

The Canterbury Tales

Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer

- ◆ Born in London around 1343, died in 1400
- ◆ A businessman, a soldier, a trusted government official, a traveler, a scholar, and an author
- ◆ Family had a heraldic coat of arms, but wasn't quite titled nobility.
- ◆ Little is known about Chaucer's formal education, but he was clearly well-read in several languages.
- ◆ "Don Chaucer" - considered the father of English poetry
 - ◆ Poets' Corner in Westminster Abbey



The Canterbury Tales

- ◆ As we discussed, pilgrimages were a popular way to express religious devotion in the medieval period.
- ◆ In these tales, readers join a group of pilgrims as they travel from the Tabard Inn to Canterbury.



A note on pilgrimages...

- ◆ Many Christians still make pilgrimages today.
- ◆ A popular organization through which these trips are organized is named Canterbury Pilgrimages and Tours.



Pope Francis says:

**"I'LL SEE YOU IN
PHILADELPHIA"**

September, 2015

Medieval Class Structure

- ◆ Those who pray
 - ◆ Spiritual leaders
- ◆ Those who fight
 - ◆ Nobility - small hereditary aristocracy
 - ◆ Born to rule and defend
- ◆ Those who labor
 - ◆ Everyone else

Essential Questions

- ◆ How does the development of the English language reflect a changing British culture?
- ◆ How do stereotypes and archetypes inform our understanding of humanity?
- ◆ In what ways are values and social structures revealed in societies?
- ◆ How do values influence the journeys people take?
- ◆ What does the use of satire reveal about medieval literature?

The Prologue

- ◆ Chaucer uses his prologue to introduce the pilgrims and explain why they are gathered together.
- ◆ Use the chart provided on our website to keep track of each character's important characteristics.



Characterization

- ◆ Direct characterization
 - ◆ direct statements about a character
- ◆ Indirect characterization
 - ◆ actions, thoughts, and dialogue that reveal a character's personality
 - ◆ Chaucer uses lots of indirect characterization!

Satire and Irony

- ◆ Satire

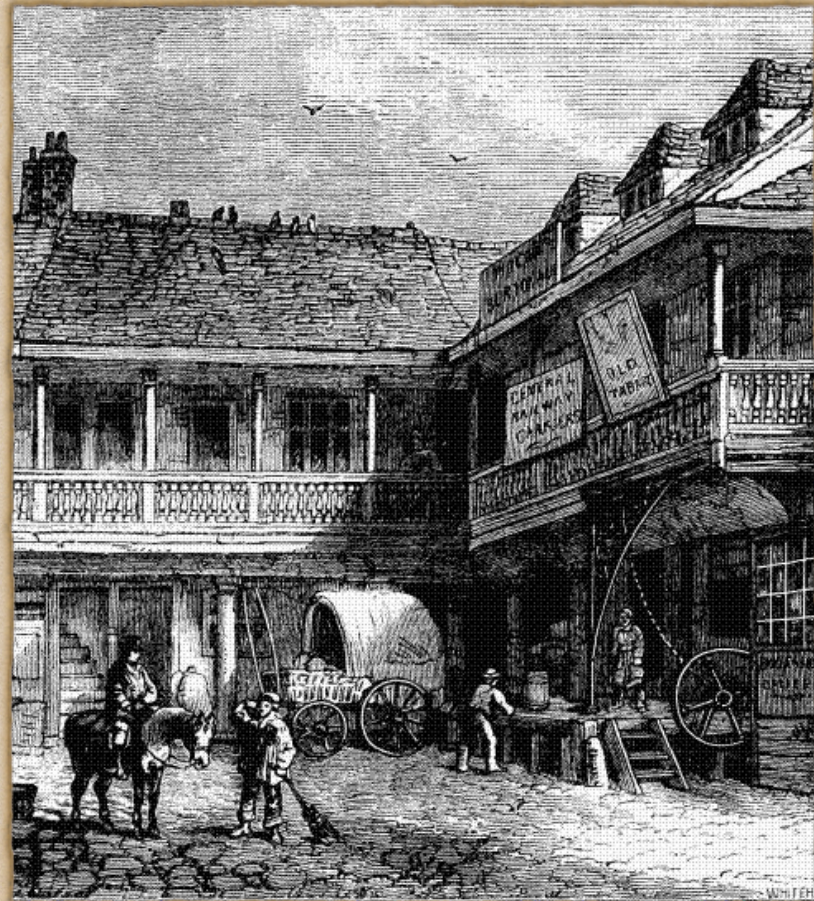
- ◆ writing that makes fun of weaknesses, institutions, and social conventions
- ◆ can be moralistic or intended to provide humor

