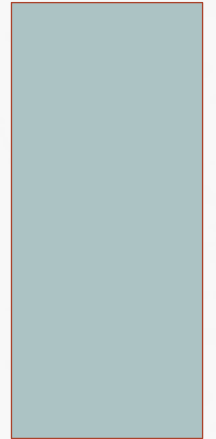


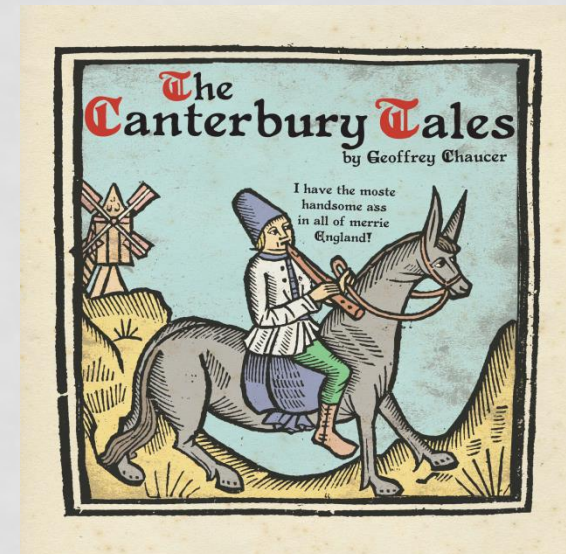
# THE CANTERBURY TALES

GEOFFREY CHAUCER



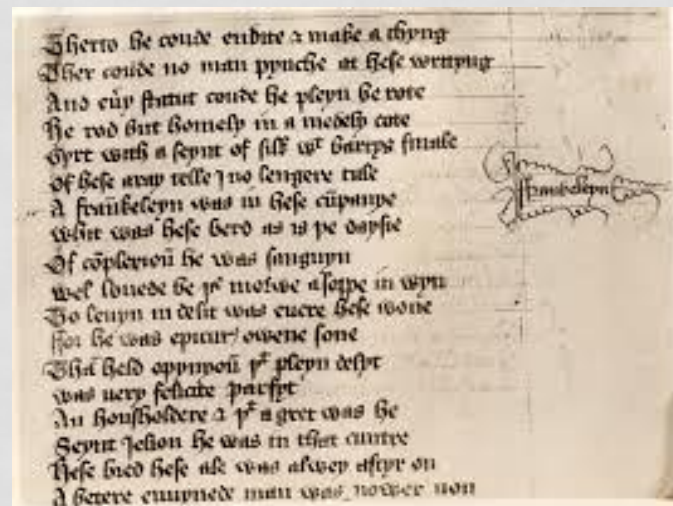
# THE CANTERBURY TALES

- Some pilgrims travel together from London to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral.
- They tell stories on their way to Canterbury.
- The prize for the best story is a free meal at Tabard's Inn.
- Two main parts:
  - a. The Prologue
  - b. The stories (24 in all, mostly in verse)
- Written in Middle English



# THE PROLOGUE

- The pilgrims are introduced by short sketches.
- There are no peasants and no high aristocracy.
- The Knight is the highest in station.
- Members of the clergy are in the lot.
- Chaucer focuses his interest in what one day will be called middle class.



# THE PILGRIMAGE

- In the Middle Ages the Church encouraged people to make **pilgrimages** to special holy places called shrines .
- If you prayed at these shrines you might be forgiven for your sins.
- Others went to shrines hoping to be cured from an illness they were suffering from.
- For many it was a Spring vacation.





# SPRING TIME



- The Canterbury Tales is set in Spring.
- Spring is a metaphor of natural rebirth:
  - when the *April rains have soaked deep into the dry ground* to water the flowers' roots; and when Zephyrus, the god of the west wind, has helped *new flowers to grow everywhere*; and when you can see the constellation Aries in the sky; and when *the birds sing all the time*.  
Some people go to other countries, but many people in England choose to go to the city of Canterbury in southeastern England to visit the remains of Thomas Becket, the Christian martyr who had the power of healing people.
- Men through Pilgrimage seek their spiritual rebirth.
- Man is in harmony with nature.



## THE WIFE OF BATH



# THE WIFE OF BATH 1

- A **worthy** woman from beside Bath city was with us, somewhat **deaf**, which was a pity.
- In **making cloth** she showed so great a bent she bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent. (*what does she do?*)
- In all the parish **not a dame dared stir** towards the altar steps in front of her. And if indeed they did, so **wrath** was she as to be quite put out of charity. (*She was.....*)
- Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground, I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound the ones she wore on Sunday, on her head. Her **hose** were of the finest scarlet **red** and **gartered tight**; her **shoes were soft and new**. (*Why was she on pilgrimage?*)



# THE WIFE OF BATH 2

- **Bold** was her face, handsome and red in hue.  
A **worthy** woman all her life, what's more  
she's had **five husbands**, all at the church door,  
apart from other company in youth;  
no need just now to speak of that, forsooth.
- And she had thrice been to Jerusalem,  
seen many strange rivers and passed over them;  
she's been to Rome and also to Boulogne,  
St James of Compostella and Cologne,  
and she was skilled in wandering by the way.
- She had **gap-teeth**, set widely, truth to say.  
Easily on an ambling horse she sat  
well wimpled up, and on her head a hat  
as broad as is a buckler or a shield;  
she had a flowing mantle that concealed  
**large hips**, her heels spurred sharply under that,  
in company she liked to laugh and chat  
and knew the remedies for love's mischances,  
an art in which she knew the oldest dances.







