

**Rhode Island College**  
**English 344**  
**Chaucer**

Texts:           *The Riverside Chaucer* (Ed. L. Benson)  
                     Jones, Terry. *Who Murdered Chaucer?*  
                     *MLA Handbook of Style* (7th ed.)

- Jan. 25 Introduction: The Importance of Chaucer and biographical summary  
 27 The Mirror of the Fourteenth Century: (historical and literary background) and Jones Ch. 1.
- Feb 1 Chaucer's language, "To Rosemounde," "The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse"  
 3 Shorter Poems: "Gentilesse," "Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton," "Complaynte of Venus"  
 8 Medieval Literary Dreams: *The Romaunt of the Rose Fragment A*  
 10 Courtly Society, Courtly Love discussion and art  
 15 Consolation: *Book of the Duchess* (Quiz 1)  
 17 *Book of the Duchess*  
 22 The Medieval Book of Beasts and Hunting: *Parliament of Fowls* (Quiz 2)  
 24 *Parliament of Fowls* (Quiz 3)  
 26 Fortune: *House of Fame*
- Mar. 1 *House of Fame*  
 3 Reading Chaucer Aloud 1 (individually in C-L 357) (Complete reading Jones)  
 8 Roundtable discussion of Jones  
 10 Exam 1  
 15-18 Spring Break (no classes)  
 22 History and Romance: *Troilus and Criseyde* (Bk. 1) (Paper 1 due)  
 24 *Troilus and Criseyde* (Bk. 2) (Quiz 4)  
 29 *Troilus and Criseyde* (Bk. 3)  
 31 *Troilus and Criseyde* (Bk. 4-5)
- Apr. 5 Pilgrims in the World: *Canterbury Tales* (CT), "General Prologue"  
 7 CT, "General Prologue" Review Jones, Ch. 11  
 12 CT, "Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale"  
 14 CT, "Knight's tale"  
 19 CT, "Miller's Tale," "Nun's Priest's Tale"  
 21 CT, "Pardoner's Tale". Chaucer's "Retraction"  
 26 Projects: Class Presentations (Paper 2 due)  
 28 Projects: Class Presentations
- May 3 Reading Chaucer Aloud 2 (individually in C-L 357)  
 8 Course Summary: Who Murdered Chaucer?

\*Readings **should be completed before the assigned class**. Always consult both sets of notes (Explanatory and Textual) when reading a work.

Though I have indicated two chapters in Jones for specific classes, you should **read the entire book by March 3**.

### **The Course**

Very few people who read and write English have not heard of Geoffrey Chaucer. The major goal of this course is to read and enjoy the major works of England's most famous medieval poet. An artist's achievement grows out of domestic, political, and intellectual ambiance. Through study of these texts we will come to a better understanding and appreciation of medieval literature and its cultural and historical contexts as well as its relevance to our own lives and time.

A portion of my weekly office time is reserved for individuals or groups who want to gain facility in the pronunciation and reading of literature in any of the original medieval languages you choose (Old English, Middle English, Old French, Anglo-Norman French, Middle High German, or even a little Italian). This reading practice together can enrich your study of the literature, and is a valuable skill for those of you who may be teaching some of these texts yourself in the future.

### **Reading Chaucer Aloud**

Medieval English literature was created to be heard (and was often recited aloud). Reading aloud not only increases enjoyment, but also understanding of the text. Each of you will be expected to learn to pronounce Chaucer's language and to read aloud with expression. In addition to my office time, there are also websites and other recordings to help you gain facility. You might begin by browsing through the Chaucer MetaPage (with audio files), Harvard Chaucer Site, and for fun, Geoffrey Chaucer Hath a Blog. Other useful medieval web sites are The Labyrinth, NetSERF, ORB: Online Reference Book for Medieval Studies, and The Age of King Charles V, 1338-1380 (with 1,000 illustrations from the Department of Manuscripts, Paris, Bibliothèque nationale de France).

### **Goals and Objectives**

1. To read and enjoy the major works of England's most famous medieval poet.
2. To understand how culture, class, gender, religion, and history affected his life and works.
3. To learn the rudiments of Middle English as a spoken and written language.
4. To sharpen and demonstrate your critical skills in well-written essays.
5. To become familiar with Middle English critical resources in print and electronic forms.

## Course Requirements

4 Quizzes and 2 reading Chaucer aloud performances 25%.

1 Exam 20%.

2 Papers (one 4-6 pages, the other 7-10 pages with annotated bibliography) 40%.

Class participation and final project presentation 15%.

## GRADING

There will be one exam in the course, as well as four short quizzes.

A goal of this course is to improve your analytical and writing skills. One paper will be a close analysis of one of Chaucer's shorter poems using a theoretical model of your own choosing. A second paper will be a research/analysis paper (7-10 pages) on a controversy over the interpretation of one of Chaucer's works. I suggest you might find "The Clerk's Prologue and Tale" or "The Merchant's Prologue and Tale" good candidates, but there are certainly others. As part of this paper you will submit an annotated bibliography of your sources. I will give you a separate handout on this paper with more details.

A final project, by individuals or small groups, will give you an opportunity to present to the class the results of your research on a topic related to this course. Your presentations will be evaluated on content, creativity, and attention to audience (your performance and handouts or other aids for audience understanding and appreciation of your topic).

Please note that the citations for all work submitted in this course will conform to the *MLA Handbook of Style* (7th edition). If you do not have a copy, please purchase one. Tertiary sources are not appropriate for work at this level.

## ATTENDANCE

Regular attendance and classroom participation are essential. Missing more than four classes for any reason may result in withdrawal from the course.

## PLAGIARISM

Plagiarism is a serious breach of academic behavior. Plagiarism is expressly prohibited as outlined in the Student Handbook; in such cases there are severe penalties which may include failing the assignment without make-up or failing the course. Evidence of plagiarism will be kept on file in the English Department and the office of the Vice-President for Academic Affairs for the rest of the student's academic career at Rhode Island College. Severe infringements will be submitted to the Board of College Discipline for further action

You are encouraged to ask questions at any time, and I am always pleased to meet with you during my office hours or at mutually convenient times arranged in advance. Correspondence by e-mail is also encouraged. Please check your own e-mail regularly (at least twice a week) during the semester.

**Welcome to Chaucer. It's going to be a good semester, and remember, "everything in Chaucer is controversial and disputable."**