English 325:
The Life and Works of Geoffrey Chaucer: What does it mean to be the “father of English poetry”? 

Most medieval authors were anonymous, so why do we know Chaucer? And why is he considered the ‘father of English poetry’? In this course, we will address these and other questions as we read several of Chaucer’s works in the original Middle English, including The Book of the Duchess, Troilus and Criseyde and The Canterbury Tales. We will read these works with an eye to Chaucer’s development as an author, but we will also look at them as cultural, social and political artifacts in dialogue with an ever-changing English literary tradition. To do this, we’ll consider the cultural work of a variety of genres and themes, including romance and fabliau, authorship and readership, nationalism and imperialism, social antagonisms and class rivalries, religious and gender difference, and the individual’s relation to structures of authority in fourteenth century England.

Required Texts:
Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, trans. Richard H. Green (Dover, 2002) 0-486-42163-5

Please note that Chaucer books are not all the same; you MUST have these particular editions.

Course Requirements:

Class Participation, Quizzes, In-Class Writing. This class comes with a heavy reading load and will be run primarily in a lecture/discussion format. It goes without saying that I expect you to come prepared with your book and having done the assigned reading for the day. Regular, active participation is also required, although I will periodically give quizzes on reading and/or translating Middle English.

Moodle Postings. As part of your class participation, you will also be required to respond to the readings by posting textual analysis of a short passage (no more than 15 lines) at least TEN (10) times over the course of the semester. The postings are due by 2:00 on Friday (i.e. by the time of class) and should be in the form of a 150-word (i.e. about paragraph) close reading of the language and literary elements of a particular passage. These short response papers are intended to hone your skills of textual analysis and reading Middle English, and need not be structured around a clear “thesis.” They should, however, present a clear issue or observation (for example some incident, passage, framing device, etc. that struck you as strange, unfamiliar, or problematic) as well as how Chaucer explores this concept through the nuances of language, meaning, poetics, etc. Be sure to refer to specific line numbers in your posting.

Group-Led Discussion and Intertextuality Essay. No one can study Chaucer without studying the stories he knew. In addition to the required readings, each member of the class (together with a partner) will be responsible for leading a discussion on Chaucer’s engagement with his sources and analogues.

This assignment is worth 20% of your grade (5% presentation, 15% essay), and consists of three parts:
1. Reading closely the primary materials assigned and conducting any relevant research that you think may be useful for generating discussion (e.g. on the fabliau or social class).

2. Developing 3-4 provocative, well-formulated and informed questions that will allow you to lead a 15-minute discussion of the assigned readings. Remember that there is an art to asking such questions and I'd be happy to help you with this part of the assignment, so please feel free to come see me. Be sure to email me to let me know your plans by 5:00 on the day before your presentation.

3. Writing an essay (5-7 pp.) based on your readings that explores intertextuality in Chaucer’s poetry. This, of course, is your own work, to be done apart from your classmates.

All three parts must be completed in order to receive a passing grade on the assignment. If you have any questions about the readings or the assignment, or just want to run some ideas past me, please don’t hesitate to email or come by to see me.

**Essays and Exams.** There will be 3 essays: (1) an “Intertextuality” essay on Chaucer’s relationship to his sources and analogues (described above); (2) a Close Reading/Critical essay which will require you to read an article of criticism (on reserve at the library), post a summary of the article on Moodle, then write an essay that develops your own close reading as a response; (3) A final essay that incorporates close reading, Chaucer’s intertextuality, and secondary criticism. More detailed explanations of these assignments will follow. There will also be two in-class exams, which are necessarily cumulative. There will be no final exam.

**Absences.** Regular, punctual attendance is required. Arriving more than 10 minutes late three times counts as an absence. Failure to bring your book to class or to pass the day’s quiz also counts as an absence. Absences for extracurricular activities, religious holidays, or illness may be excused as long as you have contacted me in advance and completed the necessary homework/make-up work on time. You are allowed three (3) absences free-of-charge; each additional absence will cost your final course average two tenths of a point. If you miss more than 7 classes, you will fail the course.

**Late Paper Policy.** There will be NO extensions on any assignments in this class. Instead, you will be allotted three (3) “free” days at the beginning of the semester, which you may use when and as you wish. Each day is worth 24 hours (e.g. a paper due on Friday may be turned in on Saturday at 2:00), and you are free to use them up all at once or space them throughout the semester. It's up to you, but be aware that once these three days are used up, your letter grade on any given essay will drop 1/3 grade for each day it is late.

**Grading.**
1. Class participation, Moodle postings, quizzes and smaller writing assignments -10%
2. Group-Led Discussion - 5 %
3. Intertextuality Essay on Chaucer’s Use of Sources (5-7 pp.) - 15%
4. Close Reading and Critical Essay (5-7 pp.) -15%
5. Two Exams -15% each
6. Final Essay, including proposal and annotated bibliography (10 pp. ) - 25%

**Honor Code.** All work must adhere to the honor code.

**Questions, problems, or concerns?** Please always feel free to contact me. Most difficulties can be prevented from becoming serious problems fairly easily -- if the professor knows about them in advance.
COURSE SCHEDULE
(Note on reading the Canterbury Tales: Unless otherwise specified, if a particular tale is listed by title, this refers not only the tale itself but also to the prologue, epilogue and relevant surrounding material.)