- ◆ Irony

- ◆ verbal irony - stating things the reader knows are false
- ◆ situational irony - readers expect one thing but get surprised by the opposite

Setting the Scene

- ◆ Frame Story
- ◆ What time of year is the pilgrimage taking place?
- ◆ Why are the pilgrims going to Canterbury?
- ◆ Who is the “holy blissful martyr” the pilgrims seek?
- ◆ Where does the pilgrimage begin?



The Knight

- ◆ Lines 43-80
- ◆ One of three ideal portraits
 - ◆ warrior, crusader, embodies courtly values
- ◆ How does Chaucer use direct/indirect characterization?



The Squire

- ◆ lines 81-102
- ◆ Knight's son
- ◆ Embodies qualities of a typical romantic hero
 - ◆ Textual evidence?
- ◆ Courtly and military arts



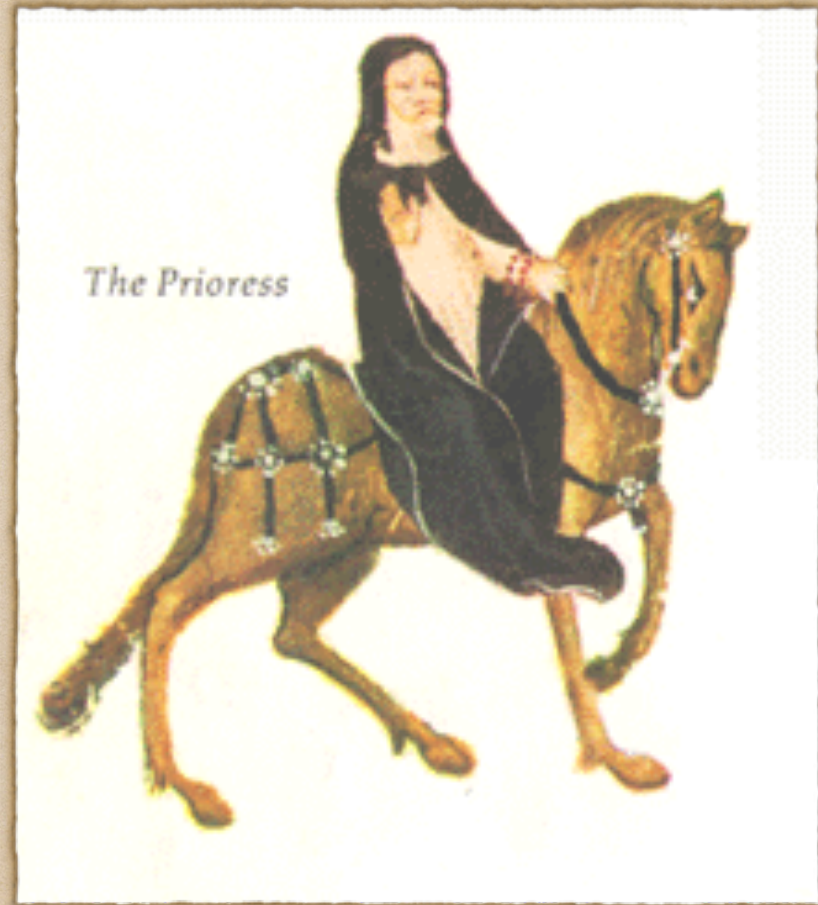
The Yeoman

- ◆ lines 103-121
- ◆ Knight's servant
- ◆ Does Chaucer focus on internal or external attributes of the Yeoman?



