A medieval manuscript illustration depicting a group of men on horseback in a town square. The central figure is a man in a red robe and a red cap, looking towards the left. To his left is a man in a blue robe and a blue cap, gesturing with his right hand. To the right of the central figure is a man in a blue robe and a blue cap, looking towards the right. In the background, there are several buildings, including a large stone building with a crenelated roofline. The scene is set in a green field. The text "The Canterbury Tales" is overlaid in the center of the image.

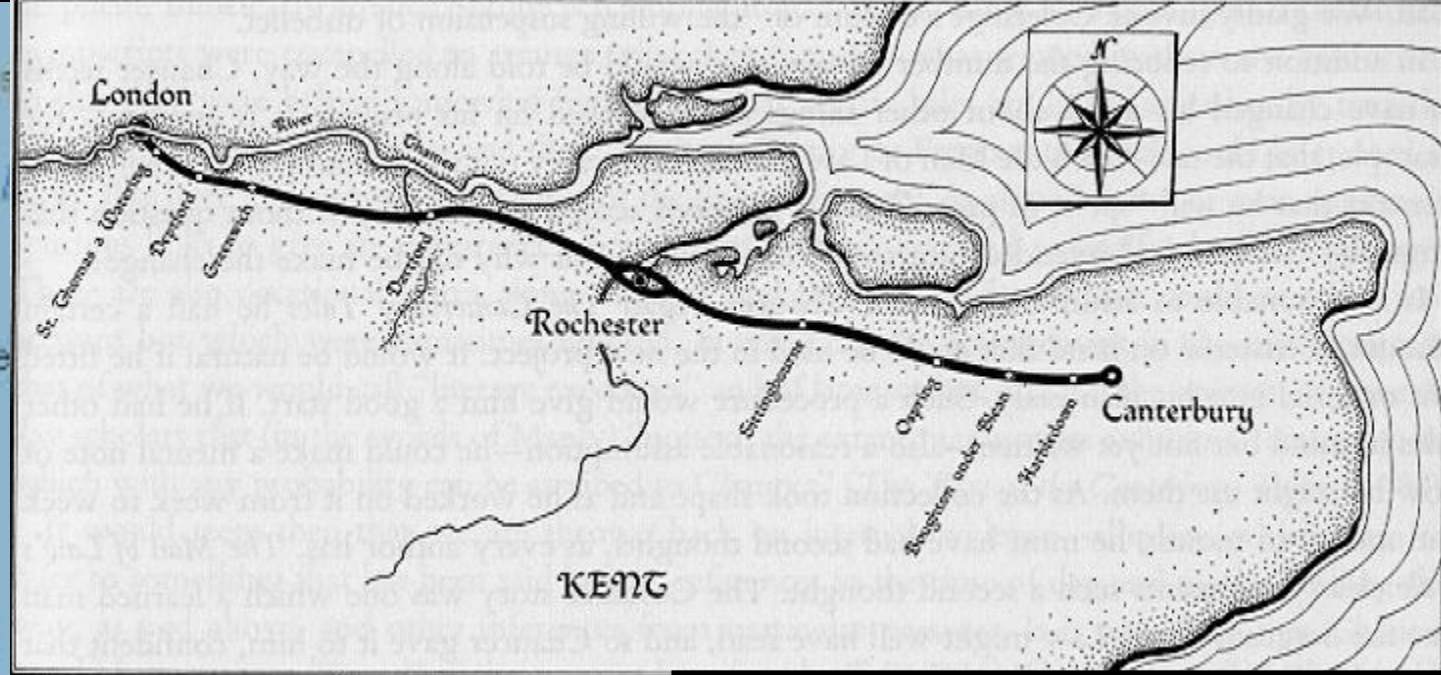
The Canterbury Tales



Geoffrey Chaucer

(1343 – 1400)

- Fought in the Hundred Years' War when he was sixteen.
- Got married when he was about 23, had two sons.
- Travelled to Spain and Italy for the English King: Edward III
- Well off:
 - Tax inspector (wool, fleeces and leather)
 - Wrote and travelled a lot – wrote in Middle English!
- Most famous work: The Canterbury Tales (1386-1400)



Canterbury

- Very popular destination for travelling in 14th century England
- Spring: people feel like going on a trip (the pilgrimage)
 - Also a symbol for a fresh start, new life
- Pilgrimage: religious journey undertaken for penance and grace
 - Also: sort of a holiday, people do not do what they usually do





Information – *General Prologue (1)*

- Group of pilgrims meet in London:
 - Tavern called the Tabard Inn
 - Group of 29 people!
- Decide to travel to Canterbury together, to visit the shrine of Thomas Becket.
 - Safety
 - Company

Decide to tell each other stories on the way to Canterbury, two each way. Instead of 126 stories, there are only 22 tales.

