

## Sophister Module Description Template 2026-27

**Module Name: 'Bound by Love': Human Connection in Chaucer**

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**ECTS Weighting: 10 ECTS**

**Semester Taught MT/HT: Hilary Term**

**Year JF/SF/JS/SS: Senior Sophister**

### **Module Description:**

For many medieval writers, love is a force that unites all of creation, binding us together in what Chaucer calls the 'fair chain of Love'. Not limited to marriage or romantic relationships, love is central to medieval understandings of friendship, community, and politics, not to mention humanity's relationship with God and the natural world. Medieval writings about love reflect on how human beings are bound together through ties of affection and obligation, while also exploring how universal experiences are mediated through historical, cultural, and literary conventions. In the stories they tell of human connection, Chaucer's writings on love are movingly familiar. In demonstrating, however, that literary conventions often endorse hierarchical and inequitable social structures, his writings also invite us to reflect critically on the ideological and political force of writings about love. Through critical analysis and discussion, we will explore what Chaucer's writings can teach us about human connection in his age and our own.

In this module, we explore the paradoxes of medieval attitudes to love in a diverse selection of Chaucer's works. From his earliest dream visions, *The Parliament of Fowls* and *The Book of the Duchess*, Chaucer transforms literary conventions, examining love within the ecological, political and ideological systems that structure human experience. In his masterpiece, *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer takes the story of a secret love affair during the Trojan War and imbues it with remarkable philosophical and psychological complexity. In the competing perspectives of *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer explores how narratives of love are shaped in a contested and rapidly evolving social landscape. Thus, while the Knight celebrates love as a force underpinning traditional social order, the Merchant offers a wildly cynical rebuttal from a bourgeois perspective, and the Wife of Bath compels us to reconsider everything we have been taught about love, gender, and marriage.

### **Learning Outcomes:**

On successful completion of this module, students should be able to:

- Analyse selected works by Chaucer in the context of their classical and/or medieval sources
- Apply appropriate methodologies and/or critical theories in the analysis of a selection of Chaucer's works
- Comment in an informed way on how Middle English literature was shaped by literary and philosophical ideas about love
- Undertake detailed close reading of a short passage of Chaucer's poetry, supported by appropriate lexical and bibliographical tools

**Assessment Details:**

- Number of Components: 2
- Name/Type of Component(s): Assignment 1: Close Reading; Assignment 2: Critical Essay
- Word Count of Component(s): Assignment 1: 1200-1400 words; Assignment 2: 3600-4000 words
- Percentage Value of Component(s): Assignment 1: 25%; Assignment 2: 75%

**Preliminary Reading List:**

Students are likely to find it more cost-effective and convenient to acquire a complete edition of Chaucer, though there are also separate editions available. We will read all texts in Middle English, but support will be provided, while students will also be directed to appropriate translations.

The standard critical edition of Chaucer's complete works is *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson (the Oxford paperback is usually easy to find, and the extensive notes make it reasonable value). Also very reliable is *The Norton Chaucer*, ed. David Lawton, which provides helpful contextual material.

If you decide instead to purchase separate editions of the poems, the following are recommended:

Geoffrey Chaucer. *Dream Visions and Shorter Poems*. A Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Kathryn Lynch (New York, Norton, 2006).

Geoffrey Chaucer. *Troilus and Criseyde*. A Norton Critical Edition. Ed. Stephen A. Barney (New York: Norton, 2006).

Geoffrey Chaucer. *The Canterbury Tales: Seventeen Tales and the General Prologue*. A Norton Critical Edition. Ed. V.A. Kolve and Glending Olson (New York: Norton, 2018). There is also a complete Norton edition of the *Canterbury Tales*.

Translations are available of most of Chaucer's work. *Troilus and Criseyde* has been translated by Barry Windeatt for Oxford World's Classics. There are a number of solid translations of *The Canterbury Tales*, including the Penguin one by Nevill Coghill and the Oxford World's Classics translation by David Wright. Students will be directed to translations of other texts as required.

Please note:

- Curricular information is subject to change.
- Information is displayed only for guidance purposes, relates to the current academic year only and is subject to change.