

THE AGE OF CHAUCER (1340-1400)

(Beginning of New English Language and Literature)

AND

“THE CANTERBURY TALES”

Vaibhav A. Gangane

M.A II (Sem IV)

Dnyanopasak College, Parbhani 431 401

Index

1. General info about the age
2. Silent Features of The Age of Chaucer
3. About Geoffrey Chaucer
4. Chaucer's Works
5. Features of Chaucer's Works
6. The Canterbury Tales
7. Chaucer's Contribution to Literature

■ General info about the age :

The Age of Chaucer “covers a period of glaring social contrasts and rapid political change.” It was essentially an era of unrest and transition. It is characterized by a noticeable departure from medievalism to an era of rational inquiry and critical understanding. It marks the beginning of a new language and literature. The following characteristics distinguish this period.

Silent Features of The Age of Chaucer

1. An Era of Transition
2. The Growth of Nationalism
3. Black Death, Famine and Social unrest
4. The Corruption of the Church and Reformation
5. The Dawn of New Learning

1. An Era of Transition

(Change from Medieval to Modern)

- Chaucer was born in a tumultuous period of social, religious and political change.
- The Spirit and romantic idealism was at its climax.
 - But the change from medieval to modern was slow and imperceptible.
 - Yet, England was characteristically medieval , the strange amalgam of love, war and religion reached perhaps its fullest development at this time.

- Literature changed from oral to written.
 - Focus shifted from the text to reader.
 - Reader was given more importance than writer.
 - Value of self-expression and originality are upgraded (upheld).
 - English established as literary language by adapting, translating and imitating Greek and Latin texts.
- Feudalism, chivalry and church were on their decline.

2. Growth of Nationalism

(Upsurge of national spirit)

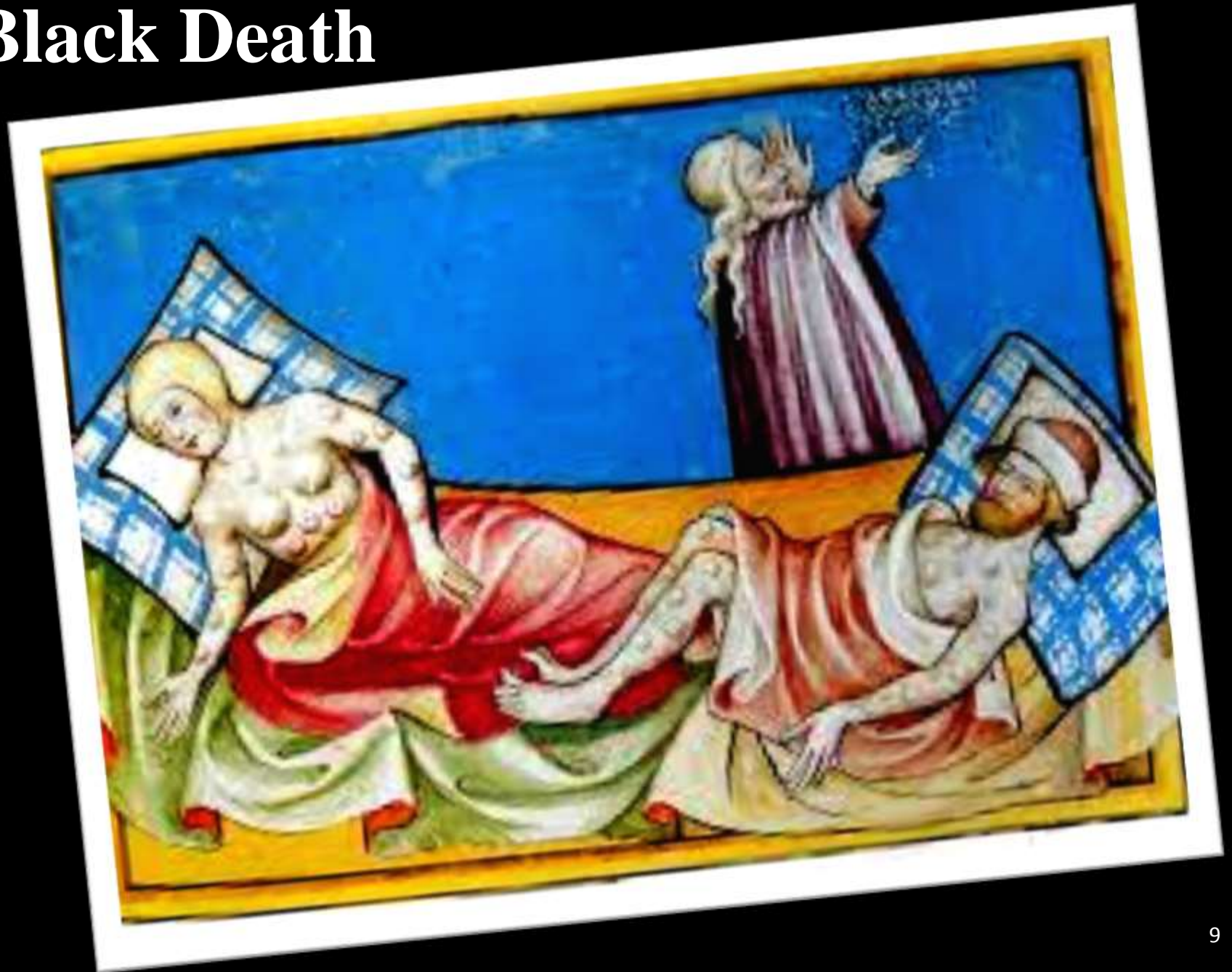
- This age was remarkable for the growth of national spirit (Nationalism).
 - There was a striking awareness of unity of customs, temperaments and language.
 - The East Midland speech became the language of capital and universities.
 - French and English amalgamated to form standard English.
- Influence of the church was on the wane.
 - Political, intellectual and spiritual influence had diminished.
 - But in the reign of John (a clergy) legislation was working to nurture the growth of national consciousness.

