

ENGL6017: Chaucer and Gower
Eric Weiskott
Fall 2020, T 2:00–4:25pm
Office hours: W 10:00–11:00am (Stokes S407)
[COVID-19 contingency: virtual office hours by appointment via Zoom:
bccte.zoom.us/j/9227771962]

In fourteenth-century London, Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower were “frenemies.” Chaucer was the upwardly mobile bureaucrat, ready to poke fun at everyone; Gower was the well-heeled and straitlaced lawyer. Their bodies of poetry, spanning four decades and three languages, influence and respond to one another. We will read the two poets side by side, with attention to topics of mutual relevance such as multilingualism, politics, literary form, source study, and social status. This seminar has minimal overlap with the syllabus of ENGL3393: Chaucer. No prior knowledge of Middle English required. Gower’s French and Latin texts read in translation.

REQUIRED TEXTS (available at the BC Bookstore)

The Riverside Chaucer, ed. Larry D. Benson (3rd ed.) (Oxford, 2008)

Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Russell A. Peck, vol. 1 (2nd ed.) (Medieval Institute, 2006) (also free online, but we’ll read extensively from it) [prologue and books 1 and 8]

RECOMMENDED TEXT (also free online)

Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ed. Peck, vol. 2 (2nd ed.) (Medieval Institute, 2013) [books 2–4]

SCHEDULE

London frenemies?

Sept 1 Chaucer, *Troilus and Criseyde*, ll. 5.1856–69
Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, ll. 8.2870–970 (from “Healing Love’s Wound”; “Leave-Taking of Venus,” Lancastrian recension) and 8.*2941–70 (“Leave-Taking of Venus,” Ricardian recension)
Crow and Olson, *Chaucer Life-Records*, pp. 54 and 500
Pronunciation (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/pronunciation)

Choosing a language

(Sept 4) *Discussion post 1 due on Canvas
Sept 8 Chaucer, *General Prologue*, ll. 1.1–42 and 1.747–858
Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, prologue, ll. 1–584 (“Incipit,” Lancastrian recension; “The State”; “The Church”; “The Commons”)
Yeager, “‘Oure englisshe’ and Everyone’s Latin”
(Sept 14) *Discussion post 2 due on Canvas
Sept 15 Chaucer, *The Legend of Good Women*, ll. 1–579 (prologue, “F” version)
Gower, *Cinkante Balades*, dedication 1 (the French only) and balades 36–7
(d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-french-balades-cinkante-balades)
Middleton, “The Idea of Public Poetry in the Reign of Richard II”

Sources of history

- (Sept 21) *Discussion post 3 due on Canvas
 Sept 22 Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 2.588–1612 (“Tale of Constance”) (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/peck-gower-confessio-amantis-book-2#constance)
 Rigby, “Gower’s Works”
 (Sept 28) *Discussion post 4 (translation and commentary) due on Canvas
 Sept 29 Chaucer, *The Man of Law’s Introduction, Prologue, and Tale* (2.1–1162)
 Kolve, *Chaucer and the Imagery of Narrative* (excerpt)

Masculinity and rape

- Oct 6 Chaucer, *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton*
 Chaucer, *Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan*
 Gower, *Cinkante Balades*, balades 41–4 and 46
 Dinshaw, “Rivalry, Rape and Manhood”
 Nicholson, “Gower’s Ballades for Women”

Love, death, and Ovid

- Oct 20 Chaucer, *The Book of the Duchess*, ll. 1–290
 Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 4.2701–3186 (“Somnolence”; “On Dreams”; “Tale of Ceix and Alceone”; “On Sleeping and Waking”) (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/peck-gower-confessio-amantis-book-4#somolence)
 Carlson, “Gower Agonistes”
 *Topic study due (2–5 pp.)
 Oct 27 ?Chaucer, *Complaynt d’Amours*
 Chaucer, *The Complaint of Mars*
 Chaucer, *The Parliament of Fowls*, ll. 1–322
 Gower, *Cinkante Balades*, balades 34–5
 Brantley, “Venus and Christ in Chaucer’s *Complaint of Mars*”

Politics, 1381–1400

- (Nov 2) *Discussion post 5 due on Canvas
 Nov 3 Chaucer, *The Nun’s Priest’s Tale* (7.2821–3446)
 Gower, *Visio Anglie*, ed. Carlson and trans. Rigg, prologue (ll. 1–58) and chs. 1–5 (ll. 1–460)
 Justice, *Writing and Rebellion* (excerpt)
 (Nov 9) *Discussion post 6 due on Canvas
 Nov 10 Gower, *Visio Anglie*, chs. 6–21 (ll. 461–2150)
 Cornelius, “Gower and the Peasants’ Revolt”
 (Nov 16) *Discussion post 7 due on Canvas
 Nov 17 Chaucer, *The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*
 Chaucer, *Lak of Stedfastnesse*

- Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, prologue, ll. 1.*24–92 (from “Incipit,” Ricardian recension), 8.2971–3172 (Lancastrian recension: “Prayer for England”; “On Kingship”; “Farewell to the Book”; “Farewell to Earthly Love”), and 8.*2971–3114 (Ricardian recension: “Prayer for Richard”)
- Gower, *H. aquile pullus* (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-minor-latin-works-h-aquile-pullus)
- Gower, *O recolende* (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-minor-latin-works-o-recolende)
- Arner, *Chaucer, Gower, and the Vernacular Rising*, introduction and conclusion
- Scattergood, “Social and Political Issues in Chaucer”
- [optional: Nuttall, review of Arner, *Chaucer, Gower*]

