

Time Travelling with Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales then and Now

Course: IDH 2930 – Uncommon Reads

Book: *The Canterbury Tales*

Instructor: Neil Weijer

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Tuesday, Period 8

Little Hall 119

Office Hours: by Appointment

Smathers Library 200G

What, or who, gives an author their authority? As a class, we will explore this question by tracing the long evolution of the medieval poet Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. This collection of lively, funny, and sometimes shocking stories told by Chaucer's characters, a group of travelers from all walks of medieval life, has been praised as one of the most important works of literature in the English language for nearly 600 years. However, as there was never an "official" copy of the *Tales*, scribes and printers were unable to agree on how many stories there were and where they all fit. The English that they were written in was likely as incomprehensible in the northern counties of England as it is to us today. Finally, Chaucer apologizes for his moral error in writing the *Tales* at the end. So when we read the *Tales*, are we reading Chaucer's book?

Over the course of the semester, students will read selections from the *Canterbury Tales* out of multiple from our Rare Book, print, and digital collections. These range from the earliest medieval manuscripts and printed editions to Penguin paperbacks and children's books. These unconventional readings will challenge students to read the "same" work in vastly different ways, and to examine how Chaucer and his stories evolved through the ages. As the major project, students will adopt one of these books independently or in groups, and discuss the ways in which its printers, scribes, artists, or editors have presented their version of Chaucer and his stories to the readers.

Short reflections, in-class and online discussions will allow them to reflect on the experience of reading these different books, as well as the stories of Chaucer's characters that they contain. We will listen to or watch performances of some of the *Tales*, and be asked to read in different places around campus. As a group, we will try to find common ground with a motley band of thoroughly medieval, yet quintessentially human characters, and in so doing to understand how much effort went into making Chaucer into the author that he is today. By the end of the class, students will have a better sense of books, editors, and readers all impact the way that authors and their works are understood.



Learning Outcomes

By the end of the semester students will learn to:

- 1) Work closely with primary sources in special collections.
- 2) Think critically about how books and settings for reading produce different experiences.
- 3) Interpret, discuss, and reinvent the stories told by Chaucer's characters.
- 4) Never look at extra "e"s on the ends of Ye Olde Shopping Plazas and Subdivisions the same way.

Course Format and Meeting Locations

Each class period will have time for discussion of the source books and the reading experience, the content of the tales for the week, with any background or content supplied by the instructor. Students should come to class prepared to discuss the tale(s) assigned. Questions to guide discussion will be posted on the Canvas site the week prior to each class.

This course will meet in person both in our regular classroom and in the Judaica Suite in Smathers Library. Meetings in the Judaica Suite are noted in the syllabus. Because of variables in class size and the possibility of sickness or disruption to your normal routines the course may differ from what is outlined below. My aim is to provide the best and most effective experience for us to be together safely. Please be patient and understanding of each other, and adhere to any recommended guidelines concerning masks or other health precautions that may emerge over the course of the semester.

Course materials will be provided to you with an excused absence, and you will be given a reasonable amount of time to make up work. [Find more information in the university attendance policies.](#)

Textbook and Required Readings

Since we will be discussing very different versions of the tales in our classes, it is necessary for you to have access to an edition with line numbers. While not required, I recommend the Norton edition is (somewhat) portable, and comes with excellent critical aids and other medieval works.

The Canterbury Tales: Seventeen Tales and The General Prologue (Norton Critical Editions) ISBN: 9781324000563

An excellent no-cost option is Harvard's edition, which features the text along with an interlinear translation in modern English.

<https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/text-and-translations>

A video introducing and comparing the two editions is available at [this link](#) (requires your Gatorlink login) and on the course's Canvas page.

Reserve Materials in UF Special and Area Studies Collections

For each part of the course, one of the discussion sessions will require comparative reading of the tales on the syllabus with a historical edition. Additionally, at least one of the assignments will require students to examine a book in UF's Special Collections. The instructor will work with students to ensure that the relevant content is accessible virtually or in person. Students must make appointments to visit the Grand Reading Room outside of class time during the room's open hours (9:00-6:00PM Monday-Thursday, 9:00-5:00PM Friday).

