke and wonder
Bi syþez hatz wont þerinne,
And of þoþe blysse and blunder
Ful skete hatz skyfted synne.

Scots: William Dunbar, *The Twa Mariit Wemen and the Wedo*, ll. 1-6 (late 15th century)

Apon the Midsummer evin, mirriest of nichtis,
I mувit furth till ane meid, as midnight wes past,
Besyd ane gudlie grein garth, full of gay flouris,
Hegeit of ane huge hicht with hawthorne treis,
Quhairon ane bird on ane bransche so birst out hir notis
That never ane blythfullar bird was on the beuche hard.

Influence of Print: William Caxton, Prologue to *Enydos* (c. 1490)

And when I had aduyseyed me in this sayd boke, I delybered and concluded to translate it into Englysshe, and forthwyth toke a penne and ynke and wrote a leef or twyne whych I oversawe agayn to corecethe it. And when I sawe the fayr and straunge termes therin, I doubted that it sholde not please some gentylmen whiche late blamed me, sayeng that in my translacyons I had over-curyous termes whiche coude not be understande of comyn peple and desired me to use olde and homely termes in my translacyons. And fayn wolde I satysfye every man, and so to doo toke an olde boke and rede therin; and certaynly the Englysshe was so rude and brood that I coude not wele understannde it. And also my lorde abbot of Westmynter ded do shewe to me late certayn evydences wryton in olde Englysshe for to reduce it into our Englysshe now usid. And certaynly it was wretyn in suche wyse that it was more lyke to Dutche
than Englysshe: I coude not reduce ne brynge it to be understonden. And certaynly
our langage now used varyeth ferre from that whiche was used and spoken when I
was borne, for we Englysshemen ben borne under the domynacyon of the mone,
whiche is never stedfaste but ever waverynge, wexynge one season and waneth and
dyscreaseth another season.

And that comyn Englysshe that is spoken in one shyre varyeth from another. In so
moch that in my dafyes happened that certayn marchauntes were in a shippe in
Tamysse for to have sayled over the see into Zelande. And for lacke of wynde that
taryed atte forlond and wente to lande for to refreshe them. And one of theym named
Sheffelde, a mercer, cam into an hows and axed for mete and speccally he axyd after
eeggys. And the goode wyf answerde that she coude speke no Frenshe. And the
marchaunt was angry, for he also coude speke no Frenshe, but wolde have hadde
eeggys; and she understode hym not. And themne at laste another sayde that he wolde
have eyren; then the good wyf sayd that she understod hym wel. Loo! What sholde a
man in these dafyes now wryte, “eggges” or “eyren”? Certaynly it is harde to playse
eery man bycause of dyversite and chaunge of langage.

Some Causes of Reading Difficulty

Abbreviations
ME = Middle English
ModE = Modern English
OE = Old English

1. Morphology
➢ history of English is one of simplification, first morphological (ME loses OE
inflexions) and then syntactic: ME is morphologically more complex than ModE
➢ nouns:
— ModE plurals in -s or -es
— ME plurals can also end in -is (e.g., goddis = “gods,” not “goddness”)
— some nouns form plural with -(e)n: a few survivals in ModE (oxen, children), but
rather more in ME (brethren, sustren, shoon, foon, eyen, eyen [“eggs”]) — some
of these nouns alternate between -n forms and -s forms
➢ pronouns:
— I is normal form for 1st-person sing., but ich or ik sometime occur
— ME retains distinct forms of second-pers. pronoun: thou (thow) / thee / thyn for
singular, you (yow) / ye / your for plural; like mod. French, ME uses plural for
polite speech, even when referring to singular subject
— 3rd-person sing. as ModE, except that it can alternate with hit / hyt
— neuter it has no possessive, so his is used (“The lylie upon his stalke
grene” — this is not personification)
— feminine possessive spelled hir / hire / here
— 3rd-person plural is they, but hem in object form
— possessive is hire or here, so there’s a possibility of confusion with 3rd-pers. sing. fem (e.g., hire shoon can mean “her shoes” or “their shoes”). In
practice this won’t pose serious difficulties, since context will guide you.
- *man / men* = indefinite pronoun, as mod. German or Dutch: “one,” not “a male human being” (e.g. “What asketh men to have?” means “What does one want?” not “What do guys want?”)

