

**English 190: Introductory Topics in Literature**  
**Topic: Medieval Frame Tales**  
**MWF 2:00-2:50, Kennedy 207**  
**Section 02, CRN: 12221**

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**Course Description**

Welcome to the class! The frame tale—that is, a framing narrative depicting a series of oral storytelling performances by the frame’s characters—was widespread and popular throughout the Middle Ages and even as late as the early 16th Century. This enormously flexible genre offers modern audiences an entertaining and representative introduction to the medieval world, since a single frame could encompass a range of story types as diverse as romance, fabliaux, saints’ lives, and allegory. As stories about storytelling, frame tales demonstrate the compelling power of narrative in negotiating even the most dire or tedious of circumstances. Storytellers in the frame tales we will read include young noble men and women escaping the Black Plague, flood victims trapped in an abbey high in the mountains, pilgrims seeking entertainment and edification on their way to a martyr’s grave, a young bride deferring death at the hands of her own husband and king, and a gifted teacher who uses stories to awaken the intellect of hopelessly foolish princes. Our first unit will be devoted to the study of Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (14th-century Italian) as well as brief selections from Marguerite de Navarre’s much later *Heptameron* (early 16th-Century French) that it inspired. Our second unit will look backward, exploring the much earlier Eastern frame tales the *Arabian Nights* (Arabic) and the *Pančatantra* (Sanskrit), texts that circulated widely in Medieval Europe, inspiring and influencing the genre in its later forms. Finally, we will turn our attention to Great Britain, exploring the role of storytelling in a group of medieval Welsh tales *without* a formal frame known as *Mabinogi*, concluding our course with tales told by pilgrims in the most famous frame tale of all: Geoffrey Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* (14th-Century British). All works will be read in translation, and no prior knowledge will be expected. Limited to First Years and Sophomores only; however, ENG-151 is not required as a prerequisite for this course. This course is writing intensive and fulfills Foundations requirements F2i and F4.

**Course Goals**

The sequence of readings and assignments has been designed with the following objectives in mind:

- 1) developing skills in written expression;
- 2) learning to *analyze* and *critically evaluate* ideas, arguments, and points of view;
- 3) gaining a broader understanding and appreciation of intellectual/cultural activity (specifically with regard to the Middle Ages).

**Texts**

To the best of my knowledge all of these texts are available at the Rhodes College bookstore. Please notify me as soon as possible if you encounter any problems obtaining these assigned texts. [Note: It will be very important for everyone to have these specific translations. Others cannot substitute.]

- Haddawy, trans. *The Arabian Nights*. Norton.
- Musa, trans. *The Decameron*. By Giovanni Boccaccio. Penguin.
- Raffel, trans. *The Canterbury Tales*. By Geoffrey Chaucer. Random House.
- Rajan, trans. *The Pančatantra*. By Viṣṇu Śarma. Penguin.
- Ford, trans. *Mabinogi*. Berkeley.
- Rhodes College *Guide to Effective Writing* (all students should have this in hard copy; also available online at <http://www.rhodes.edu/9076.asp>)

## Course Requirements

*Please note that English 190 fulfills an F2i requirement and that the course will thus involve a substantial amount of writing and attention to the writing process.*