3. Black Death, Famine and Social unrest

(An epoch of natural calamities)

- Natural calamities increased sufferings of common people.
 - Black Death [Plague] (A.D. 1348-49) followed by famine wiped out one third population of England.
- The age of social unrest and economic troubles.
 - Labour become unsatisfied with their salary.
 - Efforts were made to keep the labours under control with the help of legislation.
- The French wars led to cost heavy burdens of taxation.
- Conflict between king Richard and his subjects resulted in endless discord and confusion.

Black Death



4. The Corruption of the Church and Reformation

(Infection of corruption, turpitude and superstition)

- Church was the seat of power, prestige and influence.
 - They lived in a godless and worldly ways in wealth and luxury.
 - Clergy were ignorant and careless.
 - Superstition became social evil.
- John Wycliffe (1320-84) “the morning star for reformation”, who challenged the authority of the catholic Church.
 - The Lullard movement was the first important opposition to Catholicism.

-- Wrote religious pamphlets and complete English version of “The Bible”.

•Religious reforms –

-- Pilgrimages were common during this period.

-- Religious reformers opposed church on grounds of idleness and laxity.

5. The Dawn of New Learning

(Spirit of new learning begins)

- In the age of Chaucer the medieval habits and traditions still in practice.
- Study of the literature of classical antiquity-
 - Not for only art but for moral ideas of ancient Greece and Rome.
 - Their works were influenced by humanism.
 - The sense of beauty, the delight in life, and the secular spirit comes in practice.
 - People loves ancient Greek philosophers and their philosophy.

- During this age England passed through the journey of medievalism and come to the beginning of the modern world.
-- It was the world of medieval, also the world of coming Renaissance excited by new ideas.

* Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1340-1400)



