

**First Close Reading Paper Assignment**  
**ENGL 2121: British Literature I**

**DUE: September 13, 2007**

Choose a brief (15-20 lines or so—the only off limits portion is lines 1-42 of the General Prologue) passage from *The Canterbury Tales* which intrigues and excites you and compare the Middle English (ME) found in your book (or, if you choose a passage not found in the *NAEL*, any of several editions available online) with at least two Modern English (NE) translations. Read each text closely, using glosses or dictionaries whenever you need to, and get a sense of what you believe is happening in the passage.\* Briefly identify the specific differences between editions, using the *Oxford English Dictionary*, Stratman's *A Middle English Dictionary*, and your own brain to figure out the strengths and weaknesses of each Modern English text. After completing your survey, translate the text you've chosen into Modern English as you see fit. Tinker as much as you'd like in order to capture the essence of what *you* believe Chaucer meant to say, keeping in mind that you are translating for a modern audience. Once you're happy with your translation, write a translator's statement; explain your choices in relation to the original Middle English text as well as the other texts you used for comparison, using the *OED* and other scholarly dictionaries whenever necessary.

Turn In:

copies of your Middle and Modern English texts (and any other sources used\*);  
your translation of the chosen text;  
and your translator's statement, complete with works cited page.

Useful Links:

Stratman's Dictionary: (or you could just type "stratman a middle english dictionary" into Google Books)  
<http://books.google.com/books?id=z88CAAAAIAAJ&dq=%22a+middle+english+dictionary%22+stratman&printsec=frontcover&source=web&ots=TI5PzzdEtJ&sig=DzCAAdkhsvC92EZvPgwpEvmfDmPs>

*The Oxford English Dictionary*: <http://www.oed.com> OR go through GALILEO and click on either link. The GALILEO password is *sugarhouse*.

Examining the *OED*: [http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/component/option,com\\_frontpage/Itemid,1/](http://oed.hertford.ox.ac.uk/main/component/option,com_frontpage/Itemid,1/)

How to cite the *OED*: <http://www.oed.com/services/citing.html>

Google: <http://www.google.com> (Search Google far and wide for NE translations if you can't get to a library.)

\*You may use outside sources such as commentaries if you find it absolutely necessary, but I suggest you stick to your own ideas; it'll be more fun, and it'll help you learn to use the *OED*. Besides, the only incorrect answer is the answer you haven't defended. (I don't need copies of the *OED*.)

An extremely short example from the General Prologue (which we will go over in class):

My ME source, copied from the webpage cited below, is duplicated in your *NAEL*.

35 But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space, Er that I ferther in this tale pace, Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun To telle yow al the condicioun Of ech of hem, so as it semed me, 40 And whiche they weren, and of what degree, And eek in what array that they were inne; And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.	35 But none the less, whilst I have time and space, Before yet further in this tale I pace, It seems to me in accord with reason To describe to you the state of every one Of each of them, as it appeared to me, 40 And who they were, and what was their degree, And even what clothes they were dressed in; And with a knight thus will I first begin.
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Kökbugur, Sinan. "Geoffrey Chaucer (1342-1400) – 'The Canterbury Tales,' from General Prologue, ll. 1-42."

The  
Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer. 1997. Librarius. 29 Aug. 2007 <<http://www.librarius.com/canttran/genpro/genpro001-042.htm>>.

My next source also has ME, which originates from *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson and published by the Holton Mifflin Company. He also wrote the NE translation. It's a little intimidating to use his work as a source...but surely there is *something* I can add to the conversation.

35 **But nathelees, whil I have tyme and space,**  
But nonetheless, while I have time and opportunity,  
36 **Er that I ferther in this tale pace,**  
Before I proceed further in this tale,  
37 **Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun**  
It seems to me in accord with reason  
38 **To telle yow al the condicioun**  
To tell you all the circumstances  
39 **Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,**  
Of each of them, as it seemed to me,  
40 **And whiche they weren, and of what degree,**  
And who they were, and of what social rank,  
41 **And eek in what array that they were inne;**  
And also what clothing that they were in;  
42 **And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.**  
And at a knight then will I first begin.

