

LMC 3502-A - CRN:92403 - TTh 9:30-10:45

Skiles 302 - Dr. Richard Utz (richard.utz@lmc.gatech.edu)

The Story of Troy

“The story of the Trojan War is one of the world’s greatest stories. For more than 3,000 years, it has forged an extraordinary narrative tradition – told and retold from Homer to Shakespeare to Hollywood.” This is how one of the most impactful cultural institutions, the British Museum, invited audiences to visit their 2019 exhibit, [Troy: Myth and Reality](#). And while you may be familiar with some of the best-known elements of this famous story, in this class you will gain deep, first-hand knowledge.

What’s this class about

The GT catalog description says this: “Introduction to Greece, Rome, and Medieval Europe through an examination of one or a few major culture conflicts expressed in the literary genres and periods.” The class fulfills a “humanities requirement.” – I am parsing this generic description for our class as follows: At the center of this class on medieval literature is one of the most famous texts by one of the most famous authors writing in English, *Troilus and Criseyde*, by Geoffrey Chaucer, followed by Robert Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid*. As you may know, the word “medieval” originally means *in the middle*, in this case in between two other time periods, Classical Antiquity and the Renaissance. And there is no way to understand what “middle” means unless you know what happened before and after. The medieval authors Chaucer and Henryson wrote their retellings of the Troy story based on a long narrative tradition. We will read the *Iliad* (Ancient Greece) and the *Aeneid* (Ancient Rome) as pre-medieval foundational stories of that tradition, and Shakespeare’s *Troilus and Cressida* (Renaissance) as an example of a post-medieval retelling. Each of these pre-medieval, medieval, and post-medieval versions (re)invents the story and adapt their focus depending on their own socio-cultural context, and we will be able to compare these versions to learn how stories begin, travel, and resituate.

Why is this class important

We begin storytelling spontaneously as children and are powerfully affected throughout our lives. In fact, learning about the power of narrative as a ubiquitous and global force is really all about humanity itself. We are natural storytellers. In this class, we will find out about the features that made the story of Troy one of the most persistent narratives ever.

After an initial reliance on human memory and orality for storytelling and performance (as with the earliest versions of the *Iliad*, somewhat for the *Aeneid*), humanity switched to writing as its most powerful means of wider communication, and reading became an

ever-increasing form of story-sharing. Oral creation and performance of stories worked in tandem with human brain development and cultural progress, and writing and reading gradually replaced orality as humans organized into larger tribes, groups, and nations. Our medieval texts in class (*Troilus and Criseyde*; *Testament of Cresseid*) are at the exact transition from orality to literacy, and Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* comes into being not too long after the printing press revolutionized communication. Depending on audiences and cultural contexts, the Story of Troy innovated into different genres of literature, moving from epic (*Iliad*, *Aeneid*) to epic romance/novel (*Troilus and Criseyde*) and to drama (*Troilus and Cressida*).

How will we work together

Storytelling and -receiving (multimodal: orally, writing, aurally, reading, visual, performance, and many hybrid forms) are central to our evolution into human beings, and we will adapt our work in class accordingly. Our most important tool will be “close reading,” a tried and tested method of engaging with stories. The goal of close reading is NOT to quickly get the gist, or to understand the basic plot (those only offer a surface understanding), but a deep engagement that takes time and nuanced analysis. While everything around us encourages us to accelerate, to respond without deliberation, and to remain at the surface of things, we need to slow down to fully comprehend motivations, grammatical structure, layered semantics, and even punctuation, i.e., the joyful complexity of human communication. Your own deep reading of assigned texts, and our class discussions based on these deep readings will be central features of this class. The amount of reading for this class and the deep engagement with details in the texts may present a challenge, but the kind of reading I propose has any number of scientifically proven positive outcomes and offers you progress at some of the essential skills and capacities that make human beings truly human. Other features of this class, like (mostly) using material instead of virtual books, handwriting instead of typing, human brain power instead of AI (with some exceptions), and human-human interaction in class instead of human-machine interaction, have all been chosen based on tried and proven scientific evidence for successful deep learning. Finally, you will learn how to read and interpret an earlier stage of English (Middle English), and neuroscience and psychology leave no doubt about the amazing benefits, intellectual and cultural, of acquiring a ‘new’ language.

Course outcomes (what's in it for you)

GT's Core IMPACTS - Arts, Humanities & Ethics mandates that, as an outcome of this course, **Students will effectively analyze and interpret the meaning, cultural significance, and ethical implications of literary/philosophical texts in English or other languages.**

More specifically, here is what this class can do:

- You will come to know and **understand** one of the most impactful narrative traditions (and their rhetorical, philosophical, etc. features) in world literature,

with a focus on some of the medieval retellings. This means you will substantially **enhance your cultural literacy** as a well-educated future thinker and future leader. *Subject matter expertise & critical analysis*