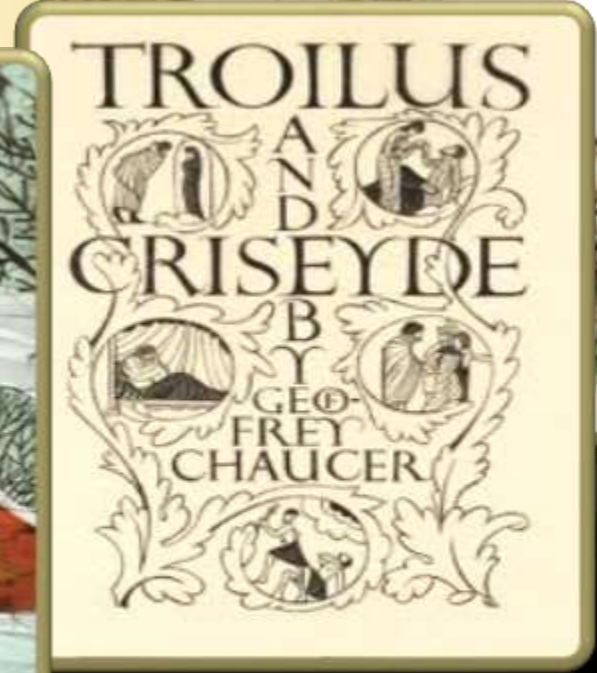
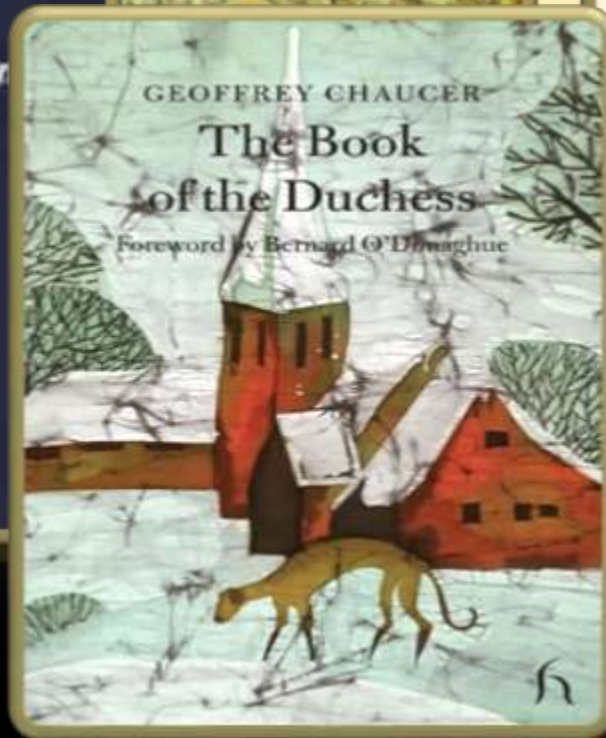
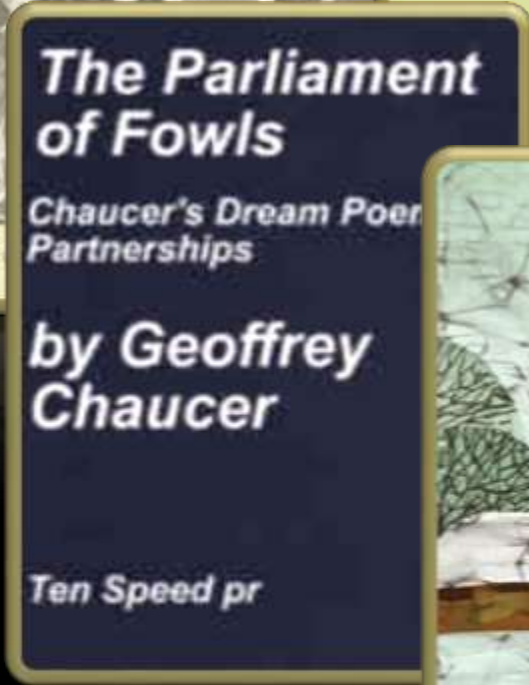
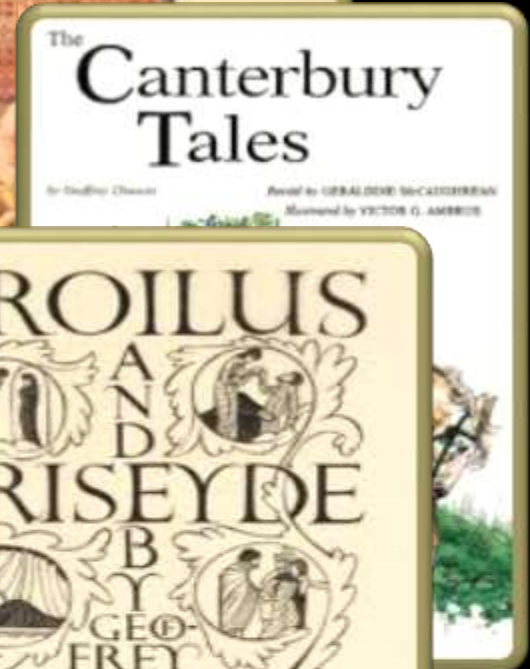
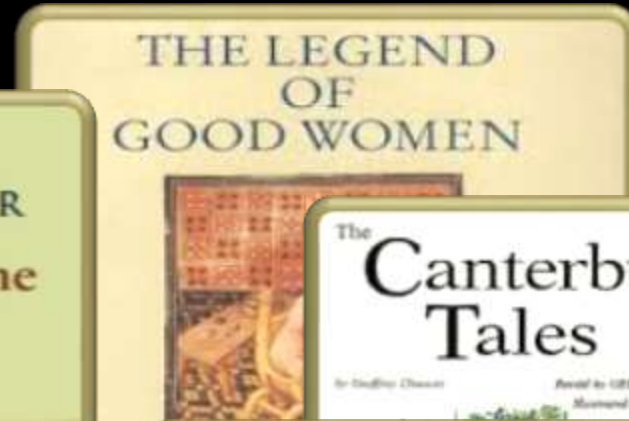
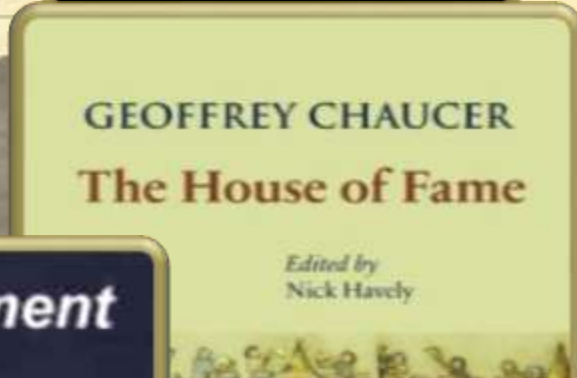
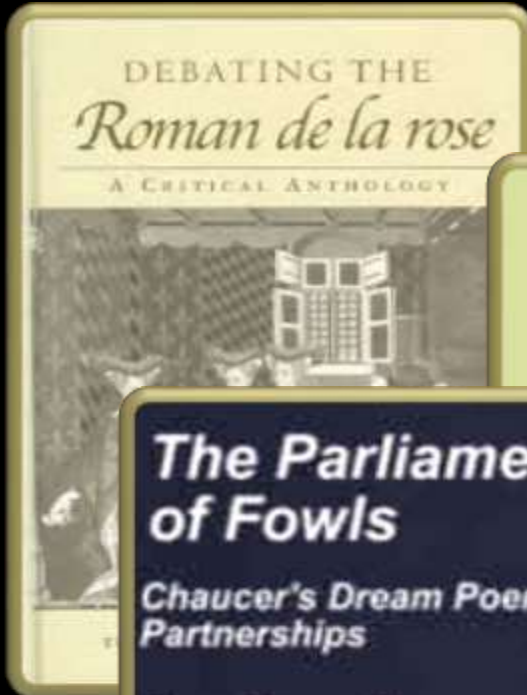
* About Geoffrey Chaucer . . .