## THE PRIORESS

# THE PRIORESS

- *There also was a Nun, a Prioress,  
Her way of smiling very **simple** and **coy**.  
Her greatest oath was only “By St Loy!”  
And she was known as **Madam Eglantyne**.  
And well she sang a service, with a fine  
Intoning through her nose, as was most seemly,  
And she **spoke daintily in French**, extremely,  
After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe;  
French in the Paris style she did not know.*
- Is she really simple and coy?
- Why does she speak French?

# THE PRIORESS' S MANNERS

- At meat her manners were *well taught* withal;  
No morsel from her lips did she let fall,  
Nor dipped her fingers in the sauce too deep;  
But she could carry a morsel up and keep  
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.  
For *courtliness* she had a special *zest*,  
And she would wipe her upper lip so clean  
That not a trace of grease was to be seen  
Upon the cup when she had drunk; to eat,  
She reached a hand sedately for the meat.

# THE PRIORESS' S TENDER HEART

- She certainly was very *entertaining*,  
*Pleasant* and *friendly* in her ways, and straining  
To *counterfeit a courtly kind of grace*,  
A stately bearing fitting to her place,  
And to seem dignified in all her dealings.  
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,  
She was so *charitably solicitous*  
She used to weep if she but saw a mouse  
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bleeding.  
And she had little **dogs** she would be feeding  
With *roasted flesh*, or *milk*, or *fine white bread*.  
And bitterly she wept if one were dead  
Or someone took a stick and made it smart,  
She -was all sentiment and tender heart.

# THE PRIORESS' S LOOK

- Her veil was gathered in a *seemly* way,  
Her nose was *elegant*, her eyes glass-grey;  
Her mouth was very small, but *soft* and *red*,  
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,  
Almost a span across the brows, I own;  
She was indeed by no means undergrown.  
Her neck, I noticed, had a *graceful charm*.  
She wore a coral trinket on her arm,  
A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,  
Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen  
On which there first was graven a crowned A,  
And lower, *Amor vincit omnia*

# CHAUCER'S SATIRE

- Satiric approach
- Horace and Juvenal influenced Chaucer.
- Two kinds of satire:
  1. **GENTLE SATIRE** (Horace) which makes fun of someone, but doesn't mean to offend.
  2. **BRUTAL SATIRE** (Juvenal) which means to offend someone.
- Chaucer employs both forms



# ARISTOTLE'S HIERARCHY



# A PATRIARCHAL VISION

- «Natural» inferiority of women.
- Men are above women .
- The man's role is to tell a woman what to do.
- Men could beat women.
- The Patriachal vision of society is **NATURAL**.
- The Church held the same view.







# THE WIFE OF BATH

- Chaucer gives us detailed information on her. She was a:
  1. A **middle-aged, sensual, handsome** woman from Bath
  2. A **skilled** cloth maker.
  3. **Wealthy** as we can see from her clothes:
  4. A very **religious** woman and went to Mass every Sunday.
  5. She was the first to go to the altar.
  6. She was interested in travelling and men:
  7. She had been on many pilgrimages.
- Chaucer makes us realize that **religion played a minor role**:
  1. the way she behaves in church is not real devotion but ostentation;
  2. she wants to be the center of attraction and loves to be respected in public;
  3. she is proud of her position in society;
  4. she went on pilgrimages more for **recreational reasons** than for spiritual ones.



# A FEMINIST ICON

- Stereotypes of the women of the time :
    1. A threat
    2. Innocent and submissive
  - The Wife of Bath does not fit to the stereotypes, because:
    1. She is a wealthy woman who made money through marriages.
    2. She enjoys relationships with the other sex.
  - She stands up in front of men and starts to talk:
    1. Against marriage (*..marriage is a misery and a woe*)
    2. Women manipulate men.
    3. Women are way smarter than man.
- She is one of the first **feminist** characters in English literature.



# MADAM EGLANTINE

- Chaucer is very accurate in her description. He tells us :
  1. her **NAME**, Madam Eglantine (*a rose; in the Middle Ages symbol of Christ but also of passion*),
  2. her **SOCIAL POSITION** (*a prioress*), her cultural background (*she studied at Stratford-atte-Bowe and knew French*),
  3. her **TRAITS** (*elegant nose, glass-grey eyes, small soft red mouth, spread forehead, undergrown size*)
  4. her **CLOTHES** (*a veil, a cloak and a coral trinket*),
  5. her **BEHAVIOR** at table
  6. her **FONDNESS FOR DRINKING AND EATING**,
  7. her **COURTLY GRACE AND MANNERS** .
- She is not indifferent to the fashion of the time.
- She goes against monastic rules keeping the veil higher to let her forehead and the sides of her face uncovered.
- he has a golden brooch while monastic rules forbid nuns to wear jewels and ornaments.



# CHURCH CRITICISM

- Chaucer wants to make an indirect **CRITICISM OF HIS OWN CONTEMPORARY CHURCH**.
- She is described more as a lady with a bit of vanity than as a servant of Christ.
- She is more concerned with gentle manners and appearance than with religion.
- She is more interested in her own pets than in human beings.
- Use of **GENTLE IRONY**, which is achieved through contrasts:
  1. “Her greatest oath was only ‘By St Loy’ “( nuns shouldn’t swear);
  2. “ she spoke daintily in French, extremely after the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe ( a monastery near London)” but she didn’t know “ French in the Paris style”;
  3. “ at meat her manners were well taught” but she “dipped her fingers in the sauce “ even if not “ too deep”