**Old English**: from 7th century to 1066. West Saxon (Wessex) dialect becomes modern English.

**Hundred Years' War**: 1337–1453

**Black Death** (bubonic plague) 1346 to 1353

**Peasants’ Revolt**: 1381 (Wat Tyler was the leader)

## Geoffrey Chaucer (1343 to 1400)

He was familiar with courtly love and romances of Guillaume de Mauchaut, Jean Froissart and Eustance Deschamps. He is said to have translated Pope Innocent III’s *De Contemptu Mundi.* Considered "father of English literature", he’s the first writer to be buried in Poets' Corner, in Westminster Abbey. He’s perhaps the first poet known by name. He’s seen as a precursor to later poets laureate as he received a gallon of wine from Edward III every day which was later made into monetary grant by Richard II. Henry IV renewed the grants assigned by Richard Helped in legitimizing the literary use of Middle English. Thomas Hoccleve hailed him as "*the firste fyndere of our fair langage*". Chaucer studied law in the Inner Temple (an Inn of Court). He attended the 'Wonderful Parliament of 1386. John Lydgate referred to Chaucer within his own text *The Fall of Princes* as the "lodesterre (guiding principle) … off our language". Sir Philip Sidney greatly praised *Troilus and Criseyde* in his own *Defence of Poesie*. G. K. Chesterton says "among the great canonical English authors, Chaucer and Dickens have the most in common." Chaucer uses East Midland dialect.

**3 periods of Chaucer:** 1**. French period**: Roman de la Rose (Guillaume de Lorris, extended by Jean de Meun) and Guillame de Machat poems influence. Book of Duchess falls in this period. 2. **Italian period**: Dante and Boccaccio influence. *The House of Fame, The Parliament of Fowls* belong here. 3. **English period:** *Legend*, *Canterbury* fall in this period. Eustache Deschamps (French poet) called himself a "nettle in Chaucer's garden of poetry".

***A Treatise on the Astrolabe*** (1391) was written for Lewis, his son ("Lyte Lowys my sone") describes both the form and the proper use of the instrument, and stands out as a prose technical work from a writer better known for poetry. He wrote it in English and not Latin as he sees that fit.

"An ABC"

*The Romaunt of the Rose*: translation of *Roman de la Rose*.

*Boece*: translation of Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*.

***The Book of the Duchess,*** or ***The Deth of Blaunche*** *(*1369) in octosyllabic couplets, commemorates the death of Blanche of Lancaster, wife of John of Gaunt who died in 1369 of plague. Begins with the sleepless poet who has suffered from an unexplained sickness for eight years reading a book which tells the story of Ceyx and Alcyone. Ceyx is gone and Alcyone prays to Juno to give her a vision; Juno sends messenger to Morpheus who brings the body of drowned Ceyx and he advises her to bury him and to cease her sorrow. He then describes the lavish bed he would gift to Morpheus should the god discover his location and give him such a sleep. Suddenly, he falls asleep and dreams. Then he reports his dream which is so full of wonder. He wakes in a chamber pn a fine May morning (from Rose tradition) with windows of stained glass depictions of the tale of Troy and walls painted with the story of *The Romance of the Rose*. He hears a hunt going on and finally confirms it is Octavian hunting. He sees a small dog that the poet follows into the forest. The hunt begins. He stumbles upon a knight dressed in black composing a song for the death of his lady. He tells the poet that he played a game of chess with Fortuna and lost his queen and was checkmated. The poet taking it literally asks him not to pine over a game of chess. He explains that he set his heart on a woman and found her name to be "good, fair White". She reciprocated very late but finally he devoted herself to her. Later, the poet asks him the whereabouts of White and is informed that she is dead. After that, the poet awakes as the clocks trike 12 and decides that it should be set into rhyme.