Saint Thomas



- Pilgrimage to the remains of Thomas Becket
 - Archbishop of Canterbury (1162-1170)
 - Murdered in 1170 A.D.
 - Saint who helped people in need
 - The most popular saint in England
 - Lots of people went on a pilgrimage to Canterbury

General Prologue (2)

- Introduction of all the characters in the book
 - They are individuals! > **subject matter** and **language**
 - > This is a characteristic of the Renaissance!
- Their individual introductions and the *tales* follow later on
- Told by the author himself – this is called a ‘narrative’ (*vertelperspectief*)
- Canterbury tales: Frame Story (*Raamvertelling*)
 - Individual tales linked together to one complete story
 - Chaucer has possibly read one in Italy (Boccaccio – Decamerone, 1350)

Social class in *The Canterbury Tales*

- People from all walks of life go on a pilgrimage:
- Nobility – yet in *The Canterbury Tales* the military is represented, e.g. The Knight and The Squire
- Clergy – e.g. The Monk, The Prioress (*Moeder-Overste, met nonnen en haar priester*), The Friar (*de Frater*) and the Parson (*de Dominee*)
- Commoners – e.g. The Miller, The Clerk, The Franklin (landowner), the Cook, the Plowman, the Pardoner etc.

Structure Canterbury Tales

- General Prologue (start of the frame story, describing the characters and their common goal)

Tale (Knight)

Prologue + Tale (Miller)

Prologue + Tale

Prologue + Tale

etc.

The Knight's Tale

- First story of the 22 in total
- No prologue apart from the *General Prologue*
- The Knight is the narrator – however the story is brought to the reader by Chaucer
- Genre: **Romance** (also in Dutch)

Themes

- Chivalry
- Bravery
- Love

<https://youtu.be/5WksNTH52-g?si=p4LMpUCEldvWrNbu>

The Miller's Tale (1)

- Second story
- Prologue of this story connects it to the previous one (the Knight's Tale); the prologue often used to comment fiercely on the previous story
- Strange combination with The Knight's Tale;
- More logical: The Monk's Tale:
 - Approximately of the same status
 - Story of virtue as well

Miller:

- Not a very handsome man – what does that say about his personality?
- Fighter, drunk, tells naughty stories (opposed to the chivalrous Knight!)

The Miller's Tale (2)

- Story is considered funny
 - Unexpected after the Knight's beautiful tale
 - Quite naughty
 - Not God fearing at all – tavern tale
 - Genre: **Fabliau** (also in Dutch) – funny, naughty, short!
- Characters: Alison, wife of carpenter John, fancies Nicholas, his tenant.
- Summary: Nicholas and Alison try to deceive John by convincing him there's a flood coming. Nicholas and Alison are caught eventually, while making love, by another man, Absalon, the parish clerk.

The Wife of Bath (1)

- Notorious story in the *Canterbury Tales*
- The Wife claims she knows all about marriage as she has been married five times
- *Prologue*: husband is reading a book
- Wants to tell her off: The Wife is just like the ladies in the book
- Fierce lady – not an ideal wife
- ‘*Confession*’ – confesses sins such as lust and greed
- Genre: **romance**

The Wife of Bath (2)

- Creates better situation for herself
- Does not want to be submissive to a husband
- Married off at 12 to a much older husband
- Later husbands are younger and not as wealthy as she is
- Social climber!
- Doesn't reinforce stereotypes (of a submissive wife)
- One of the first feminist characters in literature

The Pardoner (=aflaatverkoper)

- Connection to Christianity
- Hypocrisy
- Genre: **Exemplum** – shows true morality of a character
- Story to convince the audience of a certain belief/superstition
- Here: used as a sermon (soort preek)
- He opposes lying, however he's a liar himself
- *Radix malorum est Cupiditas* = Greed is the root of all evil

The Knight

- **Description:** A noble and experienced warrior, the Knight embodies chivalry, honour, and humility.
- **From the General Prologue:** He is a distinguished man, he has fought in many battles across Christian and Muslim lands, and is respected by all.
- **His Story:** *The Knight's Tale* is a courtly romance about two knights, Palamon and Arcite, who compete for the love of Emily.

The Miller

- **Description:** A muscular, red-bearded man with a wart on his nose, known for his crude humour and strength. He is described as dishonest.
- **From his prologue:** He is drunk and insists on telling a bawdy tale, despite the Host's protests.
- **His story:** *The Miller's Tale* is a raunchy and humorous fabliau about a carpenter, his unfaithful wife, and her two suitors Nicholas and Absolon.

The Wife of Bath

- **Description:** A confident and worldly woman who has been married five times, skilled in love and arguing.
- **From her Prologue:** She discusses her experiences with marriage, arguing that women should have dominance over their husbands.
- **Her story:** *The Wife of Bath's Tale* is about a knight who must discover what women truly desire in order to avoid execution. The answer: sovereignty over their husbands.

The Pardoner

- **Description:** A corrupt church official who sells indulgences (pardons for sins) and fake relics.
- **Pardon and Pardoner:** A *pardon* is a document granting forgiveness of sins; a *pardoner* is someone authorized by the Church to sell them.
- **From his prologue:** He openly admits to being greedy and deceitful, preaching against sin while profiting from it.
- **His story:** *The Pardoner's Tale* is a moral story about three greedy men who seek Death and end up betraying and killing each other for gold.

Resources

- <https://boroughphotos.org/lambeth/thomas-becket-archbishop-of-canterbury/>
- <https://chaucerianmyth.bandcamp.com/album/the-canterbury-theses>
- <https://ofexceptionalpromise.wordpress.com/2013/11/21/know-your-place-characterisation-by-type-in-the-general-prologue-to-the-canterbury-theses/>
- <https://geoffreychaucerrsmith.weebly.com/the-canterbury-theses.html>
- <http://www.historicalportraits.com/Gallery.asp?Page=Item&ItemID=1351&Desc=Geoffrey-Chaucer-|-16th-Century-English-School>
- <http://projectbritain.com/maps.html>