



Bachelor's courses Faculty of Humanities

VU University Amsterdam - Student- & Onderwijszaken - Exchange programme Vrije Universiteit - 2018-2019

Literature in a Changing World 1

Course code	L_ELBALES304 ()
Period	Period 4
Credits	6.0
Language of tuition	English
Faculty	Faculteit der Geesteswetenschappen
Coordinator	dr. J.F. van der Meulen
Examinator	dr. J.F. van der Meulen
Teaching staff	prof. dr. D.M. Oostdijk, dr. J.F. van der Meulen
Teaching method(s)	Seminar
Level	300

Course objective

This course aims to (1) familiarise students with the multiple voices and layers in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, the most influential masterpiece of English medieval literary history; (2) relate this literary text to the social and political (European) contexts in which it was written and diffused; (3) train students in analysing and using secondary sources representing various theoretical approaches.

Course content

Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, narrated by a highly heterogeneous group of not so devout pilgrims, are generally considered to be an important landmark in the formation of the idea of 'Englishness' and nationhood - against the French cultural hegemony since the Norman Conquest.

In this course, we will read and critically analyse a selection of the multi-layered prologues and tales contained in this 'estates satire' by the 'Father of English poetry'. For a more diverse audience than ever before witnessed in European literature, he celebrates 'difference' and plurality, and juxtaposes things sacred and profane, low and high genres and classes - all to be explored and examined before one might be able to draw any conclusion at all. Inspired by his illustrious French and Italian predecessors (Jean de Meun in the Roman de la Rose, Dante in the Commedia and Boccaccio in the Decamerone), Chaucer daringly challenges various authorities and universal truths in vernacular English. He raises significant questions and moral issues which students are invited to compare to our current world of globalisation and (anti-)European and nationalist tendencies.

Our explorations will include scholarly work on Chaucer's reworking of famous sources, interpretations inspired by new theoretical approaches (new historicism, postcolonialism, gender and queer studies), as well as modern remediations of The Canterbury Tales on screen (Pasolini, recent re-workings of tales for the BBC).

Form of tuition

Seminar; 2 x 2 hours per week. Attendance (80%) is compulsory.

Type of assessment

Active participation (includes preparation of weekly written and oral assignments): 60%; final essay: 40%. In order to pass the course, students need a pass grade (5.5 or higher) for their essay as well as

for their average grade.

Course reading

In advance of the course, students will have obtained a copy of the following paperback edition of the Canterbury Tales, and bring it to class:

- Geoffrey Chaucer. The Canterbury Tales. A Verse Translation by David Wright, with an Introduction and Notes by Christopher Cannon. Oxford University Press, 2011. (collection Oxford World's Classics).

The reading list will be announced in the syllabus posted on Canvas at the start of the course.

Entry requirements

Students should be sufficiently proficient both in speaking and writing in English

to take part in this third-year course. Students should be aware that the level of theoretical reflection in this course is accordingly high.

Target group

BA students in the English track of Literature and Society; exchange students pursuing a bachelor in English literature or literary studies.

Remarks

Theme: Chaucer's Canterbury Tales in context. This course is obligatory in the third year.