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, 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 and assignments.

Course Objectives

By the end of the course you should have achieved a comfortable reading knowledge of Chaucer’s Middle English, an overview of the many genres and styles of writing in which he participated, and gained a sense of his place in the vernacular literary canon.

Required Textbooks

Chaucer: *Dream Visions and Other Poems* (Norton Critical)
*Troilus and Criseyde* (Penguin, ed. B. Windeatt)

Other editions, especially the Riverside/Wadsworth Chaucer, are acceptable. Translations may not be used in class.

Mark breakdown

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Component</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
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<tr>
<td>Translation quizzes (best 2 of 3)</td>
<td>20%</td>
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<tr>
<td>Individual oral presentation</td>
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<td>Short essay</td>
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<td>Exam</td>
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<tr>
<td>Participation</td>
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Assignments and Responsibilities

**Translation quizzes**
These will consist of one passage of Middle English, approximately 10 lines each, to be translated into modern English prose paragraphs. Each one will take half an hour, and cannot be rescheduled unless a doctor’s note is provided. The lowest-scoring quiz of three will be dropped; the top two counted.

**Oral presentation: what question would you ask Geoffrey Chaucer?**
These will be ten minutes in length, with time limits strictly enforced. Format may vary (an imaginary interview, a talk, a short paper, a skit, etc.). If you could ask one single question of Geoffrey Chaucer, what would it be? Go ahead: ask it. He can’t answer, because he’s dead. So there are two ways of approaching this presentation: 1. You attempt to answer it for him, or 2. You explain what is at stake in the question (e.g., is it a legitimate one to ask? Where would we look for answers? In what ways would these answers help us?)

Missed presentations cannot be rescheduled without a doctor’s note and will be given a grade of zero.

**Peer group debate**
All students in the class will be randomly divided into peer critique groups on LEARN. Each group of 4-6 people is responsible for creating and animating (i.e., realizing in action, not drawing) a debate of at least 4 parties, modelled on Chaucer’s *Parliament of Fowls*. It can be on any issue, but it must be conducted as a beast fable, with animal protagonists articulating the differing points of view. Presentation slots are 20 minutes, strictly enforced. All students receive an individual grade based on their performance and contributions on LEARN.

**Short essay**
A brief research essay of 1500 words, formatted throughout in MLA style, including a bibliography of at least three items, is worth 20% of the grade and is due in week 10. It must pose and answer a single question about Chaucer’s work. This may or may not be the one framed in your presentation, but it must be a question generated by you.

**Creative portfolio**
Over the term we will compose a series of short poems, imitations of Chaucer’s Middle English, with varying pedagogical goals. We will work on these in class, and in peer critique groups on LEARN. The student will submit the best two of these as a final portfolio at the end of the term, accompanied by a 3-5 page methodological commentary on the processes of writing them. Both elements, creative and methodological, will be weighted equally.
Exam
A 2.5-hour exam will be held 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, commitment and effort in the experimental writing exercises, and helpful peer critique on LEARN are the elements of the participation grade.

Lateness Policy
Anything submitted late receives a penalty of 10% (a letter grade) and will not be accepted after 7 days (including weekends) beyond the deadline, thus receiving a grade of zero.

Technology Policy
The individual presentations and group debates must be conducted live and low-tech: that is, no PowerPoint or other use of the computer podium is permitted. I wish to hear individuals speak for themselves.

Schedule of Classes

Week 1
Monday Sept 14    introduction to Chaucer and Middle English (language handout available on LEARN, plus links to extra resources)
Wednesday Sept 16         Middle English practice: the balade

Week 2
Monday Sept 21        Middle English practice: short poems
Wednesday Sept 23   QUIZ #1 (half an hour); begin Book of the Duchess

Week 3
Monday Sept 28    Book of the Duchess
Wednesday Sept 30  Book of the Duchess

Week 4
Monday Oct 5     Quiz #2 (half an hour); Book of the Duchess
Wednesday Oct 7   The Parliament of Fowls

Week 5
Monday Oct 12    THANKSGIVING
Wednesday Oct 14  *The Parliament of Fowls; Group Debate 1*

**Week 6**
Monday Oct 19  *Parliament of Fowls; Group Debate 2*
Wednesday Oct 21  *Parliament of Fowls; Group Debate 3*

**Week 7**
Monday Oct 26  *Parliament of Fowls; Group Debate 4*
Wednesday Oct 28  *Troilus and Criseyde, Book 1*

**Week 8**
Monday Nov 2  Quiz #3 (half an hour); *Troilus* Book 1
Wednesday Nov 4  *Troilus* Book 2

**Week 9**
Monday Nov 9  *Troilus* Book 2
Wednesday Nov 11  *Troilus* Book 3

**Week 10**
Monday Nov 16  *Troilus* Book 3; RESEARCH PAPERS DUE
Wednesday Nov 18  *Troilus* Book 4

**Week 11**
Monday Nov 23  *Troilus* Book 4
Wednesday Nov 25  *Troilus* Book 5

**Week 12**
Monday Nov 30  *Troilus* Book 5: PORTFOLIOS DUE
Wednesday Dec 2  exam review

**University 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.

**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, now at [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-arts-processes](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/student-grievances-faculty-arts-processes)

**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. When misconduct has been found to have occurred, disciplinary penalties will be imposed under Policy 71 – Student Discipline, which can be found here [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/faculty-staff/index#ai](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/faculty-staff/index#ai)

**Appeals:** A student may appeal the finding and/or penalty in a decision made under Policy 70 - Student Petitions and Grievances (other than regarding a petition) or Policy 71 - Student Discipline if a ground for an appeal can be established. Read Policy 72 - Student Appeals, also at [http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/faculty-staff/index#ai](http://arts.uwaterloo.ca/faculty-staff/index#ai)

**Accommodations for Persons with Disabilities**

The AccessAbility Office (AO), located in Needles Hall, Room 1132, collaborates with all academic departments to arrange appropriate accommodations for students with disabilities. If you require academic accommodations (such as alternate test and exam arrangements) please register with the AO at the beginning of each academic term and inform the course instructor.