

# Geoffrey Chaucer-Canterbury Tales

Mr. Pogreba, Helena High

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## Geoffrey Chaucer (1343-1400)

- Author, philosopher, diplomat and poet, best remembered for The Canterbury Tales and Troilus and Cressida.

## Middle English

- Middle English is the early form of the English language that was spoken and written between roughly 12<sup>th</sup>-15<sup>th</sup> centuries. Derived from Old English combined with the influences of French and Anglo-Norman, it was the language of the common people of England. However, some of England's greatest writers, including Chaucer, Kempe, and Malory wrote in Middle English.
- The invasion of England in 1066 by William the Conqueror had a profound impact on the language of England. England was essentially tri-lingual, with the Wessex dialect of Old English for the commoners, French for the nobility, and Latin for the clergy. All three languages influenced the development of Middle and Modern English.
  - For example, English has three words for one concept, each with a slightly different meaning
    - Kingly (Old English)
    - Royal (French)
    - Regal (Latin)
- Old English loses its case endings and complicated inflection, and the language begins to take on a sound and written form that is much easier for Modern English speakers to follow.
  - Syððan wæs geworden þæt he ferde þurh þa ceastre and þæt castel: godes rice prediciende and bodiende. and hi twelfe mid. And sume wif þe wæron gehælede of awyrgdum gastum: and untrumnessum: seo magdalenisce maria ofþære seofan deoflu uteodon: and iohanna chuzan wif herodes gerefan: and susanna and manega oðre þe him of hyra spedum þenedon; (Luke 8.1-3, in Old English)
  - And it is don, aftirward Jesus made iourne bi cites & castelis prechende & euangelisende þe rewme of god, & twelue wiþ hym & summe wymmen þat weren helid of wicke spiritis & sicnesses, marie þat is clepid maudeleyn, of whom seuene deuelis wenten out & Jone þe wif off chusi procuratour of eroude, & susanne & manye oþere þat mynystreden to hym of her facultes (Luke 8.1-3, in Middle English)
- **Pronunciation of Middle English**
  - 'a' as in modern 'father'
  - long 'e' as in modern 'there'
  - short 'e' as in modern 'egg'
  - 'i'/vowel 'y' as in modern 'see'
  - long 'o' as the oa in modern 'oar'
  - short 'o' as in modern 'on'
  - 'u' as in modern 'do'
  - 'r' sounds have a light roll
  - Generally, all letters are pronounced. Thus, knight is pronounced k-n-i-g-h-t, not "nite"
  - The final e in words is pronounced, unstressed

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## *Literary Types in The Canterbury Tales*

- Framing Device: outline for a story that provides a unified whole to a story that is partially disconnected
- Beast Fable: Animals with human characteristics teaches a lesson. Relies on assumptions about the nature of particular animals
- Exemplum: Short narrative that teaches through example
  - Exemplar: Model person
- Fabliaux: Fable with a snappy ending
- Breton Lay: narrative poem, not a song
- Courtly Romance: love story that uses the conventions of the aristocracy
  - Andreas Capellanus: The Rules of Courtly Love
    - Jealousy
    - Temporary
    - Strength and Weakness
    - Paleness
    - Knight and His Lady
    - Representative of relationship between knight and his lord.

## *Themes of the Prologue*

- Appearance versus Reality. Chaucer points out the hypocrisy of the characters in the story
- Religious Hypocrisy in Particular
  - The Nun—polite, nice, genuine. Honest faith, but human
  - The Friar—worldly, earthy. Against expectations of his order
  - The Pardoner-vain, betrays his faith
  - The Summoner-Appearance suggests his reality. He is really evil, selfish, and perhaps mad
  - The Parson-like a shepherd to his flock

