

Chaucer Aloud: Sex, Love, and Marriage

Location: The Rosenbach
2008 Delancey Place, Philadelphia, PA 19103

Time: classes on Thursday 6.00-8.00 p.m. 19 September, 17 October, 14 November, 5 Dec.

Instructor: David Wallace, Judith Rodin Professor of English, University of Pennsylvania
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Class:

In this class we will read Chaucer aloud, in Middle English, since that is more fun than silent reading, and is actually how Chaucer expected his tales to be enjoyed. Middle English is wonderfully phonetic, and expressive, so no worries if you have never read it before (or not since High School). We begin with the Wife of Bath, a female speaker who tells of her five marriages (while looking for husband number six), and who both enjoys sex and makes good use of it as bargaining tool behind the bed curtains. We will see why women poets of our time, such as Jean Binta Breeze, Patience Agbabi, and Caroline Bergvall, have found her a creative inspiration. When her long prologue is done, the Wife tells her Tale, which anticipates a key question posed by Freud ("what does a woman want?"). We then move on to the Clerk's Tale, which sees an aristocratic husband demand total obedience from his wife, the patient Griselde. Our fourth and final class turns to The Franklin's Tale, in which an easy-living middle aged man attempts to resolve all difficulties in marriage, advocating compromise in all relationships and bringing us to a happy ending. And throughout the course we will look at some of the wonderful Chaucer-related materials held by the Rosenbach.

Texts:

Required: any edition featuring Chaucer's original Middle English is acceptable, but I especially recommend (and will be using) Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*, ed. Jill Mann, original spelling (Penguin, paperback, \$17.60 at Amazon):
<https://www.amazon.com/Canterbury-original-spelling-English-Penguin-Classics/dp/014042234X>

Supplementary text, not required: D. Wallace, *Geoffrey Chaucer: A New Introduction* (OUP, 2017), \$15.30
<https://global.oup.com/academic/product/geoffrey-chaucer-9780198805069>

Helpful and permissible crib (parallel text):
<https://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu/pages/text-and-translations>

Timetable:

All classes take place on Thursdays, 6.00-8.00 p.m.

19 September: Introductions and Wife of Bath's Prologue

17 October: Wife of Bath's Tale

14 November: Clerk's Tale

5 December: Franklin's Tale

Web resources (just for your own interest):

Chaucer MetaPage: promotes and centralizes web-based resources.

<http://www.unc.edu/depts/chaucer/>

Visualizing Chaucer: artists and images through time

<http://d.lib.rochester.edu/chaucer>

eChaucer: includes link to Concordance, invaluable for studying use and frequency of particular words.

<https://machias.edu/faculty/necastro/chaucer/index.html>

Harvard Chaucer website: editions, reading instructions, bibliography

<http://chaucer.fas.harvard.edu>

Open Access Companion to CT: exploratory, interactive guide for readers.

<http://www.opencanterburytales.com>

PennSound Chaucer readings and discussions (David Wallace)

<http://writing.upenn.edu/pennsound/x/Wallace.php>

Global Chaucers, <https://globalchaucers.wordpress.com>

New Chaucer Society: excellent resource page

<https://newchaucersociety.org/resources/>

Medieval Academy of America: excellent web resources.

<http://www.medievalacademy.org>

The Latin Library: for quick reference to dozens of texts, no translations.

<http://www.thelatinlibrary.com/about.html>

Digital Scriptorium, a consortium of libraries providing free online access to medieval manuscripts.

<http://bancroft.berkeley.edu/digitalscriptorium/>

Medieval Manuscripts Blog, images from British Library

<http://britishlibrary.typepad.co.uk/digitisedmanuscripts/>



Pier Paolo Pasolini as Chaucer, pondering new tales to tell, in his film
I Racconti di Canterbury, The Canterbury Tales

David Wallace has been Judith Rodin Professor of English and Comparative Literature at the University of Pennsylvania since 1996, and has served as President of the Medieval Academy and of the New Chaucer Society. He leads tours for Penn Alumni Travel and teaches contemporary travel writing as well as Chaucer, Dante, and premodern women. He takes especial interest in poetics and performance, and participates in the conversation-performances of the multi-media artist Caroline Bergvall (most recently on the mad king Sweeney in Dublin). He lives on Delancey Place, three blocks from the Rosenbach.