

University of Montana
ScholarWorks at University of Montana

Syllabi

Course Syllabi

Spring 2-1-2019

LIT 350L.80: Chaucer

Ashby Kinch

University of Montana - Missoula

Let us know how access to this document benefits you.

Follow this and additional works at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi>

Recommended Citation

Kinch, Ashby, "LIT 350L.80: Chaucer" (2019). *Syllabi*. 9806.
<https://scholarworks.umt.edu/syllabi/9806>

This Syllabus is brought to you for free and open access by the Course Syllabi at ScholarWorks at University of Montana. It has been accepted for inclusion in Syllabi by an authorized administrator of ScholarWorks at University of Montana. For more information, please contact scholarworks@mso.umt.edu.

LIT 350L.80: Reading Chaucer Reading: The Canterbury Tales

Course Information:

Dr. Ashby Kinch

MW 9:30-10:50; DHC 117

Office: LA 221; **Office Hours:** M 11-12; T 2-3; W 11-12; by appointment

Phone: 243-6695; **E-mail:** ashby.kinch@umontana.edu

Required Texts:

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales: Seventeen Tales and the General Prologue*. Third Norton Critical Edition, ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson. W.W. Norton: New York & London, 2018. ("N" in the syllabus)

Moodle / Reserves: required and supplemental readings will be posted on Moodle or available in hard copy at the Mansfield Library

Course Description:

In this course, students will explore the life and literary production of one of the most interesting and enigmatic figures in the English poetic tradition. As spy, soldier, diplomat, tax officer, minister of the King's works, and Member of Parliament, Chaucer accumulated an incredible breadth and diversity of social experience, which he shaped, through his unique literary talent, into one of the great works of social imagination: *The Canterbury Tales*. In addition to critical engagement with the rich variety of Chaucer's storytelling art, students will be introduced to the manuscript culture in which Chaucer worked. Students will conduct guided research in the holdings of the University's Special Collection, which contains a compelling range of Chauceriana, including a 450 year-old print edition of Chaucer and facsimiles of early manuscript versions of *The Canterbury Tales*. Students will construct their own projects with this material, which might include a variety of disciplinary or methodological approaches, including creative response. Students will also complete weekly writing assignments and a final research project, developed in consultation with the instructor.

Work Requirements (Detailed Further in Separate Document)

Weekly Moodle Position Papers: 30% **(due weekly each Friday before 5 p.m.)**

Pilgrim Portrait Project (4-6 pp. research synthesis paper): 20% **(due Feb 22nd)**

Scholastic Debate: 20% (3 topics, positions chosen by lot) **(Weeks 8-10)**

Final Interpretive Project: 30% **(due, April 30th, 10 a.m.)**

General Education Goals Met by This Course (from the University Gen Ed Description):

Upon completion of the Literary & Artistic Studies course (V), a student will be able:

1. analyze works of art (*The Canterbury Tales*), with respect to structure and significance within literary and artistic traditions (*CTales as reflective of trends in contemporary medieval literature of the Continent, and foundational for later English literature*), including emergent movements and forms; and
2. develop coherent arguments that critique these works from a variety of approaches, such as historical, aesthetic, cultural, psychological, political, and philosophical.

Further Course Outcomes:

Students who successfully complete this course should be able to:

- 1) Explain to their parents, friends, and legislators the value of studying medieval literature, Chaucer in particular;
- 2) Write a coherent argument that accounts for the nuance, sophistication, and head-scratching irony of Chaucer's writing;
- 3) Recite some Middle English passages in social environments where that ability, while it might mark them as strange, will make them distinctive.
- 4) Become familiar with the norms and conventions of critical writing about Chaucer, including reading essays that are so arcane and mesmerizing that they require the near-constant consultation of a dictionary.

