

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

LIFE (1340 c. - 1400)

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London into the family of a wealthy merchant and received a good education. After his studies, he found a place in the royal household. In 1373, Chaucer made the first of a number of journeys to France and Italy. During his stay in Italy he encountered the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, who would have a profound influence on his mature work. On his return to England, Chaucer continued to work as a royal official and to write poetry until his death in 1400.

ACHIEVEMENT

Chaucer's literary production is usually divided into three periods. The first period includes:

- ***Le Roman de la Rose***, an unfinished translation of the French allegorical poem by Guillaume de Lorres and Jean de Meung;
- ***The book of the Duchess***, an allegorical lament on the death of John of Gaunt's first wife.

The second period includes:

- ***Troiens and Criseyde***, from Boccaccio's *Filostrato* about the Trojan hero and faithless love;
- ***The house of Fame***, an unfinished allegory about the poet being carried away in a dream by an eagle to the house of Fame, partly indebted to Dante and Ovid;
- ***The legend of Good Women*** drawing an Ovid's *Heroides*, made up of an allegorical prologue and nine stories of women;
- ***The Parliament of Fowls***, rich in comic spirit, about a gathering mates birds that must to choose their mates.

The third period includes ***The Canterbury Tales***.

THE CANTERBURY TALES

In *The Canterbury Tales*, published around 1387, Chaucer chose the framework of a pilgrimage to set his tales in. Collections of stories inside a framework were common in the Middle Ages. The most famous Mediaeval framing tale is Boccaccio's *Decameron*.

Chaucer inserted his tales into the framework of a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas Becket, in Canterbury. Each of the pilgrims, including Chaucer himself, who met at the Tabard Inn, decided to tell two tales on the road from London to Canterbury and two on the way back.

The *General Prologue* provides a detailed representation of real individuals who are at the same time representatives of Mediaeval society. After a classical poetic introduction, Chaucer introduces the first pilgrim, a Knight, who represent the highest rank of all the pilgrims. Then Chaucer describes characters who represents the Church: a Prioress accompanied by a nun, a monk, a friar and a parson. There follow short descriptions of other pilgrims such as a merchant, a clerk, a sergeant of law, a franklin, a haberdasher, a weaver, a dyer, a cook, a shipman, a doctor of physic, a wife of Bath.

The pilgrims are embodiments of the main traits of the classes they belong to, because the poet's intention is not only to mirror Mediaeval society but also to satirize the corruption that occurs within the three Mediaeval social estates: the nobility, the clergy and the peasantry.