- Father of English poetry, greatest English poet of the medieval ages.
- First poet of national importance.
- Author, poet, philosopher and alchemist.
- Chaucer also maintained an active career in the civil service as a bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat.
- Traveled in Flanders, France, Spain and Italy where he observed various types of men, manners and fashions. Which highly influenced him for his literary creations.

* Chaucer's Life . . .

- Born in London around 1343.
- precise date and location of his birth remain unknown.
- Son of wealthy London vintner (wine merchant).
- Educated in St Paul's Cathedral School, and later at Inner Temple where he studied law.
- In 1357, he became a courtier, diplomat and civil servant.
- In 1368-78, he was sent to France, Genoa and Florence.
- Where he influenced by the works of authors like Dante, Boccaccio and Froissart.

* Chaucer's Works . . .



- Early period (up to c.1370)
 - Translation of '*Roman de la Rose*'
 - *The Book of the Duchess*

- Middle period (up to c.1387)
 - *The House of Fame*
 - *The Parliament of Fowls*
 - Translation of '*Consolation of Philosophy*'
 - *Troilus and Criseyde*
 - *The Legend of Good Women*

- Last period (after 1387)
 - *The Canterbury Tales*

Features of Chaucer's Works

- Gift of story telling and descriptive power
- Use of musical element
- Personal touches; charming, humorous
- Rarely philosophized
- softness in narration
- Perennial interest in humanity
- Happy world (as there is pain and perplexity, but no agony or rebellion)

“The Canterbury Tales” - (c.1387)

(Most remarkable work of Chaucer)

- Chaucer’s Canterbury Tales influenced by Boccaccio’s *‘Decameron’*.
- 29 pilgrims meet at Tabard Inn.
- 23 of them tell stories.
- In Canterbury Tales there are 24 stories.
- Chaucer tells two stories – *Tale of Thopas* and *Tale of Melibeus*.
- The Canterbury Tales begins with *Knights Tale* and ends with *Parsons Tale*.
- It ends with “Retraction”, Chaucer’s apology for the vulgar and unworthy parts of this book.