- Formal Papers (45%)
  - Each of our three units will conclude with the submission of a 1,250-word paper (worth 15% each). Each of these papers should offer close textual analysis, engage relevant secondary sources, and develop a clearly articulated and well-supported thesis. A detailed assignment sheet will be provided prior to each paper.
  - All papers must be submitted in hard copy AND electronically through the Moodle website. Please try not to send assignments as attachments through email unless you experience problems with Moodle.
  - *Late papers:* Papers submitted after the beginning of class on the due date but on the same day will be subject to a 5% penalty. Papers submitted more than one day late, but within one week of the original deadline, will be subject to a 10% penalty. Papers submitted more than one week late will not be accepted. Any special arrangements must be made ahead of time and outside of class.
- Workshop Preparation and Participation (5%)
  - Prior to each paper submission, one class period will be devoted to writing workshops. Preparation might include such activities as draft writing, outlining, or peer review. Other paper-related work such as topic proposals or progress reports will also fall under this portion of your grade.
- Revision of the paper of your choice (10%)
  - While drafting and revision will be an integral component of every unit and paper, at the end of the semester, you will submit a revision of the paper of your choice along with a cover letter detailing your goals and changes. Further details will be provided in an assignment sheet later in the semester.
  - Please be aware that revision is a crucial skill that we will be developing this semester, and the submission of a carefully and thoughtfully revised paper is mandatory. The same late penalties and submission policies apply to the revisions as to the original three papers. Even strong writing can always benefit from revision, and the revision will constitute a separate grade. Be careful not to assume that the revised paper will automatically be higher than the original submission. Failure to revise (or the submission of a paper only very lightly and superficially revised) can result in a grade lower than that of the original paper.
- Weekly Moodle Posts (15%)
  - Weekly postings are intended to stimulate in-class discussions, to serve as starting points for formal papers (where appropriate), and to offer additional writing practice throughout the semester.
  - A new discussion topic will be added to the Moodle website each weekend, and all postings will be due by midnight the following Tuesday.
  - Posts submitted after this deadline but before the beginning of class Wednesday will be subject to a 10% deduction. Posts submitted after the beginning of classtime will not receive credit.
  - Please note that you must post to the assigned board each week to receive credit. The two lowest scores will be dropped to allow for occasional illness and emergencies. Any special arrangements must be made ahead of time and outside of class.
- Quizzes and Day-to-Day Activities/Assignments: 15%
  - In lieu of examinations, frequent unannounced quizzes and in-class activities will help facilitate comprehension and retention of our readings. On the value of frequent assessments as opposed to longer examinations, see Chronicle of Higher Education article on Moodle site.
  - Sometimes quizzes will be administered at the beginning of class and other times will need to be completed ahead of time on Moodle. If you miss class, be sure to check the website for any missed instructions. In-class questions will be given at the beginning of class. Students arriving late will not receive extra time unless special arrangements have been made ahead of time and outside of class. Online quizzes will be made available at least 24 ahead of time and will become unavailable 10 minutes before the start of class. Please plan your time accordingly.
  - Because of the logistical problems involved in making up quizzes and in-class activities, two scores will be dropped to allow for occasional illness or emergency. Any special arrangements for extenuating circumstances must be made ahead of time and outside of class.

- Participation: 10%
  - Your participation grade will be determined on the basis of your attendance, the quality of your contributions to discussion, your preparation for and engagement in class activities, and your completion of any ungraded assignments.
  - Please note that while the course's success will depend largely on class discussion, there are many ways to participate. Those who speak often will not automatically receive higher grades than more quiet students. If you seldom speak in class, you can participate by making more frequent contributions to online forums or contributing more actively in small groups.
  - In all cases, contributions to discussion (in class and online) should demonstrate careful reading of course materials and must be respectful of other students' ideas and points of view. For information on the attendance policy, see below.

### Additional Notes

*Class preparation:* Please read all materials carefully before you come to class. Bring questions about what is difficult or confusing to you. Also come prepared to share your thoughtful insights and responses. It is your responsibility to notify me *before* classtime of any problems completing readings or assignments. While time spent completing readings and assignments will no doubt vary from student to student and from day to day, you should expect to spend several hours preparing for each hour that you are in class. See helpful tips on time management at <http://www.rhodes.edu/counselingcenter/12089.asp>.

*Honor code:* All work must adhere to the honor code: "As a member of the Rhodes community, I pledge I will not lie, cheat, or steal, and that I will report any such violation that I may witness."

*Plagiarism and academic integrity:* The Rhodes College Honor Council Constitution defines plagiarism as follows: "Cheating includes plagiarism; specifically, it is the act of using another person's words or ideas and representing them as one's original work. This includes, without limitation, using information from any source without proper reference, getting ideas or words from a classmate's paper, failure to properly punctuate direct quotes, and obtaining a paper from someone else. Ignorance is not an excuse for these violations. It is the student's responsibility to consult the professor, an Honor Council member, or writing handbooks for procedure for properly acknowledging sources." Barret Library offers the following advice for avoiding possible plagiarism (<http://www.rhodes.edu/barret/15554.asp>):

- Acknowledge and cite all sources properly.
- Use quotation marks around words that are not your own.
- Properly introduce and indent longer quotations that are not your own.
- Use footnotes or endnotes to acknowledge another's words or ideas.
- Do not paraphrase too closely.

Please note also that all writing in English 190 must be original work produced specifically for this course. No paper or portion of a paper—even if revised—may receive credit if it has already received or will receive credit in another class. Please ask me or a Writing Center staff member if you have any doubt about even a small portion of a paper that you have produced.

*Attendance:* As the official Student Handbook explains, Rhodes College "considers interactive engagement with other students and the professor, in a structured setting, to be one of the essential and central components of the academic program. . . . Absenteeism is not to be taken lightly" (<http://www.rhodes.edu/studenthandbook/2176.asp>). Regular attendance is thus expected and counts as a part of your participation grade. Three tardies will be treated as one absence. In addition to the effect of absences on your participation grade, after three unexcused absences, your overall grade may automatically be reduced by 2 percentage points each day, down to 60%. (In other words, a student will not fail on the basis of attendance alone, but poor attendance could theoretically reduce a grade as low as D-.) For example, if your course average at the end of the semester is an 80% and you have 4 unexcused absences, your course grade will be lowered to 78%. I will take roll or distribute a roll sheet at the beginning of each class. I will have a sign-in sheet for late arrivals at the front of the room. Please note that it is *your* responsibility to sign the sheet if you arrive late in order to avoid recorded absences. Absences and tardies may be excused only if I have been notified ahead of time and outside of class. If you miss class, be sure to check the course website for

missed material or assignments. Students whose reasons for absence raise privacy concerns should seek assistance from the Office of Student Affairs: <http://www.rhodes.edu/campuslife/1186.asp>.