Lyric form and metrical form

- (Nov 23) *Discussion post 8 due on Canvas
- Nov 24 Chaucer, *The Complaint unto Pity*
- Gower, *Confessio Amantis*, 8.2149–376 (“Debate between the Confessor and the Lover”; “The Lover’s Poetic Supplication”; “Venus’ Reply”)
- Gower, *In Praise of Peace* (d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-minor-latin-works-livingston-in-praise-of-peace)
- Cervone, “‘I’ and ‘We’ in Chaucer’s *Complaint unto Pity*”
- Cole, “Chaucer’s Metrical Landscape”

Manuscript culture

- Dec 1 ?Chaucer, *Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, his Owne Sciveyn*
- Gower, *Quicquid homo scribat* (three versions)
(d.lib.rochester.edu/teams/text/yeager-gower-minor-latin-works-quicquid-homo-scribat)
- Batie, “Gower’s Latin Manuscripts”
- Edwards, “Chaucer and ‘Adam Sciveyn’”
- Horobin, “Adam Pinkhurst, Geoffrey Chaucer, and the Hengwrt Manuscript of the *Canterbury Tales*”
- Manuscripts (mediakron.bc.edu/alliterativepoetry/manuscript-guide)
- *Manuscript assignment: Browse Chaucer and Gower manuscripts on the Yale Mirador Viewer (mirador.britishart.yale.edu) (see attached list)
- Dec 8 Mini-conference (lightning talks: 5 min.)
- Dec 15 *Paper due on Canvas (15–20 pp.)

GRADING

- Discussion posts 15%
- Oral presentation (to be scheduled), 5–15 min. + handout and/or Page on Canvas 20%
- Paper, 15–30 pp. / 10–15 pp. 40%
- Participation 10%
- Topic study, 2–5 pp. 15%

OBJECTIVES

In this course, you will explore the shapes of Chaucer's and Gower's literary careers and approach their poetry from multiple critical perspectives. You will encounter many genres of writing in fourteenth-century England's three literary languages: Latin, French, and English. Along the way, you will also acquire reading proficiency in the Middle English language.

ASSIGNMENTS

The Discussion posts, due on Mondays (or the previous Friday when Monday is a university holiday), should reflect your initial reactions to the course material. They can, but need not, articulate an argument about the material. Discussion post 4 is a more in-depth translation and exposition of twenty lines or so from Chaucer's *Man of Law's Tale*. The topic study is an introductory essay on a problem, topic, or research or teaching question arising from the course material. The paper is an article-length research project that engages with prior scholarship and argues for its point of view in detail. Undergraduates in the course are permitted to write toward the lower end of the page range (15 pp.), while graduate candidates in the course are expected to write longer (20–30 pp.). Lynch School graduate candidates may instead complete a teaching portfolio and/or lesson plan (10–15 pp.) relating to the course material. Each student will also prepare one oral presentation (to be scheduled) of 5–15 minutes, supported by a handout and/or a dedicated Page on Canvas. In addition to the oral presentation, graduate candidates in the course will be invited to take primary responsibility for class discussion for half of a class period (about an hour).

PARTICIPATION

Students are expected to attend each class having completed the assigned reading. Students should come to class prepared to discuss course texts as literature and as language. This is a discussion-based class, and you typically will not need laptops or smart phones. **[COVID-19 contingency: Students are expected to complete the assigned reading. Students who can should attend each Zoom meeting of the class. If the Zoom meeting time, or the Zoom technology, or the need to have a computer and reliable wifi, create problems for you, please speak to me and I will make all possible accommodations. If you fall ill, please speak to me and I will make all possible accommodations. Remember to have your hardcopy course text in front of you. If you never had, or no longer have, one of the texts, please email me and I will help get you a copy. During the Zoom class meetings please keep your attention focused on class as much as possible. I understand this is challenging, and I will be lenient. We're in this together.]**

ACADEMIC INTEGRITY

Boston College places great value on academic integrity (bc.edu/offices/stserv/academic/integrity.html). I have a zero tolerance policy for intentional plagiarism. All quotations or paraphrases of sources must be cited parenthetically or in a footnote (examples: libguides.bc.edu/c.php?g=44446&p=281300).

ACCESSIBILITY

If you are a student with a disability seeking accommodations in this course, please contact Kathy Duggan, (617) 552-8093, at the Connors Family Learning Center regarding learning disabilities, or

Paulette Durrett, (617) 552-3470, in the Disability Services Office regarding all other types of disabilities.

TITLE IX MANDATORY REPORTING

Please be aware that as a Boston College faculty member, I am obligated to report to the Student Affairs Title IX Coordinator any case of sexual misconduct that any student discloses to me.

Manuscripts of Chaucer's and Gower's English writings on the Yale Mirador Viewer

A. Chaucer, *Canterbury Tales*

- Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Merthyr fragment
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/Merthyrfragment.json)
- Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 392D ('Hengwrt')
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/MSPeniarth392DHengwrtMultispectral.json)
- Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Dd.4.24
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/CambridgeDd_4_24.json)
- Cambridge, Cambridge University Library, Kk.1.3 (*Prioress's Tale* only)
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/kk13.json)
- London, British Library, Harley 7334
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/BLHarleyMS7334.json)
- Oxford, Corpus Christi College, 198
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/OxfordCorpusChristiMS198Multispectral.json)
- San Marino, CA, Huntington Library, EL 26 C9 ('Ellesmere')
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/HuntingtonMSEL26C9.json)

B. Chaucer, *Boece*

- Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 393D
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/MSPeniarth393DMultispectral.json)

C. Gower, *Confessio Amantis*

- Cambridge, Trinity College, R.3.2
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/CambridgeTrinityCollegeMSR_3_2Multispectral.json)
- New Haven, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library, Osborn fa.1
(mirador.britishart.yale.edu/?manifest=http://manifests.ydc2.yale.edu/manifest/Osbornfa1.json)