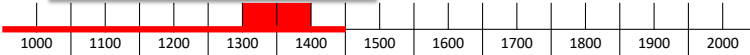



 **Geoffrey Chaucer (ca. 1340-1400)**



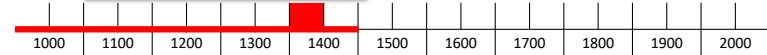
- son of a merchant, born to the newly ascendant middle class; received a robust education
- placed in his teens as a page in a great aristocratic household, the start of a rich and varied diplomatic career
- captured by the French during the Hundred Years' War
- one of the earliest English writers to be exposed to the cultural flourishing of the Italian Renaissance (NAEL A467-70)



 **Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1387-1400)**



- Chaucer originally projected 120 tales, but completed only 22
- Chaucer lived close to the pilgrim road that led to Canterbury, site of the Thomas à Becket shrine
- frame narratives were popular in the Middle Ages, but Chaucer's is unique in presenting a wide social spectrum
- best preserved in the illuminated Ellesmere MS (ca. 1400), now at the Huntington Library in California (NAEL 471-73)



Chaucer, “The General Prologue” (ca. 1340-1400)



Middle English Original

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
 The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
 And bathed every veyne in swich licour
 Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
 Whan Zephyrus eek with his sweete breath
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
 The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
 Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,
 And smale foweles maken melodye,
 That slepen al the nyght with open ye
 (So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),
 Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages....

NAEL Translation

When that April with his shoures soote
 The drought of March hath pierced to the roote,
 And bathed every vein in such licour
 Of which virtue engendered is the flour;
 When Zephyrus eek with his sweete breath
 Inspired hath in every holt and heath
 The tender crops, and the yonge sonne
 Hath in the Ram his halve course yronne?
 And smale fowls maken melody
 That sleepen all the night with open eye—
 So pricketh them Nature in their corages—
 Then longen folk to go on pilgrimages.... (1-12)

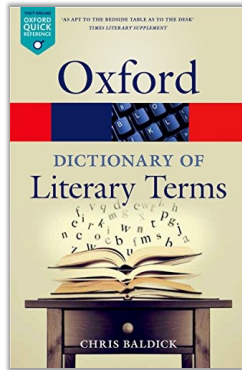
heroic couplet

Middle English Original

x / x / x / x / x / x
 And palmeres for to seken straunge
 /
 strondes,
 x / x / x / x / x / x /
 To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;
 x / x / x / x / x / x /
 And specially, from every shires ende
 x / x / x / x / x / x /
 Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,
 x / x / x / x / x / x /
 The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
 x / x / x / x / x / x /
 That hem hath holpen whan that they were
 /
 seeke. (13-18)

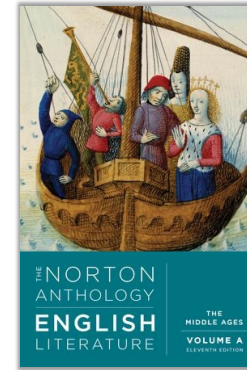
- a rhymed pair of iambic pentameter lines
 - **iambic pentameter**: five pairs of alternating unstressed (x) and stressed (/) syllables
- established by Chaucer as a major English verse form
- named after 17th C heroic drama (drama aiming at epic grandeur) by Dryden and others
- dominated 18th C poetry by Pope and others (Baldick 163-64)

frame narrative



- also known as “frame story”
- a story in which another story is enclosed or embedded as a “tale within a tale,” or which contains several such embedded tales
- prominent early examples include Boccaccio’s *Decameron* (1353) (with which Chaucer was probably familiar) and Chaucer’s own *Canterbury Tales* (ca. 1390) (Baldick 145)

estates satire



- subgenre of mediaeval literature that sets out to expose and ridicule typical examples of corruption at all levels of society
- character types include the idealized knight, the vain ecclesiastic, the lusty wife, etc.
- most are judgemental in tone, but Chaucer’s “General Prologue” breaks from this tradition by presenting a tone of admiration, leaving it to the reader to perceive the irony (NAEL A473-74)

estates satire

Knight (43-78) Squier (79-100) Yeman (101-17)	Temporal Lords	Cook (379-87) Shipman (388-410) Doctor (411-44)	Middle Classes
Prioress (118-64) Monk (165-207) Frere (208-69)	Spiritual Lords	Wif of Bathe (445-76) Person (477-528) Plowman (529-41) Millere (545-66) Manciple (567-86) Reeve (587-622)	Commons
Marchant (270-84) Clerk (285-308) Sergeant (309-30) Frankelain (331-60) Guildsmen (361-378)	Middle Classes	Somnour (623-68) Pardoner (669-714)	

irony

types of irony

- **verbal irony:** a discrepancy between what is said and what is meant (e.g., sarcasm)
- **structural irony:** use of an unreliable narrator whose views differ widely from the true circumstances
- **dramatic irony:** when the audience knows more about a character’s situation than the character themselves
- a subtly humorous perception of inconsistency
- occurs when an apparently straightforward statement or event is undermined by its context so as to give it a very different significance (Baldick 187)

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