Upper Class	Middle Class		Lower Class	
	Upper	Lower	Virtuous	Immoral
Knight	Merchant	Cook	Yeoman	Miller
Squire	Clerk of Oxford	Shipman	Parson	Manciple
Prioress	Man of Law	Doctor of Physique	Plowman	Reeve
Monk	Frankline	Wife of Bath		Summoner
Friar	Five Guildsmen			Pardoner



*Characters



The Pardoner



The Knight



The Squire



The Monk



The Friar



The Summoner



The Parson



The Nun's Priest



The Second Nun



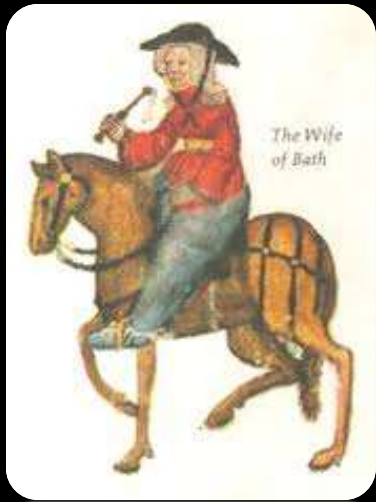
The Prioress



The Merchant



The Clerk of Oxford



The Wife of Bath



The Man of Law



The Shipman



The Physician



The Reeve



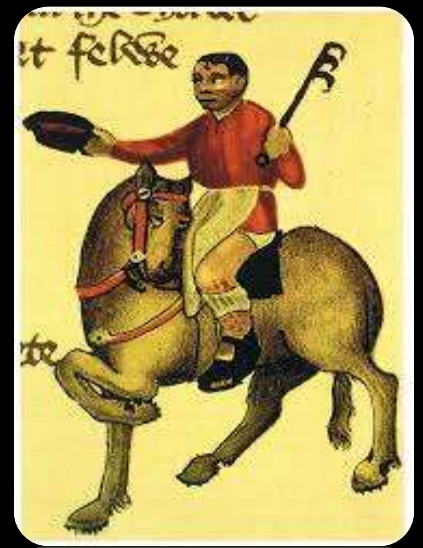
The Franklin



The Manciple



The Miller



The Cook



Chaucer



The Knight –

- Member of the Household Group
- Represents ideals of truth, honour, generosity, courtesy, modesty and gentleness.
- First to arrive Tabard Inn after Chaucer.
- Wildly travelled and prudent.
- Tells first tale '*Knight's Tale*'.



The Squire –

- Son of the Knight.
- Was “as fresh as the month of may”
- Fought battles for winning his ladyloves.
- He is humble and modest.
- Tells an '*Oriental Tale*'.



The Prioress –

- Her name was Eglantyne.
- Beautiful, romantic and amiable.
- She had fine table manners.
- loves small dogs more than human beings.



The Monk –

- Compared to the Prioress in religious affection.
- A robust and masculine man, the Monk travels with the Prioress and Second Nun.



The Friar –

- Supposed to live a poor life by begging but is more interested in love affairs of young people.
- Good singer



The Pardoner –

- Chaucer's masterpiece in character drawing.
- Good story-teller; sing hymns beautifully.



The Summoner –

- Pardoner's companion
- Lecherous and dishonest
- Children are afraid of his fiery red face full of pimples and scary eye brows.
- He loves garlic, onion, leeks and wine.
- Spout of few Latin Phrases he knows.



The Parson –

- Ideal parish priest.
- Thought only holy thoughts and did only good deeds.
- He is very gentle and diligent.



The Clerk of Oxford –

- A Neutral portrayal
- Devoted to the study of philosophy
- Eager to learn and teach
- Prayed for the souls of those who helped him
- He is polite and speaks only when necessary
- He speaks about morality
- His tale is a reply to the tale of wife of bath it is about the patient *Wife Griselda*.



The Merchant –

- Wealthy businessman
- He wore rich and multicolored clothes and hat from Holland.
- Carries himself so well that no one realizes he is heavily in debt
- Newly and unhappily married



The Man of Law –

- Wise and slightly suspicious of everything
- He had vast knowledge of law
- often appointed by the king as a judge of the court of assizes
- Wealthy land-buyer