***Anelida and Arcite*** (1370s) story of Anelida, queen of Armenia and her wooing by false Arcite from Thebes, Greece. It may be unfinished. The story is made up of an introduction and a complaint by Anelida which is in turn made up of a proem, a strophe, antistrophe and a conclusion. After the complaint there are a few lines which continue the story, but these may have been added by a later scribe.

***The House of Fame*** (between 1374 and 1385) in 3 books, a dream vision in octosyllabic couplets influenced by *Divine Comedy*. After falling asleep the poet finds himself in a glass temple adorned with images of the famous and their deeds. He thus deconstructs nature of fame and the trustworthiness of recorded renown. The poem begins with describing nature and causes of dreams. Then the poet starts by invocation to the god of sleep and asks him that no one should misjudge the meaning of his dream as he’s going to relate it in full. It happens on the night of the tenth of December that he has a dream in which he’s inside a temple made of glass. Upon seeing the portraits of Venus, Vulcan, and Cupid, he deduces that it’s the temple to Venus. He reads on a brass tablet *Aeneid*, about the betrayal of Dido by Aeneas (who married Lavinia). Also reads betrayal stories in “Tho saugh I” (then saw I) series of Demophon of Athens and Phyllis, Achilles and Breseyda, Paris and Aenone, Jason and Hypsipyle, and later Medea, Hercules and Dyanira, and finally Theseus and Ariadne. He roams outside the temple and sees a golden eagle coming towards him. **II**. In the second book, he’s taken up by the eagle (who explains himself as a servant of Jove, addressing him as Geffrey) as he falls unconscious. Book III begins with invocation to “God of science and of lyght”. Later he wakes up in the House of the goddess Fame which according to the eagle is ‘natural abode’ of sound thus she can hear everything. Made of beryl stone, it is atop a massive rock and actually ice inscribed with the names of the famous with many names melting into illegibility. He sees musicians perform there. He sees fame now. He describes her as having countless tongues, eyes, and ears, to represent the spoken, seen, and heard aspects of fame. She also has partridge wings on her heels, to represent the speed at which fame can move. He sees her delivering judgements of fame and infamy without due consideration and god of the north winds, Aeolus, blows one of two trumpets: "Clear Laud" to give the petitioners fame or "Slander" to give the petitioners infamy. Then he is asked by a man whether he was there for fame which he clearly disclaims and then is taken by him to another house of rapidly spinning wicker house where he hears rumor and hearsay. Upon the entry of a mysterious "great authority", the house falls silent.

Ben Jonson and Inigo Jones appropriated the image of "The House of Fame" for their "Masque of Queenes" (1609). Alexander Pope as *The Temple of Fame: A Vision* (1715). John Skelton made an earlier emendation to Chaucer's vision of Fame, Rumour and Fortune with his *A Garlande of Laurell*.

***Parlement of Foules*** or ***Parlement of Briddes*** (*Parliament of Birds*) or the ***Assemble of Foules*** (Caxton print 1478) a dream vision in rhyme royal stanza (7 line stanza with rhyme scheme of ababbcc). It contains the earliest references to the idea that St. Valentine's Day is a special day for lovers. Oruch concludes that Chaucer is likely to be "the original mythmaker in this instance." The narrator falls asleep reading Cicero’s *Somnium Scipionis* in the hope of learning some "certeyn thing" since he knows love only from books. He goes on to praise how new science comes from old books. He dreams that Scipio Africanus the Elder is guiding him as he takes him to celestial spheres to a gate promising both a "welle of grace" as well as a stream that "ledeth to the sorweful were/ Ther as a fissh in prison is al drye". He passes through Venus’s dark temple. Here Nature is convening a parliament at which the birds will all choose their mates. Sees three tercel (male) eagles making case for mating with formel (female) eagle. The lower estate birds protest and a comic parliamentary debate ensues. Nature then goes with female eagle’s choice of choosing none and thus preserves her free will. She wants to put off her decision for another year. Nature allows the other birds, however, to pair off. The dreamer awakes, still unsatisfied, and returns to his books, hoping still to learn the thing for which he seeks.