A list of the books on reserve will be made available to students on the course's canvas site, as well as to Public Services in the reading room. A working list is attached to this syllabus. Students are encouraged to team up and work with the books, if possible, both to aid in comprehension and to generate ideas to bring to the discussions. Due to the circumstances this semester, students will work with the instructor to find the best ways to consult materials during the semester.

*****The full list of reading room policies may be found on the Special Collections website at
<https://sasc.uflib.ufl.edu/resources-policies/reading-room-policies/>*****

Assignments and Grading

1) Participation in Online Discussions and in-class exercises: 45%

Participation may take the form of comments on the discussion questions on the course's canvas site to engagement in small group discussions during the class sessions. The ultimate shape of these exercises will depend on the class composition and the safety of all participants.

2) Four Short Reflections on “Uncommon Readings” (300 words): 30%

These should be uploaded to the course Canvas site. These assignments are designed to get you to think about the way that you are interacting with the *Canterbury Tales* in their different guises. How does the language, setting, or object that you're reading change the way you experience the story?

These assignments are described in the syllabus and on Canvas and are due before the start of class on the day assigned.

Uncommon Reading 1: Pleyne Englysshe – Due start of class week 5

Uncommon Reading 2: Quiet Please – Due start of class week 8

Uncommon Reading 3: With Feeling! – Due start of class week 10

Uncommon Reading 4: Nuns on the Run - – Due start of class week 13

3) Final Presentation: Adopt a Book (25%)

Five minute, in-class presentation (may be done individually or in groups, depending on class size). Choose an edition of the Tales that we've seen in the collections (or go out and find your own). Discuss how the choices made by its editors and publishers affect how readers interact with the book. How do they think Chaucer should be presented. Who should read the Tales?

Grading Scheme:

A	100 %	to 95.0%
A-	< 95.0 %	to 90.0%
B+	< 90.0 %	to 87.0%
B	< 87.0 %	to 84.0%
B-	< 84.0 %	to 80.0%
C+	< 80.0 %	to 77.0%
C	< 77.0 %	to 74.0%
C-	< 74.0 %	to 70.0%
D+	< 70.0 %	to 67.0%
D	< 67.0 %	to 64.0%
D-	< 64.0 %	to 61.0%
E	< 61.0 %	to 0.0%

Course Policies

1. You must complete all *assignments* above to receive credit for this course. Late assignments will be marked down for each day.
2. *Attendance*: Because of the participatory nature of this course and the small number of sessions, attendance is crucial. Students promise to abide by all attendance policies of the University (<https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx>) and the Honors College. If you foresee significant conflict with attendance (due to activities, sports, labs, etc) please speak with me as soon as possible.
3. *Tardiness*: Each tardy arrival to class counts as 1/3 of an absence (so 3 tardies equal 1 absence). If you are frequently late this will also negatively affect your participation grade in the course.
4. *Classroom Community*:
 - a. Chaucer , sensitive topics may arise either in the reading or in class discussion. Every student is expected to be respectful to other students and the instructor during the discussion and to give space for the class to explore these stories. Please feel free to contact the instructor ahead of time or outside of class if there are particular topics or sections of the *Tales* that you
 - b. Always bring the assigned reading to class with you, along with materials for taking notes and any assignments that may be due during that class meeting. Be prepared for active discussions. To help with this, I highly recommend that you take careful reading notes and write down potential comments for class ahead of time.
 - c. You should use computers, laptops, and e-readers for course-related activities only. Checking Facebook, web surfing unrelated to class, and doing work for other classes are examples of behavior that may result in deductions from your participation grade or you being asked to leave class for the day. You can, however, use an approved device to take notes or view course readings (if you prefer not to print electronic readings).
5. *UF's policy on Harassment*: UF provides an educational and working environment that is free from sex discrimination and sexual harassment for its students, staff, and faculty: <http://hr.ufl.edu/manager-resources/recruitment-staffing/institutional-equity-diversity/resources/harassment/>
6. *Paper Submission*: Papers and written assignments are must be submitted to Canvas, in .doc or .docx format, before class on the date indicated on the syllabus. (All UF students have access to free copies of Office 365 ProPlus. This can be downloaded at <http://www.it.ufl.edu/gatorcloud/free-software-downloads-office-365-proplus/get-o365-proplus/>.)
7. *Late Papers/Assignments*: Papers submitted late will receive a deduction of one full letter grade per day. Papers submitted more than 3 days late will earn an E. I will consider exceptions in exceptional circumstances with appropriate documentation.

