

# ENG 201 – Global Literature I

## *Class Outline*

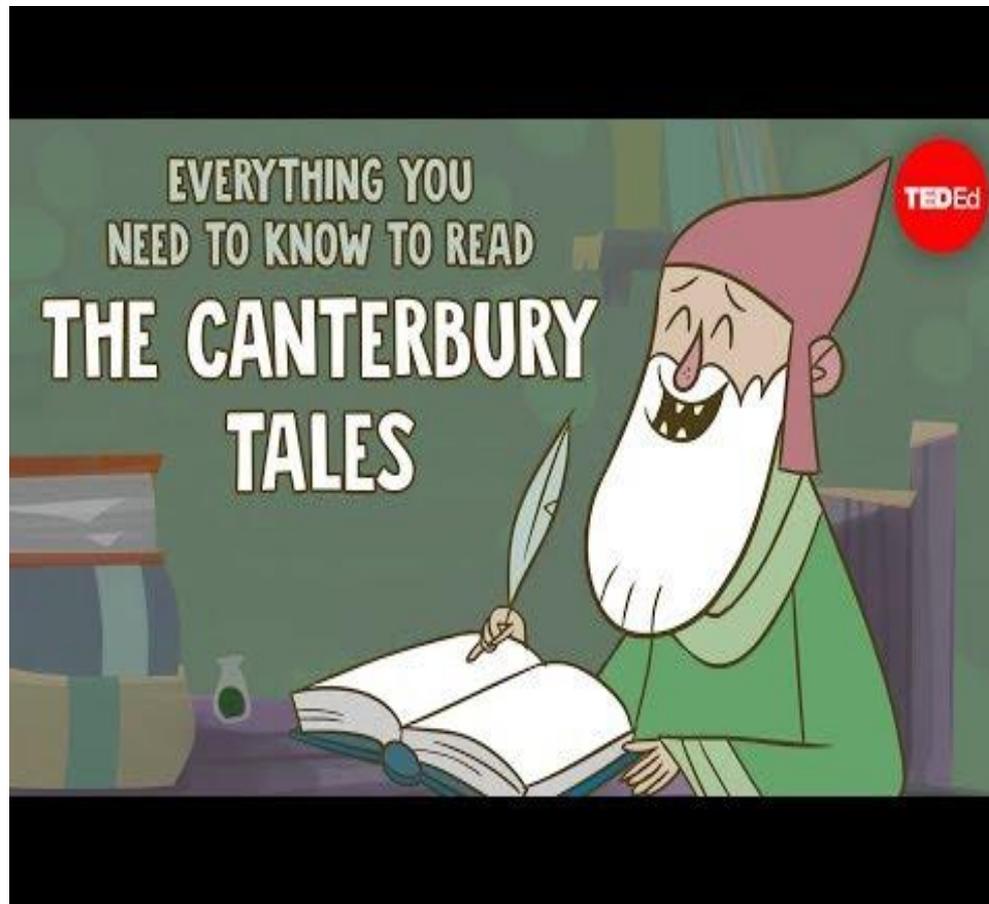
***Attendance*** (Please use the time to catch up on reading & work on your Literary Analysis Essay)

***Lecture:*** Chaucer – review ppt.

***Conclusion:*** Response Essay  
(Select one of two questions and complete by 11:59 pm by 11/30).

# Geoffrey Chaucer

Film Clip: *The Canterbury Tales* (Please note: *\*Theme of sexuality and bawdiness is highlighted in this Clip\**)



# Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343-1400)

- Dominant literary figure in the 14<sup>th</sup> century
- “Father of English Literature”
- Life experiences
  - child of wealthy wine merchant
  - page in a royal household
  - spoke French, Latin, & Italian
  - Soldier & diplomat
  - member of Parliament

# Geoffrey Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales

- Wrote the tales around 1385 A.D.
- Planned many more tales, but did not complete the proposed 120 tales before his death
- Wrote about all classes in The Canterbury Tales to give us a glimpse of English society at the time