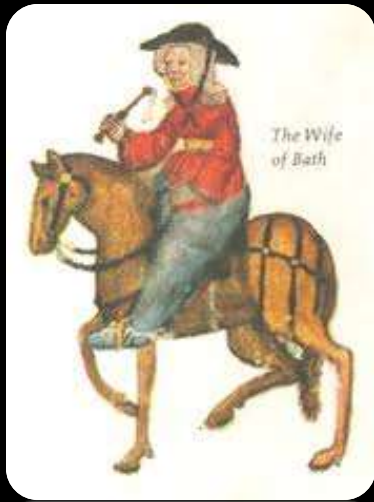


The Franklin –

- Companion of Man of Law
- A wealthy gentleman who like to have wine in the morning
- Because he loves pleasure, he is called “*Son of Epicurus*”
- At Country meetings he is representative and chairman
- ‘*The Franklin’s Tale*’ is story set in Brittany

* The Five Guildsmen –

- They are artisans and are newly rich represents urban middle class
- They are – Haberdasher, a Carpenter, a Weaver, a Dryer and a Tapestry Maker



The Wife of Bath –

- Bath is famous for cloth-making and she was herself an expert in weaving/ embroidery.
- Lived an honourable life
- Wildly travelled in Italy, Spain and Jerusalem
- Loved to tell romantic tales and to gossip



The Physician –

- Extremely good at his profession and astronomy
- Knew of every disease and where it came from and gives cure immediately
- Eats a simple diet which is healthy
- He saved gold, because of his love of gold



The Reeve –

- Slender (thin and graceful) man named Oswald
- In charge of his master's sheep, cattle, dairy, swine (pig), horses, stock and poultry.
- He could observe seasons, weather and foretell harvest
- Also a good carpenter, a trade which he had learnt in youth



The Shipman –

- Live in the west country and comes from Dartmouth
- Bold and prudent
- Wildly travelled
- Expert in matters regarding the position of the moon, the tides, the currents and the perils of the sea
- His ship was called *The Magdalen*

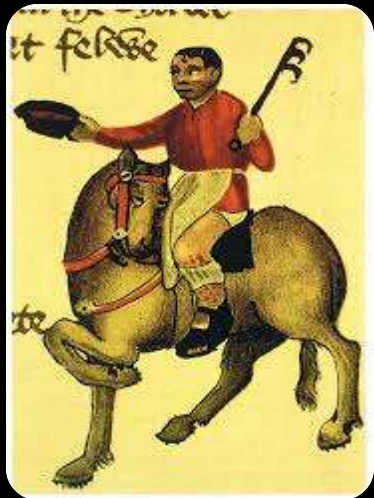
* The Yeoman –

- Knew all techniques of carpentry and carried a sword, guard and a shield and a dagger
- He is a woodsman compared to Robin Hood



The Manciple –

- Worked at a college of lawyers.
- An attendant who purchases provisions for a college and an inn of court
- He serves food to the lawyers and students at the temple
- Despite his lack of education, this Manciple is smarter than the thirty lawyers he feeds.



The Cook –

- His name is Roger.
- He was employed by the Guildsmen.
- Perfect in cooking food
- His masterpiece is minced chicken in white sauce.



The Miller –

- His name is Robyn.
- Found of telling indecent tales
- He tells the tale of a bawdy fabliau.
- Wore white coat and blue hood.
- Expert in grinding corn and stole corn by pushing the scales with his thumb, for which narrator swears he had a “golden thumb”.



The pilgrims delivering tales

*Chaucer's Contribution to Literature

- **Creator of English Language and Poetry –**
 - First metrical artist, humorist and humanist
 - First national poet of England
 - He gave reformed and reshaped language as a powerful instrument of expression
 - Informed musical sweetness and liquidity to language
 - First man to use “Naked Words”
- **First Great Realist –**
 - Believe that poetry is the free secular spirit
 - Portrayed comprehensive picture of contemporary life
 - Realistically presented the social, economic and religious condition of age
 - Keen observer of men and manners

- **Characterization of Chaucer –**
 - First great character painter
 - Portrayed real life characters
 - Characters are drawn from keen observation of man and women
 - First writer to bring atmosphere of romantic interest about men and women
- **First great narrative poet in English –**
 - Father of English Novel
 - “*Troilus and Criseyde*” first novel written in verse
 - It has plot, dialogue, humour, irony, realism, conflict, dramatic elements etc.
 - Character Criseyde is the first true psychological study of complex woman
 - Pandarus is the first comic character in English

*Chesterton humorously remarks –

“If Chaucer is the father of poetry, he is grandfather of English fiction”

*Albert Calls Chaucer –

“The earliest of the great moderns”

*References –

1. '*Ages, movements and Literary Forms*', Dr. Satish Kumar, Lakshmi Narain Agarawal, Agra.
2. *TES Notes*, Kalyani Vallath.