8. *Academic Honesty and Definition of Plagiarism.* UF students are bound by The Honor Pledge: “We, the members of the University of Florida community, pledge to hold ourselves and our peers to the highest standards of honor and integrity by abiding by the Honor Code. On all work submitted for credit by students at the University of Florida, the following pledge is either required or implied: ‘On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment.’” The Honor Code (<http://www.dso.ufl.edu/sccr/process/student-conduct-honorcode/>) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code and the possible sanctions.>



9. Students with *disabilities* who are requesting accommodations should first register with the Disability Resource Center (352-392-8565, www.dso.ufl.edu/drc/), which will provide appropriate documentation to give the instructor.
10. *Students who are in distress* or who are in need of counseling or urgent help: please contact umatter@ufl.edu or 352-392-1575 so that a team member can reach out to you. UF's Counseling and Wellness Center offers additional support: 352-392-1575, or contact them online: <https://counseling.ufl.edu/>
11. For information on UF Grading policies, see: <https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/grades.aspx>
12. *Course Evaluations.* Toward the end of the semester, you will receive email messages asking you to go online and evaluate this course: <https://evaluations.ufl.edu/evals/Default.aspx>

Course Schedule and Assignments

Subject to Change. Please consult the course's Canvas page for the most up to date information

Part I: Setting Out – Stories, Authors, and Books

Please note our first meeting will be Tuesday, August 30th. There is no meeting the first week of class.

Week 2 (August 30): What makes an author? What about books?

Read (in class): “Adam, Sciveyn,”

Discussion of Course Syllabus and Assignments.

Week 3 (September 6th): General Prologue/Chaucer's Voices.

Read: General Prologue – lines 1-360

Introduction – Chaucer and his World

Week 4 (September 13th): General Prologue II/Chaucer in Manuscript.

****This class will meet in Special Collections****

Read: General Prologue: lines 361-858 (in Penguin Modern English Edition)

Watch: The Ellesmere Manuscript and the Making of Early Books (on Canvas)

For Discussion – Illustrating Chaucer: Compare the role and style of the images in the Speight Chaucer with those of the Ellesmere manuscript facsimile.

Uncommon Reading 1 (Due 9/20): Pleyn Englysshe – Pick a Chaucerism, odd spelling, or strange typographic feature in the prologue of either the Ellesmere Manuscript or William Caxton's edition of the Canterbury Tales and investigate it in detail. Where does it come from? Why would it have been “natural” to include in a book of the time/format?

Part II: Love Stories

Week 5 (September 20): It's Epic!

Read: Knight's Tale, Parts 1&2

For Discussion – Types of Tales and Tellers.

Week 6 (September 27) – It's Epic
Read: The Knight's Tale (Parts 3&4)
For Discussion – Talking About Battles

Week 7 (October 4) – It's Romantic?

******This class will meet in Special Collections******

Read: The Squire's Tale and the Franklin's Interjection

For Discussion – Incomplete stories. Editing Chaucer: Thomas Speight and Adam Islip's editions (1598 & 1602)

Uncommon Reading 2 (Due October 11): Quiet, Please – Read a portion of the Knight's or Squire's tales out of any of the editions on reserve in special Collections (appointments will be necessary so schedule in advance) Reflect on your experience in the Grand Reading Room. How is it different from the way you normally read?



Week 8 (October 11) – Franklin's Tale

For Discussion – Courtly Romance

Week 9 (October 18) – Wife of Bath

For Discussion – Arthurian
Adventures & Women's Agency

Uncommon Reading 3 (Due October 25):

With Feeling! - Record yourself reading the first 44 lines of the Wife of Bath's Prologue any way that seems natural to you. Compare what you've said with the text. What did you adjust, add, or remove to make the passage make sense in speaking?

