

**English 533: Chaucer and his Contemporaries**  
**SLN 30352. Monday, 6.05 - 8.55. LL249**

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I prefer to be contacted by email rather than by phone. I do not check my email on Friday, Saturday or Sunday.

Office Hours: Monday 2.30 - 4.30 and by appointment.

The late fourteenth century in England, a generation after the plague swept through Europe decimating the population, was a time of political unrest and religious turmoil. A child king took the throne, peasants rose up in rebellion, the Bible was translated into English and heretics were burned at the stake. From this turbulent matrix comes an outpouring of the most vibrant and compelling literature in the Middle Ages. In addition, this was a time of high court culture and enthusiastic aristocratic patronage of the arts. The period from the accession of Richard II (1377) to his deposition by Henry IV (1399) will be the primary focus for this course. We will read both literary and non-literary works: allegories, dream-visions, philosophical meditations, historical chronicles, statutes, religious tracts and sermons. The goal of the course is to explore the connections between these different genres and the culture which produced them. Your own interests will influence the direction in which this exploration takes us, and will determine some of the supplementary texts and critical works we read.

**Required Texts**

Boethius. *The Consolation of Philosophy*. Joel Relihan, trans.  
Indianapolis: Hackett, 2001

Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Riverside Chaucer*. Larry Benson, ed.  
Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987.

Russell Peck, ed. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute Publications, 1999.  
Langland, William. *Piers Plowman: the C-text*. Derek Pearsall,  
ed. Exeter: U of Exeter P., 1994.  
Stanbury, Sarah, ed. *Pearl*. Kalamazoo: Medieval Institute  
Publications, 2001

Relax! We will not be reading the entirety of all of these texts, though if you choose to do your essay on one of them, you will of course read the whole thing. There will also be handouts and on-line texts to be read throughout the semester.

## **Class Requirements**

Because we have the luxury of being a small group, this course will be run as a seminar (I will provide documentation for any of you who want to petition to have it count as one of your seminar requirements). This means that substantial, well-prepared and enthusiastic participation in class discussion is required and will constitute 20% of your final grade.

Review of a critical work:	15%
Close reading of passage of text:	15%
Class participation:	20%
Research essay	50%

### **Letter Grade Equivalents:**

85+ = A; 75 - 84 = B; 60 - 74 = C; 50 - 59 = D; >50 = E

I will agree to an Incomplete for medical reasons only.

All required work must be completed to pass the course. Final papers will not be accepted after the due date without a documented medical excuse.

## **The Review**

A review of a critical work, taken from the attached reading list for the course, or from a work you have discovered in the course of your research. This can be either a monograph or a collection of essays (in which case you review the whole collection). You will write a two-page review, and give a ten-minute informal presentation in class. This assignment has two purposes: i)to give you practice in one of the requirements of the academic profession, and ii) to share with your classmates some of your research discoveries, and perhaps alert them to something they might also find useful. As far as possible, the oral review will be scheduled during the period when we are studying the text with which your critical work is primarily concerned. The written review will be due the following week. Your review should identify the theoretical approach of the author (or authors), outline the main arguments and point out the strengths and weaknesses of the work(s). You could use the reviews in *Speculum* or another academic journal as a model.

## **The Close Reading**

A close reading of a 10-12 line passage (as appropriate) of your choice. You will present this in class during our discussion of the text, and hand in a written version the following week.

Your close reading should contextualize the passage, argue for its significance, identify literary devices, unpack allusions and analyze meaning.

## **The Research Essay**

Writing is the core of academic life, and something which we all need to practice, continually. To this end, we will spend considerable time and effort on the essay. The process is as follows:

The final essay will be 25 pages, due at the end of semester. First, a topic statement is due February 16. You will then write a draft of the essay by March 22, make three copies and give one to me and the other two to two classmates who are working on the same text, or a related topic. This means that each of you will have two essay drafts to comment on. These are to be returned two weeks later (April 12) with extensive and detailed comments, suggestions, criticisms, research suggestions. You will then follow up on these three sets of comments and incorporate the results in your final version.

It would make sense if your book review and your close reading were to be related to your essay.

The final essay should follow the MLA Style sheet, should have substantive as well as attribution footnotes (not endnotes) and a bibliography (not Works Cited). All quotations from the primary texts should be in the original Middle English. Quotations from languages other than English or Middle English should be given in the original in your text and translated in a note. Essays should be double spaced, on one side of the paper. Pages should be numbered in the bottom centre. Electronic submissions will not be accepted. Essays are due May 3.

**Passing off someone else's words or ideas as your own, whether you take them from a book or journal, from another student's essay or from the Internet, is PLAGIARISM, one of the gravest academic offences. Plagiarism will earn you 0 on the paper, and may have other serious consequences.**

## **Attendance Policy**

Attendance affects all aspects of the learning experience; this course will cover a large amount of material, and students who do not attend regularly will be at a severe disadvantage, especially since we meet only once a week.

If you have a registered disability, please arrange to see me during office hours at the beginning of the semester so that we can discuss the accommodation you require. It is better for both of us if I know how best to help you right from the start.

## **Schedule of Reading, Discussion and Assignments**

**Week One.** 1/26: Introduction. Wilton Diptych. Statute of Labourers (h/o). Ordinance of Labourers (h/o). Letters and sermon of John Ball (h/o). Chaucer, "Lak of Stedfastnesse".