A Note on Middle English

Chaucer's Middle English will be strange to you at first: the spelling system, based on a phonetic representation of various English dialects, is tricky and variable; the vowels will feel awkward to pronounce; and the vocabulary will seem foreign. Indeed, in some ways the most productive way to approach Middle English is to treat it like a foreign language. But it is not: it is the native root of the English we still speak today. Chaucer coined hundreds of new words in English, some of which we still use, and he put down in writing for the first time dozens of proverbial, colloquial, and idiomatic expressions of his time, thus passing along a vibrant record of the English of his day. For all these reasons, reading Chaucer's Middle English will be easier, and more productive, than you may at first think. We will read a lot of Middle English aloud in class, though I want to emphasize that the main goal is to get you reading large swaths of text with comprehension and insight. Early in the semester, especially, get in the habit of reading the text "aloud," even if only in your head, so that you make the transition to hearing the text in its own voice, rather than "translating" it into your contemporary American English. As a lot of research into reading and the brain has shown, our brains want to create "efficiency" with text, and your initial "brain response," driven by the rapid speed with which eyes scan text, will be that Middle English is misspelled Modern English. By reading aloud, you slow your brain down, forcing the eyes to "listen" to the words on the page. This practice also mirrors common medieval reading modes, which puts you closer to the cognitive experience of Chaucer's contemporaries.

Policy Statements

Attendance

You may miss class three times with no immediate impact on your grade, and you need not provide a reason for doing so. After the third absence, however, each subsequent absence will lower your **final grade** 3 percentage points *regardless of the reason*, except in extremely unusual circumstances (death in the family, documented physical illness, etc). So beware: if you sleep through a couple of classes, you are using up your reserve of sympathy for when you may really need to be away from class. If you are *required* to miss class for a University commitment, you are obliged to let me know that well enough in advance so that you can make up the work missed. The burden lies on you, the student, to communicate with me; I will not come chasing after repeatedly absent students. If you miss more than 8 classes (4 weeks!!), you will automatically fail the course.

Plagiarism

Plagiarism is an affront to the fundamental values of an academic institution, indicating a lack of respect for intellectual labor and a lack of responsibility for each student's part in sustaining academic community. Acknowledge, by citation of name, title, and page number, all work that has influenced your thinking, including work you cite, but also work from you have adapted major ideas.

The University's official warning can be found on pg. 22 of the [Catalog](#), which refers you to the [Student Conduct Code](#) (Academic Conduct), available on the web.

Disability Accommodation

Students with disabilities will receive reasonable accommodations for coursework. To request accommodation, please contact me as soon as possible in the semester. I will work with you and Disability Services in the accommodation process. For more information, visit the [Disability Services website](#) or call 406.243.2243 (Voice/Text).

Add-Drop Deadlines and Incompletes

For information on these topics, please see the [Registrar's website](#).

Nota Bene: A reading and work schedule follows. The work schedule will remain unchanged, with slight revisions in due dates possible, but the reading schedule is subject to change based on the evolving interests of the class during the semester, including the research projects students choose. I will post revisions on Moodle and announce both in class and on email when that is necessary.

Work Reading / Schedule

Week 1 (Jan. 14 / 16): Chaucer's Language, Life, and World

Mon: Introductions; in-class reading of *General Prologue*; discuss Chaucer's language; outline biography and major phases of Chaucer's life and career

Wed: *General Prologue* (lines 1-444; stop at Wife of Bath's portrait)

Read: Evans, "Chaucer's Life" (9-25; **Moodle**); Keen, "Social Hierarchy/Change" (N 507-512); Wetherbee, "An Intro to Chaucer" (N 513-522)

Moodle 1 due online by Friday at 5 p.m.

Week 2 (Jan. 21 / 23): Manuscripts, Pilgrims, Literary Satire

Mon: **MLK Day / NO CLASSES**

Wed: **Meet in Special Collections**; *General Prologue* (lines 445-858)

Read: "Wetherbee, "Reception" (N 522-25); Donaldson, "Chaucer the Pilgrim" (N 525-533); Hoffman, "The Two Voices" (N 533-543); "Sources and Backgrounds" on *General Prologue*, **excluding Boccaccio** (N 364-378)

Moodle 2 due online by Friday at 5 p.m.

Week 3 (Jan. 28 / 30): The Knight's Tale: Romance, Chivalry, Violence

Mon: Read the "Knight's Tale" in modern English translation (**Pilgrim Choices**)

Wed: *Knight's Tale*; **meet in Special Collections: FIND YOUR PILGRIM**

Moodle 3 due online by Friday at 5 p.m.