Part III: For the Kids(?) – Chaucer in Children's Literature

Week 10 (October 25) – Prioress [from *Stories from Chaucer Told to the Children*]

******This class will meet in Special Collections******

For Discussion – Saints' lives and Unsaintly topics

Week 11 (November 1) – Clerk's Tale, Monk's Tale (Excerpts)

For Discussion – Morals

Week 12 (November 8) – Nun’s Priest

For Discussion – Animal Fables

Uncommon Reading 4 (Due November 15th): Nuns on the Run – Re-Read a portion of any of the tales from this section (the Prioress, Nun’s Priest, or Clerk) on a phone in a public place (headphones optional) or one where you don’t usually read. How does this transform your habit and style of reading?

Part IV: Definitely Not for the Kids

Week 13 (November 15) – Miller & Reeve

******This class will meet in Special Collections******

For Discussion – Dirty Jokes and High Literature

Week 14 (November 22) – Summoner & Friar

For Discussion – On Leaning into Fart Jokes

Week 15 (November 29) – Can I take it Back? Pardoner’s Prologue & Chaucer’s Retraction

******This class will meet in Special Collections******

Final Discussion 1: Do Books Make Authors? Who Speaks for Chaucer?

Week 16 (December 6) – Recordings of your presentations posted to Canvas by 11:59PM

Final Discussion 2 – Do Books Make Readers?

What do the different assignments and texts we’ve encountered say about the ways we read, both now and in previous centuries?



Books on Reserve

the following books are on reserve for the class in the Grand Reading Room of Smathers Library (East).

The grand reading room is open by appointment to UF faculty and students, and materials must be consulted in the space. Please visit the Special Collections website to see the [reading room hours \(Links to an external site.\)](#) and to find out [what to bring and how to visit \(Links to an external site.\)](#).

If visiting campus is not an option, links to digitized copies of the books (if available) will be posted with the entries.

The Rare Book Collection

The Canterbury tales : the new Ellesmere Chaucer facsimile (of Huntington Library MS EL 26 C 9)

by Geoffrey Chaucer ; edited by Daniel Woodward and Martin Stevens.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: Tokyo : Yushodo Co. ; San Marino, Calif. : Huntington Library Press, 1995.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) PR1866 .W65 1995 Folio

The workes of our antient and learned English poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly printed. :

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: London, : Printed by Adam Islip, at the charges of Bonham Norton, 1598.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) PR1850 1598;Oversize

The Workes Of Ovr Ancient and learned English Poet, Geffrey Chavcer, newly Printed. : To that which was done in the former Impression, thus much is now added. 1...

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: London, : Printed by Adam Islip., An. Dom. 1602.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) PR1850 1602 Oversize

Fables antient and modern; translated into verse from Homer, Ovid, Boccace [Boccacio], and Chaucer: with original poems.

Author: Dryden, John 1631-1700

Published: London, Printed for J. Tonson, 1713.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) 821.4 D799f

Note: John Dryden was one of the key figures in establishing Chaucer's role in English literature. His translations and adaptations of the Canterbury Tales were widely read. Like many readers, Dryden had trouble understanding Chaucer's meter and the pronunciation of Middle English, and was reading Chaucer in comparison to Shakespeare and more modern poets. The volume contains the Knight's tale, the Nun's Priest Tale, and the Wife of Bath's Tale, along with Dryden's own imitative verse, "the Character of a Good Parson."

The works of Geoffrey Chaucer

compared with the former editions, and many valuable mss. out of which, three tales are added which were never before printed

by John Urry, student of Christ-Church, Oxon. deceased: together with a glossary by a student of the same college. To the whole is prefixed the author's life, newly written, and a preface, giving an account of this edition.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: London, Printed for B. Lintot, 1721.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) 821.1 C496 1721 FOLIO

Note: John Urry's edition is notable for the way that Urry tries to adapt Chaucer's language to an 18th century audience and for the "three tales never printed." Even at Urry's time it was questionable whether they were authentically Chaucer's, but the three - The Plowman's Tale, the Tale of Beryn, and the Tale of Gamelyn - are useful reminders of the ways that earlier scribes and performers sought to fill gaps in the *Tales*.

The Canterbury tales of Chaucer:

To which are added, an essay upon his language and versification; an introductory discourse; and notes. In four volumes.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: London : Printed for T. Payne, 1775-1778.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) PR1866 .T97 1775

Note: This edition is often referred to as the first "modern" edition of the tales, since it places them in the groups, if not the order, that would be followed by further collected editions. The editor, Thomas Tyrwhitt (pronounced TEER-it), relied on the Ellesmere manuscript for its order, and using the prologues and other linking materials composed 10 separate clusters of tales.

