

## Tutorial: Stories, Story-Tellers, and Audiences: Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Marguerite of Navarre's *Heptameron*

Fall 2003

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Office: Mears 213, ext. 3108

Office hours: T 4: 15-5, W 3-4: 30, F 10-10: 45, or by appointment

**Description:** How is a story constructed? Using a model derived from linguistics and applied to narrative, we will explore both this question and the art of narrative. For most of the semester, we will be the audience of stories from Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Marguerite of Navarre's *Heptameron*, but, at the end of the semester, **you** will be a story-teller and a part of the audience for your fellow students' stories. This tutorial will especially develop your ability to take part in class discussions and to write arguments.

A word about the latter: the same basic linguistic analysis that will serve to model narrative for us will also help you become a better writer of arguments, because, in order to write well consistently, you need to know what you are doing with language and rhetoric. You may already have a rough sense of how both work, but really knowing what you are doing depends on having a more conscious understanding of the way the English language and arguments work. Therefore, I have designed a series of explanations and exercises, *Dr. Syntax*, to help you acquire that consciousness. The very first of the explanations lays out the area of linguistics known as syntax and provides the basis for all the subsequent explanations. In a nice connection to our study of narrative, you will see that syntactic analysis also provides the basis for that study.

**Texts:** Chaucer. *The Canterbury Tales*, ed., A.C. Cawley, (Boston: Everyman, 1991) (CT)

Marguerite de Navarre. *The Heptameron*, trans. P.A. Chilton (New York: Penguin 1984) (H)

Corbett & Finkle. *The Little English Handbook*, 8th edition (Boston: Addison-Wesley Longman, 1998) (C&F)

Dobbs. *Dr. Syntax*,

### Syllabus

#### WEEK            ASSIGNMENT

For *The Heptameron* readings, read **all** of the stories told on the day assigned and jot down some notes on each of them. The story/stories indicated in parenthesis should be closely analyzed in preparation for class discussion. For both *The Heptameron* and *The Canterbury Tales*, as I noted under "Requirements," you will need developed notes from which you can speak in class. In addition to assigning a story in our early classes, I've included a few suggestions and/or questions that you should prepare. Part way into the semester, you'll be able to come

up with these questions yourself.

8/28 Introduction to the course and discussion of excerpt from Italo Calvino's *If on a winter's night, a traveler*

1 a) Introduction to *Dr. Syntax*  
C&F: 1-2; 18-19 (These are page numbers, not section numbers.)

Discussion of "Some Preliminary Thoughts About Stories" (7-8 in this packet)

H: "Introduction, 7-13, 27-37. Please don't read the rest of the introduction, until you've read at least the stories for the first few days.

"Prologue." Look closely at what's established in the opening two paragraphs. What is the **structure** (similar to **plot**) in the "Prologue"? In what ways are the **settings** arranged in **relation** to one another?

b) *Dr. Syntax* 1: Syntax  
C&F: 19-54 (Grammatical Sentences)

Academic Honesty Discussion

Suggested prewriting: write a brief story (500-1500 words). It can be any kind of story and, although you may use your own experience, does not have to be true. Don't spend a lot of time with this writing; just get something down. Keep working with it during the semester. A revised version of this story could be the draft of the story you'll turn in at the beginning of Week 11.

2 a) H: "First Day" (#4, Ennasuite). In a sentence, what is this story's **subject** and **theme**? The statement of a theme should take what you assert is the subject and predicate something about that subject; in other words, you have a clause. After you've decided what you'll defend as an answer to this question, consider the subjects and themes of stories #3 and #5; for each of these stories also come up with a clause. How do the three compare on subjects and themes? Finally, what is the structure of the action (**plot**) of #4? Could you come up with a few sentences that lay out this structure? Your analysis of plot should fit with what you've said about subject and theme.

Quiz on definitions in *Dr. Syntax* 1 (10 minutes)  
*Dr. Syntax*: Syntactic Analysis Exercise 1

Discussion of passage from "The Structures of Literature: A.J. Greimas" in Terence Hawkes' *Structuralism and Semiotics*

b) *Dr. Syntax* 2: Kinds of Sentences and Punctuation  
C&F: 100-157 (Punctuation and Mechanics)

## Syntactic Analysis: Exercise 2

Argument #1: In a paragraph of 150-250 words, argue for an analysis of a topic to be announced.

- 3 a) H: "Second Day" (#13, Parlamente). First, describe the main **characters** individually and in relation to one another. Can you come up with a series of statements that set out those relations? Next, consider the ring. How does it function in the story? Finally and more generally, how would you describe the "mechanics" by which one story in *The Heptameron* follows another each day?

C&F: 158-187

Academic Honesty Exercise due. For this exercise, use the first two paragraphs of "3. The Stories" in Chilton's introduction to *The Heptameron* rather than the excerpt given in the instructions for the exercise. The instructions ask for paragraphs; please write just a few sentences.