- **Adverbs:**
  - some formed by adding -ly or -liche, but most formed by adding -e to adjective
    - in translation, let context guide you as to whether an adjective or an adverb is needed
    - e.g. “The hoote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun,” / “[he] That loveth so hoote Emelye the brighte”

- **Verbs:**
  - **Infinitives** usually end in -(e)n, e.g., *loven, singen, ben*
  - **Present tense** more inflected than ModE:
    - 2nd person singular in -(e)st
    - 3rd sing. in -(e)th
    - plural usually in -(e)n
  - in questions, pronouns sometimes assimilate to verb: *artow* = “art thou,” *wiltow* = “wilt thou,” *thinkestow* = “thinkest thou”
  - some shortened forms: *bit* for *biddeth*, *rit* for *rideth*, *worth* for *wortheth*, etc.
  - **Strong verbs** (past tense indicated by vowel change, not -ed): vowel changes are often different from ModE, simply must be learned
    - ME *sing, song, songen*; ModE *sing, sang, sung*
    - some verbs are strong in ME but weak in ModE: *strecchen → straughte, werken → wrought* — hard to find in glossary
  - **Irregular verbs:** e.g., *goon → went(e)* or *yede*
    - *hoten → highte* = “to promise,” but also “to be called”
  - **Past participles:** end in -(e)n, optionally begin in *i- / y-* (reduced form of German & Dutch *ge-*): “He wol nat with his arwes been ywroken” — *ywroken* = ppl. of *wreken*, like ModE “wreak,” = “to avenge”
  - **Negation:** *ne* before verb, *nat / not* after, intensifiers (*noght, nevere, in no wise*)
    - multiple negation possible: “He nevere yet no vilenyne ne seyd”
    - negative particle *ne* can assimilate to verbs beginning in vowels, *h-* or *w-* (*I nadde* = “I ne hadde,” *I not* = “I ne wot,” *I nyste* = “I ne wiste”)
  - **Impersonal verbs**
    - *me seemeth* = it seems to me
    - *me thinketh* (Shakespeare’s “methinks”) = it seems to me (thinken = “to seem,” not to be confused with *thenken* = “to think”)
    - *me liketh* = lit. “it likes to me,” i.e., “I approve” (“it liketh me wel” = OK)
    - *me liste* = lit. “it wants to me”, i.e., “I want”
  - **Modal auxiliaries** *will, can, may* etc. like ModE, but one very frequent auxiliary is unfamiliar: *ginnen* (*gan, goon*)
    - survives in ModE “begin,” but means something like “do”
    - “On her knees she gan to fall” = *not* “began to fall” but “fell”
    - “my herte ginneth blede” = my heart bleeds
2. Vocabulary

- Words that have disappeared must be memorized (e.g., *whilom* = long ago, *ekte* = also, *wreche* = vengeance, *myyne* = remember (imperative))
- variations in spelling: this is a feature of manuscript culture, before printing technology fixed the written form of English into a more rigid convention
  - *i* and *y* are interchangeable (*y* was used to avoid minim confusion)
  - *u* and *v* are interchangeable
  - sometimes initial *i*- where we would expect a *j* - (*Januarie*)
- watch out for metathesis: e.g., *axen* = “to ask”

- **False friends** (words that look the same as ModE equivalents but have a different meaning) pose greater problems for comprehension
- for example, many **words denoting moral condition in ME** often narrow to a purely sexual meaning in ModE
  - *buxom* = obedient
  - *lust* = desire, not necessarily sexual (“Lord, welcome by thy lust and thy plesaunce; / My lust I putte al in thyn ordinaunce,”)
  - *likerous* (mod. “lecherous”) = “eager,” “greedy” in addition to mod. sense
  - *pleye, dispout* = relaxation, but can often connote amorous play

- **Social terminology evolves into an attribution of value**
  - “noble” = aristocratic, but also innately superior in quality
  - *vilein* (mod. “villain”) > *vill* = rural estate
    - originally means “peasant,” inhabitant of *vill*
    - acquires connotation of base, ignoble, boorish, untrustworthy, contemptible
    - primary, value-neutral meaning co-exists in ME with pejorative meaning:
      “For now I wont wel utterly / that thou art gentylly by thi speche. / For though a man fer wolde seche, / He shulde not fynden, in certeyn, / No sich answer of no vileyn; / For sich a word ne yghte nought / Isse out of a vilayns thought” (Chaucer, *Romaunt of the Rose* 1986-92).
  - *churl* = peasant, non-noble, but acquires pejorative sense of “rude,” “boorish” (“The Milleire is a cherl; ye knowe wel this. / So was the Reve eek and othere mo, / And harlotrie they tolden bothe two,” *CT* I.3182-84)
  - *rude* = unformed, uneducated
  - *lewed* (mod. “lewd”) = uneducated
    - formulative phrase “the lerned and the lewed” (i.e., everyone)
    - when Chaucer says of himself, “I am a lewed man,” he doesn’t mean that he has a dirty mind!
  - *knave* = boy (cf. modern German *Knabe*), begins to acquire mod. sense of “rogue,” “crook”
    - boys often worked as servants in great houses, servants were assumed to be lower in class and therefore quality