Week 4 (Feb. 4 / 6): The "Quyting" Game: First Fragment Fabiliaux

Mon: *The Miller's Prologue and Tale* and "Heile of Bersele" (N 379-81)

Wed: **Guest Teacher**: *The Reeve's Tale*; *The Cook's Tale*

Moodle 4 due online by Friday at 5 p.m.

Week 5 (Feb. 11 / 13): The Man of Law's Tale an English View of Europe

Mon: First Frag-Second Frag Transition (N 99-103); *The Man of Law's Tale*

Wed: Susan Schibanoff, "Worlds Apart: Orientalism, Antifemini sm, and Heresy in Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*" (N 569-592)

Moodle 5 due online by 5 p.m. Friday

Week 6 (Feb. 18 / 20): The Wife of Bath: Textual and Sexual Enigmas

Mon: **NO CLASSES: President's Day**

Wed: **Meet in Special Collections**: *Wife of Bath's Prologue*; *Envoy a Bukton*

Theresa Tinkle, "Wife of Bath's Textual/Sexual Lives" (Moodle)

Pilgrim Papers due on Moodle or in my box by 5 p.m.

Week 7 (Feb. 25 / 27): Speaking After "Fantasy"

Mon: *Wife of Bath's Tale*

Wed: Fradenburg, "Fulfield of Fairye" (N 592-604) and one critical essay in the *Wife of Bath Criticism* on Moodle (student choice)

Moodle 6 due online by 5 p.m. Friday

Week 8 (March 4 / 6): The Clerk's Tale: Dialogic Texts, Literary Debate

Mon: **MEET IN SPECIAL COLLECTIONS;** *The Clerk's Tale*

Clarke, *Chaucer and Italian Textuality* (pp. 107-13) (Moodle)

Disputatio 1: critical annotations due on Moodle by Tuesday at 5

Wed: Different versions of the Griselda story (N 435-456)

Critical reading on the *Clerk's Tale* (student's choice)

Scholastic Disputatio on the Proposition: "Chaucer was an anti-feminist."

Week 9 (March 11 / 13): The Franklin's Tale and The Problem of Generosity

Mon: *The Franklin's Tale*

Disputatio 2: critical annotations due on Moodle by Tuesday at 5

Wed: Boccaccio, *Decameron* 10.5; Karla Taylor, "Chaucer's Uncommon Voice: Some Contexts for Influence" (Moodle)

Scholastic Disputatio on the Proposition: "Chaucer read Boccaccio."

Week 10 (March 18 / 20): The Pardoner: Reading the Enigmatic Body-Voice

Mon: *The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale*

Helen Cooper, "Pardoner's Prologue and Tale" (N 604-12)

Disputatio 3: critical annotations due on Moodle by Tuesday at 5

Wed: *The Pardoner's Prol / Tale*; Dinshaw, "Eunuch Hermeneutics" (N 612-629)

Scholastic Disputatio on the Proposition: "The Pardoner's sexuality is essential to understanding his Prologue and Tale."

Spring Break: March 25-29

Week 11 (April 1 / 3): The Sexual Economy of the Merchant Household

Mon: *The Merchant's Tale* + "The Pear Tree" (N 457-58)

Wed: *The Shipman's Tale* (handout)

Week 12 (April 8 / 10): Poets, Priests and Rhetoricians

Moodle 7 due online by 5 p.m. Mon: **RESEARCH PROSPECTUS**

Mon: *The Nun's Priest's Tale*

Wed: *The Nun's Priest's Tale*

Week 13 (April 15 / 17): Ways to be Wicked

Moodle 8 due online by 5 p.m. Mon: **ANNOTATED BIBLIOGRAPHY**

Mon: *The Friar's Tale*

Wed: *The Summoner's Tale*

Week 14 (April 22 / 24): Wrap-Up, Catch-Up, Presentations

Moodle 9 due online by 5 p.m. Mon: **COMPLETE DRAFT PROJECT**

Final projects due on the day scheduled for the Final Exam: April 30, 10-12.

We will meet for donuts, coffee, and research presentations.