

First Paper Assignment

Goals: To reflect actively and critically on your ongoing experience with learning to read Middle English, and to weigh both the merits and demerits of translating Chaucer's verse into Modern English poetry or prose.

Assignment: Rather than a thesis-based essay, this first paper should be a relatively informal—though still substantive—engagement with your early experiences reading Middle English. Although you are welcome to make references to the language in general or to other texts we've read so far, most of your paper should be a discussion of a short passage (around 10 lines or less) from Chaucer's *Wife of Bath's Prologue/Tale* that you found particularly interesting, personally challenging, or both.

First, explain why you chose this passage to write about. Why did it capture your attention, and/or how did its language and content challenge you? How did you grapple with the language and its meaning? What did you do to work toward a better understanding? Has your understanding of the passage changed since your first encounter with it? Are there aspects of it you continue to find difficult or ambiguous?

Next, go online and find a translation of your passage into Modern English. There are a number of these translations available with open access; let me know if you have any difficulty finding one. Some online translations are in verse; many are in prose. Once you've found one that suits you, include it in your paper and compare it with the original Middle English passage. Think about the following questions: How does translation help illuminate confusing elements? What sorts of things are gained and lost in translation? Does the translation "flatten out" any complexities, layers of meaning, lyricism, etc. in Chaucer's original language? If you chose a verse translation, how well does the poetry succeed in translating Chaucer's poetic style? If you chose prose, what do you think is lost and/or gained by changing the format?

You don't need to end by stating that the original Middle English is always the best way to read Chaucer; I'm looking for a nuanced reflection on your experiences with his language as a reader and scholar. No foregone conclusions here!

Specifics: About 1000 words (approx. 4 pages double spaced, Times New Roman).

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