**Week Two.** 2/2: Chronicles of the Peasants' Revolt (h/o). Excerpt from Gower, *Vox Clamantis* (h/o).

**Week Three.** 2/9: Class cancelled. ACMRS Conference 2/12-14.

**Week Four.** 2/16: *Piers Plowman*, Prologue and Passus I, II, III, IV, V, VIII, IX, XX, XXI, XXII. Handout on allegory. Handout of two articles.

**Terry** - review of *Songes of Rechlessnesse*

**Week Five.** 2/23: *Piers*.

**Terry** - close reading

**Stephanie** - review of *Writing and Rebellion*

### ***Essay Topic Statements due***

**Week Six.** 3/1: Boethius, *Consolation of Philosophy*. Handout of article.

**David** - review of *Job, Boethius and Epic Truth*

**Johanna** - review of *The Fate of Fortune in the Middle Ages: the Boethian Tradition*

**Week Seven.** 3/8: *Book of the Duchess*.

**Kimber** - review of *Social Chaucer*

**Kimber** - close reading

**Carol** - review of *Participation and the Good: A Study in Boethian Metaphysics*

*Parliament of Fowls*.

**Week Eight.** 3/15: Spring Break

**Week Nine.** 3/22: *Pearl*.

**Patrice** - close reading

**Jessica** - review of *Seeing the Gawain Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*

### ***Essay drafts due***

**Week Ten.** 3/29: *Pearl*.

**Patrice** - review of *Pearl : Image of the Ineffable*

**Jessica** - close reading

**Week Eleven.** 4/6: [Class rescheduled] Gower, *Confessio Amantis*.  
Introduction, Prologue and Book I.  
**Stephanie** - close reading

**Week Twelve.** 4/12: *Confessio Amantis*.  
**David** - close reading

***Essay Drafts to be returned***

**Week Thirteen.** 4/19: Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*.  
**Jocelyn** - close reading  
**Dana** - review of three articles on Criseyde  
**Jamie** - close reading

**Week Fourteen.** 4/26: *Troilus and Criseyde*.  
**Carol** - close reading  
**Jocelyn** - review of *Subgit to all Poesye*

**Week Fifteen.** 5/3: *Troilus and Criseyde*.  
**Dana** - close reading  
**Jamie** - review of two articles on *Troilus and Criseyde*  
***Final essays due***

***THE END***

**Supplementary Reading List**

- Astell, Ann. *Political Allegory in Late-Medieval England*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1999.
- . *Job, Boethius and Epic Truth*. Ithaca: Cornell UP, 1994.
- Blanch, Robert J., Miriam Youngerman Miller and Julian N. Wasserman, eds. *Text and Matter: New Critical Perspectives on the Pearl-Poet*. Troy, NY: Whitston Publishing, 1991.
- Bogdanos, Theodore. *Pearl: Image of the Ineffable: A Study in Medieval Poetic Symbolism*. University Park: Penn State UP, 1983.
- Clopper, Lawrence. *Songes of Rechelesnesse: Langland and the Franciscans*. Ann Arbor: U of Michigan P, 1997.
- Dobson, R.B. *The Peasants' Revolt of 1381*. London, 1970 (2<sup>nd</sup> edn. 1983).\*
- Dunn, Alastair. *The Great Rising of 1381: The Peasants' Revolt and England's Failed Revolution*. Stroud: Tempus Publishing, 2002.\*
- Firth Green, Richard. *A Crisis of Truth: Literature and Law in Ricardian England*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1999.
- . *Poets and Princepleasers : Literature and the English Court in the Late Middle Ages*. Toronto: U of Toronto P, 1980.
- Hanawalt, Barbara, ed. *Chaucer's England*. Minneapolis: U of Minnesota P, 1992.
- Hilton, Rodney. *Bond Men Made Free: Medieval Peasant Movements and the English Rising of 1381*. London: Routledge, 1973.\*
- Justice, Steven. *Writing and Rebellion: England in 1381*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1994.
- . and Kathryn Kerby-Fulton, eds. *Written Work: Langland, Labour and Authorship*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1997.
- Kerby-Fulton, Kathryn. *Reformist Apocalypticism and Piers Plowman*. Cambridge: CUP, 1990

- Lynch, Kathryn L. *The High Medieval Dream Vision: Poetry, Philosophy and Literary Form*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1988.
- Patterson, Lee. *Chaucer and the Subject of History*. Madison: U of Wisconsin P, 1991.
- Russell, J. Stephen. *The English Dream Vision: Anatomy of a Form*. Columbus: Ohio State UP, 1988.
- Shoaf, R.A., ed. *Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde: "Subgit to all Poesye"*. Binghampton: MRTS, 1992.
- Stanbury, Sarah. *Seeing the Gawain-Poet: Description and the Act of Perception*. Philadelphia: U of Pennsylvania P, 1991.
- Strohm, Paul. *Social Chaucer*. Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard UP, 1989.
- Wallace, David. *Chaucerian Polity: Absolutist Lineages and Associational Forms in England and Italy*. Stanford: Stanford UP, 1997.
- Yeager, R.F., ed. *Chaucer and Gower: Difference, Mutuality, Exchange*. Victoria, B.C: English Literary Studies, 1991

\* = not for review.