

ENGL 4230-001 Chaucer and the Medieval World

Monday 12:40–2:05 p.m.

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Chaucer

Who painted the lion? When Chaucer's Wife of Bath questions whether it is possible for male, clerical authors to portray women in any terms other than unflattering ones, she draws on an old story, claiming that if lions painted hunt scenes, the stories they showed would vastly diverge from traditional ones. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* famously employs the framework of a pilgrimage to Canterbury to connect a diverse collection of stories loosely, juxtaposing voices and opinions that can seem as varied, as lively, and as real as those we hear around us today. But Chaucer did not make up these stories out of whole cloth; like other medieval writers, he was a bit of a magpie, feathering his nest with bits and pieces gathered from other writers, with considerable artistic manipulation and more than a smattering of true-to-life personal observation thrown in for good measure. For this course we will read a generous portion of the *Canterbury Tales* along with some of Chaucer's wonderfully surreal dream poems, a few short lyric poems, and perhaps some of his marvelous *Troilus and Criseyde*. We will concentrate on the "earnest and game" of Chaucer's serious and playful manipulations of language and source texts with an eye toward the historical circumstances of late fourteenth-century England. Secondary readings and reports will offer a sense of current trends in medieval studies, from queer theory to animal studies to new directions in lyric poetry. If you have no experience with medieval literature, this course will show you what you have been missing, while if you presume Chaucer is old-fashioned or irrelevant, the readings will paint a new picture! Prior knowledge of Middle English is not required; coursework will include language practice as well as close analysis of poetic forms.

Required texts:

Boethius/Slavitt, *Consolation of Philosophy* (Harvard) 978-0674048355

Chaucer/Benson, *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3d ed. (Houghton Mifflin) 978-0395290316

N.B.: The Houghton Mifflin edition is out of print but plentifully available used. A used copy should cost you about \$30. Copies can readily be located through www.bookfinder.com (an aggregator for booksellers).

Also acceptable is the Oxford University Press edition with a new forward by Christopher Cannon or their "paperback edition" (both are paperback, both use ISBN 978-0199552092). This is also out of print but new copies are still available for about \$40; used copies are also available.

Do not buy the excessively expensive Wadsworth Riverside Chaucer (978-1133316282) from Cengage! (This is the same text in a later, more cheaply printed edition, currently on Amazon for ~\$120.)

Recommended text:

Horobin and Smith, *An Introduction to Middle English* (Oxford) 978-0195219500