- Reading or listening to poetry (and other stories of human imagination) not only **stimulates emotional and aesthetic responses** but also **enhances cognitive functions** like flexible thinking and the capacity to understand complex, multiple meanings, all beneficial to everyday decision-making. *Cognitive functions*
- Learning and translating a historical variant of English may have the same function as learning a new language, which is known to **increase academic performance; improve concentration; empower memory; enhance communication skills; increase creativity**. *Performance & communication*
- Reading hardcopy (material books) **maximizes your understanding and retention** of what you're reading, increasing these outcomes by six to eight times over reading a digital text. *Comprehension & memory*
- Reading as an activity **reduces stress and helps relaxation** (may even **increase longevity**), **enhances empathy, improves language skills and knowledge of the world, boosts creativity and flexibility**, and helps you **grow as a person**. *Quality of life, humanity, personal growth*
- For a large portion of this class, we will consciously limit the recent technologies created to hijack your attention and keep you from in-depth deliberation. This will **increase human-to-human social interaction**, which in turn generally leads to **increased learning outcomes**. *Learning & humanity*

Required reading

All the texts below are **required**. Do not purchase other versions because you will not be able to use them. I have selected these editions carefully. They are a) the best when it comes to college level readers because they include helpful textual notes and scholarly annotations; and b) as paperbacks they minimize cost to students, in support of <https://www.affordablelearninggeorgia.org/>. So: **ONLY** purchase the books listed here with their correct ISBN numbers. The Barnes & Noble store at Georgia Tech has the required book list available, but you can of course purchase the books anywhere you like.

- 9780140275360 *Iliad* by Homer / Fagles, Robert (Trans.) – Paperback
- 9780743273312 *Troilus and Cressida* by Shakespeare, William – Paperback
- 9780393927559 *Troilus and Criseyde* by Chaucer, Geoffrey / Barney, Stephen A. – Paperback
- 9780679729525 *Aeneid* by Virgil / Fitzgerald, Robert (Trans.) -- Paperback

Other materials for the course will be supplied to you at no cost and electronically, including Robert Henryson, *Testament of Cresseid*.

Attendance

Most of the of learning in this class takes place during social interactions during class meetings. Therefore, **attendance is mandatory**. GT Policy: “Although it is recognized that occasionally it may be necessary for students to be absent from scheduled classes [...] for personal reasons, including major religious observances, students are responsible for all material covered in their absences, and they are responsible for the academic consequences of their absences. Students should discuss planned absences with their instructors as soon as possible after the beginning of an academic term. Work missed may be made up at the discretion of the instructors. [...] Students who are absent because of participation in approved Institute activities (such as field trips and athletic events) will be permitted to make up the work missed during their absences. Approval of such activities will be granted by the Student Academic and Financial Affairs Committee of the Academic Senate, and statements of the approved absence may be obtained from the Office of the Registrar”. **Parsed for our class, this means:** You may miss one (1) class meeting for any reason, no questions asked. Any other unplanned and/or unexcused absence results in an automatic deduction of 5% of total available points for the semester (+no make-up offered for exams or quizzes missed). There should not be more than three (3) planned/excused absences during the semester (contact me during the first two weeks of the semester if you believe there might be more). Finally: Arriving more than 30 minutes late to class will count as an unexcused absence.

List of Graded Assignments

- 10-12 ultra short quizzes to test reading assignments (total of 200 points available). [please bring pen to class, always]
- Active class preparation and participation (total of 200 points available)
- Collaborative assignment (total of 300 points available)
- Final exam (total of 300 points available)

Detailed study information will be provided for each type of assignment ahead of time.

Grading scale

This class uses a traditional grading scale: **A** 90% or higher [900-1000 points]; **B** 80% - 89% [800-899 points]; **C** 70% - 79% [700-799 points]; **D** 60% - 69% [600-699 points]; **F** Less than 60% [0-599 points]. *Please remember:* Unplanned and/or unexcused absences result in an automatic deduction of 5% (50 points) of total available points (+no make-up offered for exams or quizzes missed).

Technology in class

No use of technological devices (computer, phone, smart watch, etc.), unless expressly announced and needed for specific learning purposes and assignments. These devices

will be switched off and invisible during class. The only exception to this policy is an official agreement between student, [Office of Disability Services](#), and instructor about reasonable accommodations because of learning barriers. This agreement needs to exist prior to the event, exam, etc. for which you need accommodation. Oh, and please bring a pen to class because our quizzes are hand-written.

Confidentiality

Our class is a safe space for exchanging points of view on a myriad of issues included in the texts we read. To assist everyone with feeling comfortable about speaking their mind without self-censoring, I would like us to agree to the [Chatham House Rule](#), which allows to mention classroom content outside of class, but protects the identities of speakers.

Honor Code & Student-Faculty Expectations

As your instructor, I will make every effort to create a classroom environment in which honesty flourishes, and as a GT student you have made a commitment to abide by our institutional [Honor Code](#). – I will share specific guidelines as to the use of AI for an assignment due towards the end of the semester. For all general student-faculty expectations at Georgia Tech, please consult: <https://catalog.gatech.edu/rules/22/>.

Accommodations for Students with Disabilities

If you are a student with learning needs that require special accommodation, contact the Office of Disability Services (404-894-2563) as soon as possible to make an appointment to discuss your special needs and to obtain an accommodations letter. Please also e-mail me as soon as possible in order to set up a time to discuss your learning needs.

How to succeed in this class

Do all the required reading; attend class (most learning in this class will happen in class); stay engaged and participate during class meetings; don't miss deadlines (keep a calendar with reminders); reach out asap if you experience difficulties; stay healthy.

How to contact me

To email me, use the CANVAS mail function so that your message is marked as coming from this class. Office hours: Location: Skiles 310, and via TEAMS. - Times: TBD.