The Prioress

- ◆ lines 122-168
- ◆ A prioress is the head of a convent
- ◆ Younger daughters of wealth often filled this role
- ◆ Is she genuinely religious?
How can you tell?



The Monk

- ◆ lines 169-211
- ◆ The four monastic vows are poverty, obedience, chastity, and stability. How is the Monk doing with these vows?



The Friar

- ◆ lines 212-279
- ◆ Lives in utter violation of his VOWS.
- ◆ Associates with local women and taverners, works for profit
- ◆ What does the narrator think of his personality?



The Merchant

- ◆ lines 280-294
- ◆ This is a more ambiguous portrait.
- ◆ The Merchant presents himself as wealthy, but also appears to be in debt.



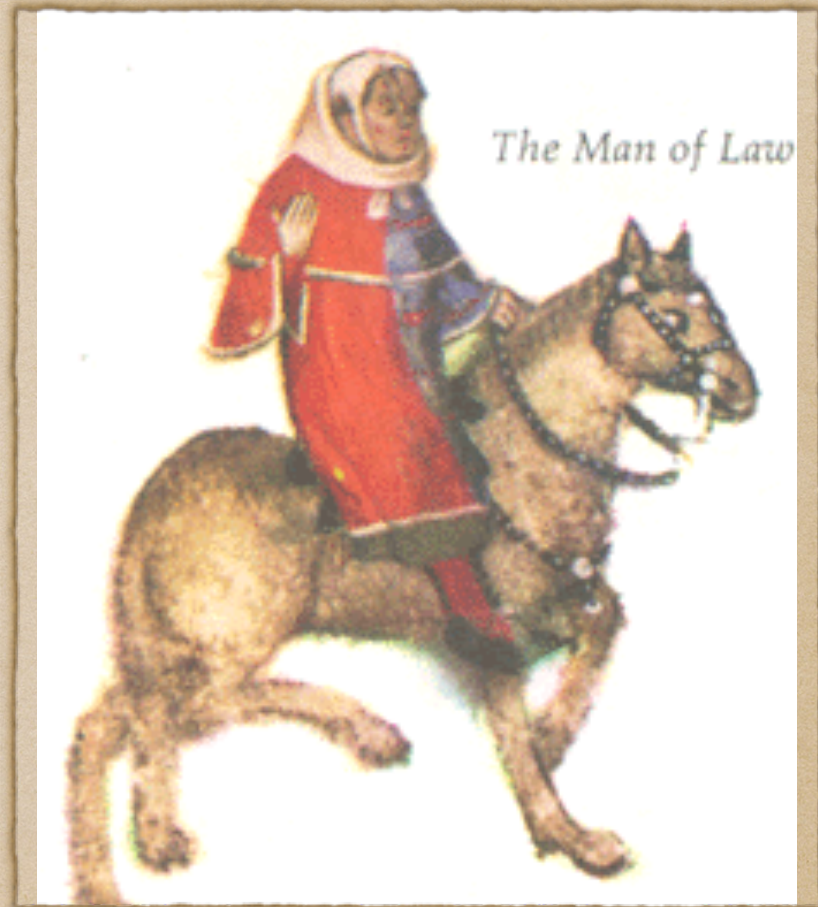
The Oxford Cleric

- ◆ The first admirable Church member
- ◆ Devoted to a love of learning and of God
- ◆ He would rather buy a book than a coat or a good meal
- ◆ Totally unworldly



The Sergeant at the Law

- ◆ Is he good at his job?
- ◆ What does the narrator mean when he says, “Nowhere there was so busy a man as he: But was less busy than he seemed to be”?



The Franklin

- ◆ A Franklin is a wealthy landowner
- ◆ Is he generous with his wealth?



The Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, and Weaver

- ◆ Group of skilled tradesmen
- ◆ How can we tell that they are doing well financially?
- ◆ Who do they bring along with them?



The Skipper

- ◆ Is the Skipper good at leading his ship?



The Doctor

- ◆ His practice, typical of the period, sounds to us more like astrology and magic than medicine. What are some examples?



