

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*



MLS 579- Spring 2011

steve phelan
Professor of English Emeritus

TEXTS:

The Riverside Chaucer: *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, ed. Larry D. Benson
(Houghton Mifflin)

The Norton Critical Edition: *The Canterbury Tales*, eds. Kolve and Olsen
(W. W. Norton)

optional: Neville Coghill's verse translation: *The Canterbury Tales* (Penguin
paperback)

SEMINAR FORMAT:

This course is presented as a seminar, i.e. students are expected to contribute a major portion of the materials for discussion through their own careful reading of the tales, imaginative re-creations of the stories, reports of background reading, and diverse critical approaches. You should be prepared to make some substantive contribution each evening about the assigned readings.

MAJOR PROJECT:

The mind works in mysterious ways and can conjure up all kinds of creative and analytical riches, even while we sleep! The major project in this course is designed to trick the mind into such revelations. Each student will choose a single tale to both research and re-create. You may begin with either the analytical paper (including research and bibliography) or the creative re-writing of the tale. The first part of your project is due in week eleven (**October 31**) and the second in week fourteen (**November 21**). I will be glad to help you before these deadlines with either phase and you will be expected to revise part one and resubmit it at the final deadline. The quality of the integration between the two halves of the project will be a significant factor in the final grade of the project.

PILGRIMAGE:

In the last week of classes we will have an evening of story-telling (and perhaps even some pub-crawling) where each student will have an opportunity to tell her/his own tale in a format arranged by the host. If we have too many students for this to work out in one evening, some adjustments will have to be made. The best tale told on the pilgrimage, as determined entirely by the votes of the pilgrims, will automatically receive an A or A+.

CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES:

At the outset, students will be given an overview of the major critical perspectives operative in literary studies and applicable to the Middle English period. Each student will adopt a single Chaucer critic for the term, reading that critic's views on each tale as we go along and providing a report some time during the term on the theoretical position(s) the critic takes toward the CT as a whole. It is assumed that the paper will represent a theorized position taken by the student on the selected tale and the whole collection.

Toward the end of the term, the class will identify three theoretical issues for the final examination and the test responses should, we hope, demonstrate an elementary comprehension of the practical applications of literary theory to a reading of the CT. Excellent web sites for Chaucer scholars are available: the Chaucer Metapage, the Harvard Chaucer, and www.geoffreychaucer.org/bibliography/. For those who like to get involved in chat-rooms, try listserv@listserv.uic.edu using instructions from The New Chaucer Society's site. These internet tools are just one way to define and research material for the paper. In addition, a wide variety of Olin's research materials will be featured, briefly and painlessly, each week in class.

ATTENDANCE:

Less than 90% attendance is grounds for failure. Kindly let me know (preferably in advance) if you are unable to attend. It is understood that students with full time employment and/or family obligations may have to miss an evening class, but once this gets beyond the first absence, we need to have some form of negotiation about compensations on Blackboard.

GRADE FORMULA:

major project: 50% (20% paper, 20% tale version, 10% the happy union)
participation: 30% (10% for report(s) on the critic, 20% class discussion)
final exam: 20%.

Week	Date	Reading Assignments and Classroom Activities
		FRAGMENT I
1)	Jan. 11	Introduction of the pilgrims to each other and the course
		General Prologue: learning to read Chaucer out loud
		Introduction to critical perspectives
2)	Jan. 18	Come as one of the pilgrims, prepared to read your own description
		How does the General Prologue reveal Chaucer's purposes?
		What is the structure of the GP?
		Choosing your critical perspective and author for tale study
3)	Jan. 25	Knight's Tale and Boccaccio's Pleasant Questions of Love
		What does the KnT say about Chaucer's purposes?
4)	Feb. 1	Miller's Tale: How does it "quyte" the Knight?
		Reeve's Tale and Boccaccio's Version (Kolve p. 307)
		The Cook's fragment and the first full fragment
		FRAGMENT II
5)	Feb. 8	Man of Law's Tale: Chaucer and Free Will
		KnT and ML: contrasts

		The Order of the Tales: Critical Perspectives Reports #1
		FRAGMENT III
6)	Feb. 15	Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale
		Gower's Version (Kolve p. 359) and other analogues of Gawain
		Introduction to the "Marriage Group"
7)	Feb. 22	Friar's and Summoner's Tales
		Critical Perspective Reports #2
		FRAGMENT IV
8)	Mar. 1	Clerk's Tale
		Merchant's Tale and Squire's Tale (incomplete)
9)	Mar. 8	SPRING BREAK: no class
		FRAGMENT V
10)	Mar. 15	Franklin's Tale (Boccaccio's source tale)
		Which character shows the most "freedom"?
		Summary Debate on the Marriage Group: What is Chaucer's Position? With which pilgrim or story does he seem to side?
		First half of Major Project due.
		FRAGMENT VI
11)	Mar. 22	Physician's Tale

		Pardoner's Tale How would you cast the three rioters?
12)	Mar. 29	FRAGMENT VII
		Shipman's Tale
		Prioress's Tale
		Chaucer's Tales: Sir Thopas and Melibee (summary presented in class)
13)	Apr. 5	Monk's Tale (selections)
		Nun's Priest's Tale
		Critical Perspective Reports #3
14)	Apr. 12	Complete project due: revised first part, completed second part, all other research materials and drafts.
		FRAGMENT VIII
		Second Nun's and Canon Yeoman's Tales
		FRAGMENT IX
		Manciple's Tale
		FRAGMENT X
		Parson's Tale with Chaucer's Retraction
		Preparation of the three final examination questions
15)	Apr. 19	FINAL EXAM: on critical perspectives
16)	TBA	Pilgrimage: a storytelling evening

CONFERENCES AND INFORMATION:

Make appointments after class, by phone, or through email. On my web site, in addition to this syllabus, you may find some useful information about the basic concepts of my courses, my own critical perspectives, and my criteria for grading papers.

Steve Phelan, Professor of English Emeritus (ph: 407-644-9025)

Email: sphelan@rollins.edu

Website: <http://web65.rollins.edu/~sphelan>