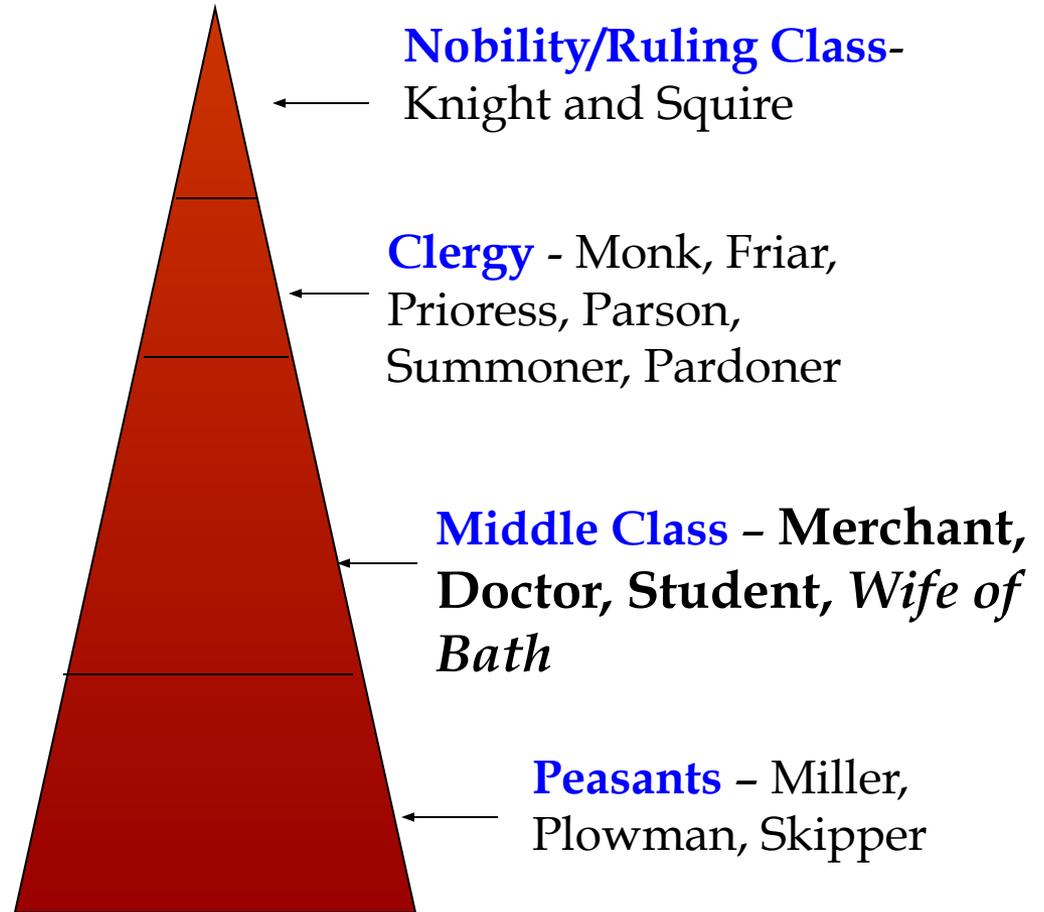
# Geoffrey Chaucer and The Canterbury Tales (cont.)

- Went against tradition when he wrote in Middle English rather than French
- Considered “Father of the English Language” because he went against the norm and chose to write in the language of the people.

# The Middle Ages

## Background

Hierarchy -  
Class Structure  
During Chaucer's  
Time



# Code of Chivalry

*A knight must be:*

1. True to his God and a defender of the faith.
2. True and loyal to his lord and king.
3. True to his lady.
4. Humble and modest in daily actions.
5. Brave and fierce in war and adversity.

# Code of the Clergy

*A member of the clergy must:*

1. Be chaste and pure.
2. Be devoted to God.
3. Obey God and Biblical law.
4. Take vows of poverty.
5. Achieve heavenly reward through earthly denial.

# Seven Deadly Sins

- Gluttony
- Avarice / Greed
- Sloth
- Lust
- Vanity
- Pride
- Anger

# Moral Virtues (opposite of sins)

- Moderation
- Generosity
- Diligence
- Love
- Modesty
- Humility
- Forgiveness

# Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

- Takes representatives of English society on a pilgrimage to Canterbury Cathedral (Shrine of Archbishop Thomas Becket)
- Pilgrims – each has speech and tale that matches a real person during his (Chaucer's) time

# The Prologue

- Thirty pilgrims are on their way to Canterbury to pay homage at Becket's tomb.
- Each agrees to tell two tales on the way to the shrine and two tales back.
- The winner will receive a supper paid for by all.