- b) *Dr. Syntax* 3: The Function of Word Order in English & Parallel Structure  
C&F 72-75 (Parallel Construction)  
*Dr. Syntax* 4: Transitions Within Sentences  
Syntactic Analysis: Exercise 3

Writing #1: In a paragraph of 150-250 words, write an argument about the function of tests in Hircan's story (#18).

In-Class Analysis #1: Using a form I give you, do a careful analysis of a peer's Writing #1. I've included an example of the form further on in this packet.

- 4 a) H: "Third Day" (#26, Saffredent). Analyze **plot** and **character** carefully. Is the story really about (**subject** and **theme**) what Saffredent claims it is?

*Dr. Syntax* 5: The Topic Sentence

C&F: 4-13 (Clear, Effective Paragraphs: Unity and Completeness)

- b) *Dr. Syntax* 6: Transitions Between Sentences  
Excerpt from Fahnestock, "Semantic and Lexical Coherence"  
(12-14, this packet)  
C&F: 13-17 (Clear, Effective Paragraphs: Coherence)

Argument #2: In a 500-word paragraph, argue in support of an analysis of a topic to be announced.

- 5 a) CT: Reading Middle English. I'll give you brief instructions on how to pronounce Middle English—it actually helps in your trying to read it! We'll then together read some sections of the *General Prologue*.

**Deadline** for choosing to turn in Argument #3 and do the oral presentation based on that paper at 6b or 7b.

- b) CT: *The Miller's Tale* to line 3492. (Also read the *Prologue* to this tale.) Look closely at each of the characters and at their relations to one another.

*Dr. Syntax 7: The Thesis Statement*

- 6 a) CT: *The Miller's Tale* from line 3492. In this tale, each character "rewarded" in the final actions. Does the Miller prepare you for these rewards? That is, do you find details that make the ending "fit" what has gone before? Thinking of the "syntax" of the tale, do you find it coherent?

*Dr. Syntax 8: The Outline* (Be sure to look back to *Dr. Syntax 7.*)

*Dr. Syntax 9: The Order and Structure of an Argument*

Instructions for oral presentations. Be sure to read the checklist on oral presentations in this packet.

- b) Argument #3 (half of the class): Write a 750-1000 argument about *The Miller's Tale* on a topic that will be announced.

**Outline due**

Oral presentations

- 7 a) CT: *The Reeve's Tale*. (Also read the *Prologue* to this tale.)

Review of *Dr. Syntax* and C&F. In preparation for this review, go back over the material from both. Come in with any questions you have; be prepared for a kind of oral quiz in which I'll ask you to do a sight analysis, for instance, of syntax in selected sentences, of kinds of sentence, of semantic transitions within and between sentences, and of subject and lines of argument in selected thesis statements.

C&F: 55-99 (Stylistic Choices: Sentences and Words)

Discussion of research projects. See page 17.

- b) Argument #3 (the other half of the class): Write a 750-1000 argument about *The Reeve's Tale* on a topic to be announced.

**Outline due**

Oral presentations

- 8 a) *Dr. Syntax* and C&F exam (20 minutes)  
CT: *The Wife of Bath's Tale*. (Don't read the *Prologue* to this tale.)

**Deadline** for turning in your first and second choices for research topic on an index card.

- b) Writing #2: In a paragraph of 150-250 words, write an argument about *The Wife of Bath's Tale* on a topic to be announced.

In-Class Analysis #2 of a peer's Writing #2. See instructions at 3b.

Panels for research projects announced.

- 9 **Monday:** first draft of your story (500 words minimum) is due in my office by **noon**. During your preregistration conference, we will take some time to discuss your story before you revise it for final submission on Friday of Week 13. Further on in this packet, you'll find the evaluation form I use for stories. You might want to look carefully at it before turning in your final version of your story.
- a) Preregistration instructions  
C&F 158-178 (Research Writing and Documentation)
- 8:45 AM: Library Research Session I (11/4, Catherine Rod, Associate Librarian of the College)
- b) Preregistration conferences
- 10 a) Work on your research project and meet with your panel to subdivide your topic.  
In class, turn in your topic **and** subtopic, as agreed with your panel.
- 9:00 AM: Library Research Session II (11/11, Catherine Rod)
- b) Preregistration conferences
- 11 a) During class session, each panel will work out the details of its panel presentation, choose an order for presentation, and appoint a moderator.  
You might want to look at the "Evaluation of Research Project and Presentation" which I've included in this packet. You may then go off and complete work on your part of the research project.
- b) Thanksgiving!
- 12 a) Panel presentations of research project
- Typed list of "**Works Consulted**" for your subtopic in the research project is due in class. Put your name, **topic**, and **subtopic** at the top of the list; follow the forms set out in Corbett and Finkle for "Works Cited" (179-82).
- b) Panel presentations of research
- 13 a) CT: *The Merchant's Tale* to line 1866. (Also read the *Prologue* to this tale.)
- b) CT: *The Merchant's Tale* from line 1866.

**The final draft of your story is due in my office by Friday  
12/12 at noon.**

- 14
- a) Story-telling, i.e. oral presentation of paper #4
  - b) More story-telling—at my house! Come to 1402 Summer Street for scones and jam and stories.
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