Works. A facsimile of the William Morris Kelmscott Chaucer

with the original 87 illus. by Edward Burne-Jones, together with an introd. by John T. Winterich and a glossary for the modern reader.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: Cleveland, World Pub. Co. [1958]

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) 821.1 C496, 1896 Facsim
Oversize

Digitized Version (Via University of British Columbia) -

<https://open.library.ubc.ca/collections/specialp/items/1.0366915>

Note: William Morris was one of the founders of the English Arts and Crafts movement, a return to traditional methods and practices in the wake of the Industrial Revolution. Morris founded the Kelmscott Press, whose methods and designs recalled early English printing and whose books are now emblematic of fine printing. Their edition of the collected works of Chaucer is one of the highlights of their press production, which also included significant early modern English poets.

Even though they catered to an extremely high social circle, Morris and a number of the early Arts and Crafts figures considered themselves to be part of a radical labor movement, which incorporated egalitarian and socialist ideals under the influence of Karl Marx and, more closely, Friedrich Engels. Morris re-imagined the Peasant's Revolt of Chaucer's own time in [*A Dream of John Ball* \(1892\)](#), which is also in [Rare Books \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Just for fun, one of the proof sheets (produced as a trial run before the edition so that corrections could be made) held in the [collections of the Beinecke Library at Yale \(Links to an external site.\)](#) show William Morris having his own "Adam, Sciveyn" moment.

The Canterbury Tales

by Geoffrey Chaucer ; with wood engravings by Eric Gill.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: Waltham Saint Lawrence, Berkshire : Golden Cockerel Press, 1929-1931.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Rare Books (Non-Circulating) PR1866 .S52 1929; Oversize

Note: The Golden Cockerell Press is the immediate successor to Kelmscott, and printed a number of the same works. The four volume set of the Canterbury Tales presents the works in a modernized translation with border pieces, initials, and engravings done by the English artist Eric Gill. Gill was (and remains) one of the most famous and recognizable figures in the English arts and crafts movement, though later research on his journals revealed him to be abusive to both his wife and his daughters late in his life.

In addition to this volume, UF holds proofs and drawings from the Canterbury tales and other works that Gill illustrated for the Golden Cockerell Press.

Chaucer for Children(?)

The following books were printed and adapted for younger readers and are found in another of our special collections, the Baldwin Library of Historical Children's Literature. Like all Special Collections materials, these must be read in the Grand Reading Room.

Tales from Chaucer in prose : designed chiefly for the use of young persons

by Charles Cowden Clarke ; illustrated with fourteen wood engravings.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: London : Effingham Wilson, 1833 (London : Maurice & Co.)

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Baldwin Library (Non-Circulating) 23h5684

Chaucer for children : a golden key

by Mrs. H.R. Haweis, illustrated with eight coloured pictures and numerous woodcuts by the author.

Author: Chaucer, Geoffrey 1400

Published: London : Chatto & Windus, 1882 ([London] : McCorquodale & Co.)

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Baldwin Library (Non-Circulating) 39h743

[Digitized and able to be read at UF Digital Collections \(Links to an external site.\)](#)

Chaucer's stories simply told

by Mary Seymour ; with illustrations by E.M. Scannell.

Author: Seymour, Mary fl. 1880-1896

Published: London ; Edinburgh ; New York T. Nelson and Sons, 1884.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Baldwin Library (Non-Circulating) 23h16562

Canterbury chimes, or, Chaucer tales retold for children

by Francis Storr and Hawes Turner.

Author: Storr, Francis 1839-1919

Published: Boston : Little, Brown, and Company, [1894?] (Boston : S.J. Parkhill & Co.)

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Baldwin Library (Non-Circulating) 23h5680

The story of Chaucer's Canterbury pilgrims

retold for children by Katharine Lee Bates ; illustrated by Angus MacDonall.

Published: Chicago ; New York ; London : Rand, McNally & Company, c1909.

UF SMATHERS, Special Coll Baldwin Library (Non-Circulating) 23h25401