Benson, Larry D. "The General Prologue: An Interlinear Translation." The Geoffrey Chaucer Page. 20 Dec. 2001.

President and Fellows of Harvard College. 29 Aug. 2007  
<<http://www.courses.fas.harvard.edu/~chaucer/teachslf/gp-par.htm>>.

Biggest Differences: rhyme (which yields to redundancy in the first translation); "higher" English in the first NE vs. colloquial speech in the second; none the less/nonetheless, space/opportunity, state/circumstances, appeared/seemed, degree/social rank, even/also, thus/then; the second seems to sound more natural when spoken aloud.

Concerns: I want my translation to be both faithful and transparent. I want to give a good sense of what Chaucer said, but I also want the text to read as naturally as possible for a modern reader unfamiliar with the text. The differences between these two NE translations seem small, but their overall effects are large. How to reduce this?

Definitions from the *OED* (Much Abbreviated and Edited by Ms. Jones and for use ONLY during this example, okay? Okay.)

## less, *a. (n.), adv., and conj.*

### B. *adv.*

1. **a.** To a less or smaller extent; in a lower degree; to an inferior extent, amount, etc. Often in neg. phr., as *none the less*, *no less*, *not the less*: see *NO*, *NOT*, etc.; also *NATHELESS*, *NEVERTHELESS*, etc.

**c900** tr. *Bæda's Hist.* v. xii[i]. (1890) 424 Oðer [dæl] wes nohte þon læs unaarefdlice cele hæðles & snawes. **c1290** *S. Eng. Leg.* I. 205/176 þe lasse he was of heom a-drad. **a1300** *Cursor M.* 11207 Ihesu crist hir barn sco bar, Hir child, and maiden neuer less [*Gött.* neuer þe lesse]. **c1386** *CHAUCER Pard. Prol. & T.* 274 If that a prince use hasardrie..He is..Holde the lasse in reputacioun.

## condition, *n.*

### II. Mode of being, state, position, nature.

9. **a.** A particular mode of being of a person or thing; state of being. (Formerly sometimes in pl.: cf. *circumstances*.)

**1340** *HAMPOLE Pr. Consc.* 769 Alstyte als a man waxes alde þan chaunges his complexcion And his maners and his condicion. *Ibid.* 805 þus may men se..What þe condicions er of an ald man. **1375** *BARBOUR Bruce* I. 274 Schortly to say, is nane can tell The halle condicioun off A threll. **1529** *WOLSEY in Four C. Eng. Lett.* 10 The miserable condycion, that I am presently yn. **1600** *SHAKES. A.Y.L.* I. ii. 15. **1605** *VERSTEGAN Dec. Intell.* viii. (1628) 261 The heyres vnto some good estates or conditions of liuing. **a1656** *BP. HALL Rem. Wks.* (1660) 208 The Bell is tolled to give notice of his dying condition. **1667** *MILTON P.L.* III. 181 That he may know how frail His fall'n Condition is. ....

†**b.** *ellipt.* State of matters, circumstance. *in any condition*: in any case, in any circumstances.

**c1386** *CHAUCER Pars. T.* ¶245 He moste confessen hym of alle the condicions that bilongen to his synne. **1393** *GOWER Conf.* III. 69 For she founde her avision Right after the condition, Which he her hadde told tofore. **1557** *NORTH tr. Gueuara's Diall Pr.* (1619) 632/1 That..hee doe in any condition return with him.

## space, *n.*<sup>1</sup>

### I. Denoting time or duration.

†**2.** Time, leisure, or opportunity for doing something. Chiefly in *to have* (or *give*) *space*. *Obs.* **a.** Const. *to* (usually with *inf.*) or *of*.