# The List of Pilgrims

- **Narrator** – line 20
- **Knight** – line 43
- **Squire** – line 81
- **Yeoman** – line 103
- **Prioress (+ 3)** – line 122
- **Monk** – line 169
- **Friar** – line 212
- **Merchant** – line 280
- **Oxford Cleric** – line 295
- **Serjeant at Law** – line 319
- **Franklin** – line 341
- **Guildsmen** – (Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, Weaver, Carpet-Maker) - line 371
- **Cook** – line 390
- **Skipper** – line 398
- **Doctor** – line 421
- **Wife of Bath** – line 455\*
- **Parson** – line 488
- **Plowman** – line 539
- **Miller** – line 561
- **Manciple** – line 585
- **Reeve** – line 605
- **Summoner** - line 641
- **Pardoner** – line 689

*\*Note: Slides 3-13 taken and adapted from*  
[https://www.wsfc.k12.nc.us/cms/lib/NC01001395/Centricity/ModuleInstance/17697/canterbury\\_tales.ppt](https://www.wsfc.k12.nc.us/cms/lib/NC01001395/Centricity/ModuleInstance/17697/canterbury_tales.ppt)

# *The Wife of Bath*



# Geoffrey Chaucer

## □ GEOFFREY CHAUCER

*The Canterbury Tales -*

[https://pracownik.kul.pl/files/10791/public/the canterbury tales penguin classics by geoffrey chaucer nevill coghill z-lib.org.pdf](https://pracownik.kul.pl/files/10791/public/the_canterbury_tales_penguin_classics_by_geoffrey_chaucer_nevill_coghill_z-lib.org.pdf)

- - Form: Poetry
  - Genre: Frame Narrative including Fables, Hagiography, Confession, and other genres
  - Country of Origin: England
  - Key Themes: *Religion, Pilgrimage, Courtly Authority, Feudal System, Agency, Chastity, Intertextuality, Sexuality, & Chivalry*

# Geoffrey Chaucer

## Summary:

- This frame-tale poem revels in the extraordinary range of possible tales and tale-tellers.
- These diverse pilgrims span the range of medieval life. *The pilgrims are, in a way, types or ideals of each manner of life*, but each teller is also an individual, characterized as such not only in the General Prologue but also in the manner in which each tale is told.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

## Key Passages:

- “And especially, from every shire’s end / Of England, to Canterbury they wend; / The holy, blessed martyr they all seek, / Who has helped them when they were sick and weak.”
- “Each one of you, to help shorten our way, / Along this journey, two tales you will say, / Toward Canterbury, as I mean you to, / And home-ward, you’ll tell us another two . . .”
- “I pray that Jesus may shorten the lives / Of those who won’t be governed by their wives . . .”

# Geoffrey Chaucer

I. The Canterbury Tales is a frame narrative, a collision of the epic tradition and the novella of *The Thousand and One Nights* and Giovanni Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

- In early spring, the poet encounters other pilgrims at the Tabard Inn of Southwark, where they are assembling for a trek to Canterbury – specifically the shrine of Thomas Becket, to whom they prayed during the winter months.
- Geoffrey Chaucer codifies and commodifies his frame narrative as a storytelling contest among socially and spiritually disparate storytellers. According to their presumptive master of ceremonies, *the pilgrims will each tell tales of “best sentence and most solas” (“most meaning and delight”)* on the road to Canterbury.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- Among the many genres Chaucer embedded within this frame are **confession** (“The Wife of Bath’s Prologue”), **Arthurian romance** (“The Wife of Bath’s Tale”), **sermons** both sage (“The Parson’s Tale”) and ironic (“The Pardoner’s Tale”), roman d’antiquité (“The Knight’s Tale”), fabliau (“The Miller’s Tale” and “The Reeve’s Tale”), hagiography (“The Prioress’s Tale” and “The Second Nun’s Tale”), Breton lai (“The Franklin’s Tale”), de casibus tragedy (“The Monk’s Tale”), and beast fable (“The Nun’s Priest’s Tale”).

