

•His life  
 •His Works  
 •His World  
 •The Canterbury Tales  
 •The Pilgrims

# Chaucer

**Chaucer** 1340(?) - 1400  
 The Father of English Poetry

The Canterbury Tales

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## Life

- Born in London - 1340 (?)
- His father → wine merchant
- His jobs:
  - Service at Court:
    - A Page
    - A Diplomat
  - Custom's Officer
  - Soldier
    - Took part in the Hundred Years' War → taken prisoner → ransomed
- In the newly born Parliament (1295 - Edward I) as the representative of Kent.
- Buried in "Poets' Corner" in Westminster Abbey. - 1400

*in contact with the new merchant class*

*in contact with the sophisticated society of the Court*

Being a poet wasn't considered a real job and you couldn't earn your own living on it

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## Works

- French Period (1359 - 1372)
  - Le Roman de la Rose
  - The Book of the Duchess
- Italian Period (1372 - 1386)
  - Troilus and Criseyde
  - The House of Fame
- English Period (1386 - 1400)
  - The Canterbury Tales

Chaucer Reading To The Court Of Richard II

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## Chaucer's World

- 3 Kings: Edward III, Richard II, Henry IV
- Dangerous times:
  - Long continuing war against France
  - Disagreements between the English Kings and the Pope
  - "Black Death"
- Religion continues to be a powerful force
- Pilgrimages were very popular

*The Wilton Diptych (Richard II, Kneeling)*

Courtly Love

Pilgrims

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## The Canterbury Tales

- 1387 -

- A collection of stories introduced by a General Prologue
- Metre: rhyming pentameter = heroic couplet (invented by Chaucer)
- A mirror of the English Medieval society
- The pilgrims were going to Canterbury on a pilgrimage to Thomas à Becket's shrine
- He had been murdered by 4 knights in the Canterbury Cathedral in 1170 because he had defended the Church against the King - Henry II.

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When in April the pleasant weather comes,  
Pilgrims desire to start their travelling ...



29 pilgrims meet in London - Southwark -  
at the Tabard Inn to start their pilgrimage



Chaucer is among them.

On the way, each traveller should tell a story  
(cfr Decameron)

The teller of the best tale will have a free dinner at  
the Tabard on their return.



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These portraits are from the woodcuts  
of the illustrations in the Ellesmere  
Manuscript and follow the descriptions  
in the General Prologue.



•Three more Characters



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## Knight

- He rode a fine horse but his clothes still carried the mark of war. He was going on the pilgrimage to thank God for his victories.



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## Pardoner

- He had long yellow hair like rats' tail with no beard. If people gave him money he forgave them in the name of the Church. He was a liar. He earned far more money than the honest Parson.



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## Nun's Priest

- *The Nun's Priest is barely mentioned in the General Prologue, where we are told only:*  
Another NONNE with hire hadde she,  
That was hir chapeleynne, and preestes thre.

(There was another nun with the Prioress; she was her secretary; there were also three priests.)



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## Wife of Bath



- She wore a huge hat and a long coat over her wide hips. Her tights were red and her shoes were new. She had had five husbands: she had lived longer than them all; she had also become rich enough to go on pilgrimages, to Jerusalem, Spain, France, Rome ...



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# Merchant

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- He was rich. He had a long beard and rich clothes. He knew how to make money and rode a fat horse.



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# Franklin (Land-Owner)

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- He had a white beard. He loved good food and wine.



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