*Computer problems:* Please be aware that computer and printing problems will not serve as an excuse for late assignments. Back up your hard-drive files frequently, and always keep a second hard copy of your assignments.

*Extenuating Circumstances:* If you need to discuss extenuating circumstances, please arrange a time to meet with me or contact me by email. Please avoid using the time immediately before and after class to ask for special arrangements. Information on late penalties can be found under course requirements.

*Special Accommodations:* If you require any disability-related accommodations, please contact me as soon as possible. I am more than happy to help make any necessary arrangements. If you have not already done so, please contact the Office of Disability Services: 901-843-3885. For further information, go to <http://www.rhodes.edu/disabilityservices/default.asp>.

*Library Reserve:* Occasionally, books that might be especially helpful for your research may be placed on reserve in Barret Library. Books to be used for article reviews will also be held on reserve. For information on using Library Reserves, go to <http://www.rhodes.edu/barret/4446.asp>.

*Additional Resources:* Success in this course and others is likely to be enhanced with careful time management, good study habits, and a general sense of well-being. The Counseling Center offers free and confidential counseling to Rhodes students: <http://www.rhodes.edu/counselingcenter.asp>. In addition, helpful links and information on such issues as test anxiety, procrastination, homesickness, study skills, and stress are available at <http://rhodes.edu/counselingcenter/>.

### Tentative Schedule

[Note: All readings and assignments should be completed by classtime on the dates provided below. If you miss class for any reason, please check the Moodle site for any changes or additions. Please be sure to notify me as soon as possible and before the start of class if you encounter any problems.]

W 8/24: Introduction to class

### UNIT ONE: BOCCACCIO'S DECAMERON

F 8/26: *Decameron*: Author's Preface and Introduction (3-24); "What's in a Frame" (Irwin, on Moodle); in addition to these readings, please read the syllabus and complete the online Moodle assessment.

M 8/29: I.1; I.2; I.3; I.10; Day 1 Conclusion (25-45; 64-71)

W 8/31: *Decameron*: II Introduction ; II.2; Conclusion; III Introduction ; III.2; Conclusion (72-73; 78-85; 187-89;190-93)

F 9/2: *Decameron* IV Introduction (249-55); IV.1 (255-64); IV.2; IV.5 (283-7); Conclusion (313-6)

M 9/5 *Labor Day*

W 9/7 *Decameron* V Introduction, V.3, V.8; V.9, Conclusion (366-67;385-93; 419-43)

F 9/9 *Decameron* VI Introduction; VI . 1; VI Conclusion; VII Introduction and Conclusion; VIII Introduction and Conclusion; IX Introduction and Conclusion (444-46; 478-87;550-55;649-53)

M 9/12 X Introduction; X.3; X.5; X.10; Conclusion; Author's Conclusion (705-06; 714-22; 729-34; 787-807)

W 9/14 *Heptameron* readings (on Moodle)

F 9/16: Paper 1 Workshop

M 9/19: **Paper 1 Due**; Please bring a hard copy to class and submit to Moodle before classtime.

### UNIT TWO: EASTERN PREDECESSORS

W 9/21 *Arabian Nights* Foreword; "Prologue: the Story of King Shahrayar and Ahahrazad, His Vizier's Daughter"; Tale of the Ox and the Donkey," "The Tale of the Merchant and His Wife," "The Story of the Merchant and the Demon," "First Old Man's Tale" (1-31)

F 9/23 *Arabian Nights* "The Story of the Porter and the Three Ladies"; "Second Dervish's Tale," "Tale of the Envious and the Envied" (80-104; 111-38)

M 9/26 *Arabian Nights* "Tale of the First Lady"; "Story of the Two Viziers" (162-81)

W 9/28 *Arabian Nights* "The Story of the Hunchback," "Christian Broker's Tale" (248-75)

F 9/30 *Arabian Nights* "The Tailor's Tale"; The Barber's Tale; "The Tale of the Sixth Brother" (300-322; 349-56)

M 10/3 *Arabian Nights* Translator's Postscript (518); Ali Baba and the 40 Thieves (Moodle); Edgar Allan Poe, "The Thousand-and-Second Tale of Scheherazade" (Moodle)