**c.** Coupled with other ns. denoting time, ability, etc.; esp. in *time and space*, *space and time*.

(a) **a1300** *Assump. Virg.* 172 þat þu..þef hem boþe wille and space, Hem to amendy er hy beo ded. **1303** *R. BRUNNE Handl. Synne* 11292, Y þanke þe..þat hast lent me wyt and space, þys yn Englys for to drawe. **a1330** *Roland & V.* 127 He bisouþt ihesu..To sende him miþt & space, For to wite þe soþe þere. **c1386** *CHAUCER Pars.*

*Prol.* 64 For to yeue hym space and audience. **c1450** *Godstow Reg.* 18, I cry vn-to þow.., That þe gete to us repentaunce and space. **c1480** *Childe of Bristowe* in Hazl. *E.P.P.* I. 121 And y shal labour..to bring your soule in better way, yf y have lyf and space. **c1550** ROLLAND *Crt. Venus* III. 153 Thow sall not aill, and I haif life and space.

(b) **c1386** CHAUCER *Prol.* 35 Whil I haue tyme and space. **c1400** *Pilgr. Sowle* (Caxton, 1483) I. xvi. 14 He had space and suffysaunt leyser ynow for to haue enstablysshed procuratours. **1484** CAXTON *Fables of Alfonse* iii, Whanne the poure man was before the Juge, he demaunded terme and space for to answeare. **1500-20** DUNBAR *Poems* xv. 32 Asking wald haif..Convenient tyme, lasar, and space. ....

## II. Denoting area or extension.

### 5. a. Linear distance; interval between two or more points or objects.

Freq. with more or less suggestion of sense 6.

**1390** GOWER *Conf.* III. 107 Astronomie..makth a man have knowleching Of Sterres..And what between hem is of space. **1534** MORE *Conf. agst. Trib.* I. (1553) Aij, Neyther one fynger breadth of space, nor one minute of tyme from you. **1565** COOPER *Thesaurus* s.v. *Spatium, Aequali spatio distare*, to be like space asunder. **1606** SHAKES. *Ant. & Cl.* II. iii. 23 Therefore Make space enough betweene you. **1667** MILTON *P.L.* VI. 104 'Twixt Host and Host but narrow space was left, A dreadful interval. ....

### †b. Proper place or relationship. *Obs.*—<sup>1</sup>

**1390** GOWER *Conf.* II. 24 Min herte..Som time of hire is sore adrad, And som time it is overglad, Al out of reule and out of space.

### 6. a. Superficial extent or area; also, extent in three dimensions.

**1387** TREVISA *Higden* (Rolls) I. 51 Also Affrica in his kynde ha<sup>b</sup> lasse space. **c1450** *St. Cuthbert* (Surtees) 8130 Also Crayke þai him gaue, With thre myle space aboute to haue. **1451** J. CAPGRAVE *Life St. Aug.* 3 Asia..conteyneth as mech in space as do þe othir too parties. **1602** SHAKES. *Ham.* II. ii. 261, I could..count my selfe a King of infinite space; were it not that I haue bad dreames. **1687** A. LOVELL tr. *Thevenot's Trav.* II. 78 Large Houses..which take up a great deal of space because of the spaciousness of the Gardens. ....

### b. Extent or area sufficient for some purpose; room. Also const. *to* with *inf.*

**c1374** CHAUCER *Troilus* I. 714 Certeynly no more hard grace May sit on me, for why? there is no space. **c1385** —*L.G.W.* 1999 *Ariadne*, [He] hath Rovme and eke space To welde an axe or swerde. **1573-80** TUSSER *Husb.* (1878) 91 Leau space and roome, to hillock to coome. **1610** SHAKES. *Temp.* I. ii. 492 Might I but through my prison once a day Behold this Mayd:..space enough Haue I in such a prison. **1671** MILTON *P.R.* II. 339 Our Saviour..beheld In ample space under the broadest shade A Table richly spred. ....

### c. Extent or room in a letter, periodical, book, etc., available for, or occupied by, written or printed matter.

**c1530** *Pol., Rel., & L. Poems* (1866) 40, I write no more to you, for lacke of space. **1697** DRYDEN *Virg. Georg.* IV. 218 But streighten'd in my Space, I must forsake This Task. **1774** GOLDSM. *Nat. Hist.* (1776) II. 298 With a studied brevity, his system comprehends the greatest variety, in the smallest space. ....