□

# Geoffrey Chaucer

**II. The variety of Geoffrey Chaucer's life experience – from child of the merchant class to court page, from customs collector to public works supervisor, from international ambassador to provincial Member of Parliament – *is unusually illuminative of his style and figure as a poet.***

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- As a servant of three successive English kings, Chaucer was said to have been dispatched on a number of embassies – some of them secret – to Spain and Italy in particular. These missions apparently included peace negotiations and marriage arrangements.
- On one of his trips to Italy, Chaucer may have met Francis Petrarch and Giovanni Boccaccio, the underlying sources for much of his narrative output.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- Chaucer tells the reader very little about himself or his times even when incorporating his persona into his narratives. Still we know more about Chaucer's life in the fourteenth century than we do of William Shakespeare's from the mid-sixteenth to the early seventeenth century.
- While French remained the language of his patrons Edward III and Richard II, Chaucer championed and popularized the London dialect of "English" just as Dante and Boccaccio had vernacular Italian; the common tongue appropriate to so many of Chaucer's narrative voices became the standard of artistic expression.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

**III. Medieval narrative tended toward allegorical, didactic storytelling that emphasized monolithic truths over subjective experience and broad moral lessons over individual introspection.**



# Geoffrey Chaucer

- “The General Prologue” presents its roster of pilgrims *as a loose cross-section of the three estates (knights, priests, and peasants) with conflicting hierarchies and pre-bourgeois gray areas* among the merchants and tradesmen.
- Chaucer goes further than many of his predecessors, *observing the storytellers-to-be and composing a detailed description* (sometimes wittily critical) of them before finding himself invited into the pilgrims’ fold and his own frame-narrative fabric.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- Before the Host (Harry Bailly) proposes the storytelling contest and defines its terms, the poet provides a diverse set of thematic and narrative expectations.
- That he subjects himself to the same scrutiny he reserves for the pilgrims affords *The Canterbury Tales* an unpretentious, freewheeling feel.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- **IV. From Geoffrey Chaucer's knight down to the Wife of Bath's knight, the warrior class was supposed to uphold the values of chivalry (from *cheval*, French for "horse").**
- **Writers of medieval romance, not to mention such political luminaries as Edward III of England, conflated moral duty and romance with the physical discipline of horsemanship.**

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- Popular bed- side reading during the High Middle Ages, *The Romance of the Rose* was a huge influence on “The Merchant’s Tale,” “The Squire’s Tale,” and, along with Giovanni Boccaccio’s *Teseida*, “The Knight’s Tale.”
- The story is a dream vision, rife with classical and philosophical allegory. The young knight quests after “The Rose,” his idealized lady love. Though romances remained popular reading for literate Europeans of all stations, by Chaucer’s time, stories and ideals of knights and ladies had also become material for satire and parody.
- The Old Woman of *The Roman de la Rose* may have inspired the character of Alison, the Wife of Bath, whose tale begins with a knight of Arthur’s court raping a young woman.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- Though the tenets of courtly romance would see him executed immediately, the king is not the arbiter of justice that day. Instead, the queen, who understands a bit about illicit passion (see Dante's *Inferno*, Canto 5, and *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*), offers the knight-rapist a quest for redemption.
- That quest, to answer the extremely subjective and rhetorical question "What do women most desire?," proves fruitless until the knight encounters the Loathly Lady in the forest. His re-education comes at a price, but his marital misery becomes happily ever after when he learns to put the of official answer (sovereignty in marriage) to practical use.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

**V. A key theme of *The Canterbury Tales* as a whole – and at the center of many disputes on the road – is the notion of secular versus clerical authority.**

Geoffrey Chaucer represents the ongoing battle between the Roman church and the English state in his intricate accounts of clashes between and within the three “estates” of English citizenry: Knights, Clerics, and Peasants.

# Geoffrey Chaucer

- While misuse of social or church status tends toward comedy in the secular tales (Miller, Merchant) and saint-making in the clerical tales (Monk, Clerk), there are exceptions like “The Friar’s Tale” (concerning a summoner’s attempt to outfox Satan) and “The Nun’s Priest’s Tale” (a beast fable chock-full of references to classical philosophy and medicine).
- In general, the closer two pilgrims are in social status, the more likely they are to quarrel. *The encroachment of the merchant class upon economic and social privileges previously reserved for the knightly class makes matters all the more ambiguous.*

# Geoffrey Chaucer

## Response Questions for Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

- 1. Consider three traits that distinguish the Wife of Bath from other fourteenth-century English Women. What are they? How are they supported in the work?
  
- 2. Considering the descriptions of “The General Prologue,” how are the Wife of Bath’s and Nun’s Priest’s tales appropriate for their tellers?

# Geoffrey Chaucer

## CONCLUSION (Reminders):

- Extra Credit Assignment\*
- Analysis Essay\*
- HAPPY Thanksgiving!