Week 1: Reading Chaucer
W 1/9 Introduction
F 1/11 "Gentillessse," "Truth," "Complaint to His Purse"

Week 2: The "French" Chaucer: Love and the Making of Poetry
M 1/14 Book of the Duchess
   Miller 44-52 (Macrobius, from the Commentary on the Dream of Scipio)
W 1/16 No class
   * DUE: Response paper on Romance of the Rose and Book of the Duchess
F 1/18 Book of the Duchess
   Miller 106-12 (Ovid, "Ceyx and Alcyone," from the Metamorphoses)
   Miller 291-99 (Andreas Capellanus, from the Treatise on Love, "Distinctions Concerning Love"; "The Rules of Love")
   * Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 1

Week 3: The "English" Chaucer
M 1/21 No class
W 1/23 General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales: Introduction and Retraction to the Canterbury Tales
F 1/25 The Knight, Squire, Yeoman
   Miller 166-68 (Geoffroi de Charny, from the Book of Chivalry: "The Making of a Knight")
   Miller 180-86 (Ramon Lull, from The Book of the Order of Chivalry, on "The Origins and Purpose of Chivalry," and "The Office of Knighthood")
   *Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 2
   [Also, to help celebrate the Macbeth symposium, we may discuss Shakespeare's (ahem!) debt to Chaucer]

Week 4:
M 1/28 General Prologue: Prioress, Monk, Friar, Clerk, Parson
   Miller 282-86 (Ovid, from The Art of Love, "Advice to Women")
   Miller 215-28; 264-68 (John Gower, from Vox Clamantis, on The Clergy)
   * Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 3
W 1/30 GP: The Wife of Bath, the Merchant, the Miller, the Reeve
   Miller 286-88 (Ovid, from Amores, on "The Lover's Warfare")
F 2/1 GP: The Summoner, the Pardoner, the Host, and Chaucer the Pilgrim

Week 5:
M 2/4 Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, Books 1-3
   * DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Groups 1 & 2; Book of the Duchess Close Reading/Critical Essay
W 2/6 Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, Book 4
F 2/8 Boethius, Consolation of Philosophy, Book 5

Week 6: The "Italian" Chaucer
M 2/11 Knight's Tale, Parts One and Two
   Miller 323-28 (Giovanni Boccaccio, from the Teseide, "Emilia appears to Palemon and Arcita")
   * Chaucer's Intertextuality: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 4
   * DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Group 3
W 2/13 Knight's Tale
F 2/15 Knight's Tale
* DUE: General Prologue Close Reading/Critical Essay

Week 7:
M 2/18 Knight's Tale, Parts Three and Four
Miller 329-43 (Giovanni Boccaccio, from the Teseide, "Arcite’s Prayer to Mars;" "Gloss: The Temple of Mars;" "Gloss: The Temple of Venus")
* Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 5
* DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Group 4

W 2/20 Knight's Tale
F 2/22 Exam #1

Week 8:
M 2/25 Miller's Prologue and Tale
Class handout: "The Three Guests of Hele of Bersele" (fabliau)
* Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 6

W 2/27 Reeve's Prologue and Tale
Class handout: "The Miller and the Two Clerics" (fabliau)
* Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 7
* DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Group 5; Close Reading/Critical Essay for Knight's Tale

F 2/29 Cook's Tale

SPRING BREAK – No Class

Week 9:
M 3/10 Wife of Bath's Prologue
Miller 385-87 (Bartholomaeus Anglicus, from The Properties of Things, on "Husband and Wife")
Miller 399-402 ("The Antifeminist Tradition")
Miller 411-14 (Theophrastus, from The Golden Book on Marriage)
Miller 415-36 (St. Jerome, from The Epistle Against Jovinian)
* Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 8
* DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Groups 6 & 7; Critical Essay for Miller's Tale/Reeve's Tale

W 3/12 Wife of Bath's Prologue
F 3/14 Wife of Bath's Tale
Class handout: John Gower, "The Tale of Florent"
* Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 9

Week 10:
M 3/17 Clerk's Tale
Miller 137-52 (Petrarch's Story of Griselda)
* Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 10

W 3/19 Prologue and Epilogue to Squire's Tale
Franklin's Tale
Miller 121-35 (Giovanni Boccaccio, from Il Filocolo, "The Question of Menedon and Fiammetta's Opinion")
* DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Groups 8 & 9; Close Reading/Critical Essay for Wife of Bath

F 3/21 No Class (Easter Break)

Week 11:
M 3/24 Pardoner's Tale
Week 12: Chaucer as Author: The End of the Pilgrimage (and the Limits of Fiction)
M 3/31 The "Literature Group": Tale of Sir Thopas; Tale of Melibee (see class handout for excerpts)
W 4/2 Parson's Prologue; Chaucer's Retraction (re-read)
F 4/4 Exam #2

Week 13: Chaucer's "Perfect" Work
M 4/7 Troilus and Criseyde, Books 1-2 (in translation)
  * DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Group 11; Close Reading/Critical Essay for Pardoner and "Literature Group"
W 4/9 Troilus and Criseyde, Book 3
  Miller 314-27 (Giovanni Boccaccio, from Il Filostrato, "The Union of Troilus and Cressida")
  * Chaucer's Sources and Analogues: GROUP-LED DISCUSSION # 12
F 4/11 Troilus and Criseyde
  * DUE: Proposal and Annotated Bibliography for Final Essay

Week 14:
M 4/14 Troilus and Criseyde, Books 4-5
W 4/16 Troilus and Criseyde
  Class handout: excerpts from Boccaccio's Il Filostrato
F 4/18 Troilus and Criseyde
  * DUE: Intertextuality Essay for Group 12

Week 15: Fifteenth-Century Chaucerians
M 4/21 Henryson, "The Testament of Cresseid"
W 4/23 Conclusions