The Wife of Bath

- ◆ The only woman on the pilgrimage who isn't a nun
- ◆ How many times has she been married?
- ◆ How many times has she traveled to Jerusalem?
- ◆ Does she hear well? (This will be important to her story.)



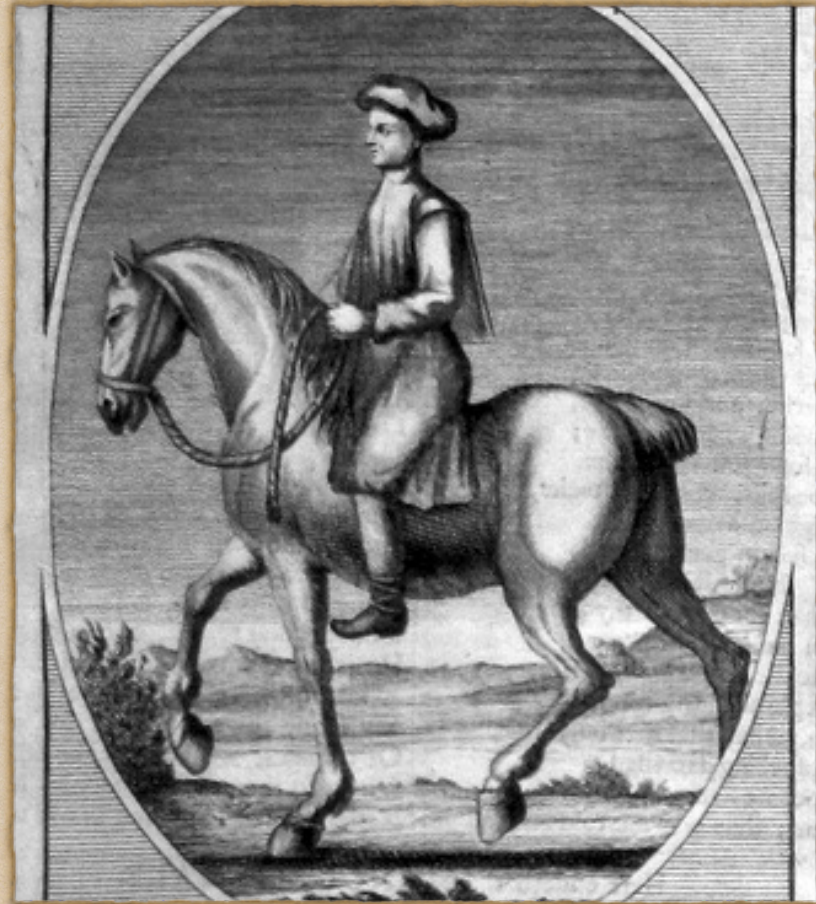
The Parson

- ◆ Another ideal portrait
- ◆ He is not described physically
- ◆ “Yet he was rich in holy thought and work” (489).



The Plowman

- ◆ The Parson's brother
- ◆ He is probably the lowest in social rank of those on the pilgrimage. How does his spirituality compare?



The Reeve, Miller, Manciple, Pardoner, and Summoner

- ◆ Group of rogues with whom the poet amusingly lumps himself
- ◆ Almost wonder what these people are doing on a pilgrimage...



The Miller

- ◆ This pilgrim is a miller of other people's grain
- ◆ Is he honest?



The Reeve

- ◆ Shrewd manager of a country estate
- ◆ He makes sure no one takes advantage of him, but does he take advantage of his young lord?
- ◆ What is the Reeve's other job?



The Summoner

- ◆ A summoner delivered summons for public sinners to appear at court.
- ◆ In such a position, there were many opportunities for bribery, extortion and blackmail.



The Pardoner

- ◆ The Pardoner professes to give people pardon for their sins in exchange for money. He also offers chances to view his pretend holy relics, which will supposedly bring blessings.
- ◆ This guy is horrible!



The Frame Story

- ◆ After introducing the pilgrim, the narrator returns to an explanation of the frame story.
- ◆ The pilgrims are gathered to travel to Canterbury when their host suggests they tell each other tales along the way.
- ◆ How do the pilgrims react to his suggestion?