W 10/5 *Pančatantra* Preamble; Book I "Estrangement of Friends," Frame Story: Lively and Tawny, The Monkey and the Wedge (1-31)

F 10/7 *Pančatantra* Book I: The Grateful Beasts and the Ungrateful Man; Crawly, the bedbug, and Drone , the wasp; The Blue Jackal ;The Lion and the Chariot-Maker; The Lapwing who defied the Ocean; The Sparrow and the Tusker; The Ancient Wild Goose and the Fowler; The Lion and the Lone Ram (98-114; 126-47)

M 10/10 *Pančatantra* Book I: The Jackal who Outwitted the Lion, Strong and the Naked Mendicant; The Maiden wedded to a Snake; Death and Little Blossom; conclusion of Book I (147-64; 185-89)

W 10/12 Read, *Pančatantra* Book II "The Winning of Friends" (191-238) and post to Moodle.

F 10/14 I will be away at a conference. No class meeting.

10/17 *Fall Recess*

W 10/19 *Pančatantra* Book II (238-264); Conclusion (435, last two paragraphs only)

F 10/21 Paper 2 Workshop

M 10/24 **Paper 2 Due**; Please bring a hard copy to class and submit to Moodle before classtime.

### UNIT THREE: Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

W 10/26: Introduction by John Miles Foley (xv-xxv); General Prologue (1-25); Knight's Tale (26-36)

F 10/28: Knight's Tale (36-84)

M 10/31: Reeve's Prologue and Tale; Cook's Prologue (105-119); Shipman's Tale and Host's Merry Words (365-77); *Decameron* VIII.1 and IX.6.

W 11/2: Wife of Bath's Prologue (159-81); Excerpt from *Roman de la Rose* (Moodle)

F 11/4: Wife of Bath's Tale (182-92); Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell (Moodle)

M 11/7: Cleric's Tale and Chaucer's Happy Song, and Merchant's Prologue (225-61)

W 11/9: Introduction to Squire's Tale, Squire's Tale, Landowner's Prologue (aka Franklin's Prologue), Landowner's Tale (293-336); Review *Decameron* 10.5 and bring to class.

F 11/11: Pardon Peddler's Introduction, Prologue, and Tale (345-64)

M 11/14: Prologue to Sir Thopas, Sir Thopas, The Host Stops Chaucer's Narration, beginning of Tale of Melibee and Prologue of Monk's Tale (387-401; 431-33)

W 11/16: Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue (457-75); Bookmaker takes his leave (597-98)

F 11/18 Workshop

M 11/21 **Paper 3**

*11/23 and 11/25: Thanksgiving Break*

M 11/28 *Mabinogi*, Pwyll, Prince of Dyfed (35-56); "Sovereignty in Pwyll" (McKenna, Moodle)

W 11/30 *Mabinogi*, Branwen Daughter of Llŷr (57-72); "The Calumniated Wife in Medieval Welsh Literature" (Wood, Moodle)

F 12/2 *Mabinogi*, Manawydan son of Llŷr (73-88); Introduction (1-32)

W 12/5 *Mabinogi*, Culhwch and Olwen (119-58)

W 12/7 **Microtheme Due**; Revision Workshop

*Final Examination Time: Saturday, May 8, 1pm: no examination; revision due by exam time.*

**Important Dates**

| day       | date               | event  |
|-----------|--------------------|--|
| Tuesday   | <b>August 23</b>   | Enrollment Clearance/Registration                  |
| Wednesday | 24                 | Classes begin<br>Opening Convocation               |
| Tuesday   | 30                 | Drop/add period ends                               |
| Wednesday | 31                 | Extended drop period begins                        |
| Monday    | <b>September 6</b> | Labor Day Recess                                   |
| Wednesday | 14                 | Extended Drop Period Ends<br>Pass/Fail Option Ends |
| Thursday  | 15                 | Withdraw Period begins                             |
| Wednesday | 21                 | Last day to remove conditional grades              |
| Friday    | <b>October 14</b>  | Fall recess begins at 5:00 p.m.                    |
| Monday    | 17                 | Mid-term grades 9:00 a.m.                          |
| Wednesday | 19                 | Classes resume                                     |
| Friday    | 28                 | Withdraw Period Ends                               |
| Tuesday   | <b>November 23</b> | Thanksgiving Recess begins at 10:00 p.m.           |
| Monday    | 28                 | Classes resume                                     |
| Wednesday | <b>December 7</b>  | Last day of classes, 10:00 p.m.                    |
| Thursday  | 8                  | Reading day  |
| Fri-Wed   | 9-14               | Final Examinations                                 |
| Friday    | 16                 | Final grades due 5:00 p.m.                         |