***Troilus and Criseyde*** (1380s, 5 books) seen (in a sense) as the first real novel in English language, it’s an epic poem set around the siege of Troy in *rime royale*(Chaucer’s invention, gets its name as James I used it in his *Kingis Quair*) dedicated to John Gower (“moral Gower”)and Strode. Gave the phrase "all good things must come to an end". Source is Boccaccio, who re-wrote the tale in his *Il Filostrato*. Robert Henryson's Scots poem *The Testament of Cresseid* imagined a rambunctious fate for Criseyde not given by Chaucer. John Metham's *Amoryus and Cleopes* (c. 1449) also follows the language used by Chaucer. Calchas, a soothsayer betrays Troy as he joins Greeks. His widowed daughter Criseyde draws flak. Troilus mocks love and is punished with desire for Criseyde. Pandarus, Criseyde's uncle, adds fuel and they start exchanging letters. He persuades Criseyde to fall for him and eventually spend a night together when she goes to uncle’s and it rains hard and Troilus “suddenly” appears as he’s heard she’s having an affair. As he tells her, he is admonished by her and he faints and uncle leaves them alone. She’s the first character in English literature who is discussed as a real person because of psychological detail in her hesitation to give in to Troilus and how he breaks down her barriers one by one. Her father persuades Greeks to exchange prisoner of war, Antenor, for Criseyde but Hector, of Troy, objects as does Troilus. He asks her to elope. However, she persuades him as she says she’ll convince her father on the 10th day and be back. She goes. But, on the tenth day accepts a meeting with Diomede, and accepts his love: “To Diomede algate I wol be trwe.” Troilus loses hope as does her uncle and he curses fortune as he seem his brooch on Diomede’s cloak. The narrator, with an apology for giving women a bad name, bids farewell to his book. He relates how Troilus died in a battle. Later narrator ponders upon the inadequacy of paganism and asks for Christ's mercy.

***The Legend of Good Women*** (1380s) first significant work in English to use the iambic pentameter or decasyllabic couplets; also one of the first mock-heroic works in English. Introduced, thus, heroic couplets. The prologue begins with Chaucer describing his love of books and how he revers them. He says that except for May’s gaming season, nothing takes him away from the books: “Farewel my bok, and my devocioun!” He sees importance of experience but books also important to learning. The he talks of M<ay (Rose tradition) and flowers, particularly the daisy, which he personifies as a symbol of loyalty and virtue. Chaucer falls asleep and dreams of being visited by the God of Love and his queen, Alceste. The God of Love is angry with Chaucer for his previous works, like *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Romaunt of the Rose*, which he believes portray women negatively. The command of queen Alceste is said, by John Lydgate in *The Fall of Princes*, to be a poetic account of an actual request for a poem by Anne of Bohemia who came to England in 1382 to marry Richard II. To atone for this perceived offense, Chaucer is commanded to write a series of tales about good women who exemplify faithfulness in love.

Alceste intercedes on Chaucer's behalf and persuades the God of Love to forgive him. She instructs Chaucer to write about virtuous women from history and mythology as an act of redemption. Then Chaucer recounts the stories of heroines who suffered for love. Each legend tells the tale of a woman who remains loyal in love, often at great personal cost. Chaucer planned to include 19 stories, but only 9 survive in varying degrees of completion.

The Legend of Cleopatra: Cleopatra, the queen of Egypt, is portrayed as a devoted lover of Mark Antony. After their defeat in battle, Antony falls on his sword, and Cleopatra, unable to bear the loss, allows herself to be bitten by an asp. Her death is described as a noble act of loyalty to Antony, and she is celebrated as an example of true love and sacrifice.

The Legend of Thisbe: Thisbe’s tale is a tragic love story set in Babylon, resembling *Romeo and Juliet*. Thisbe and Pyramus are forbidden to be together by their families but communicate through a crack in the wall separating their homes. They plan to meet in secret, but a misunderstanding leads to their deaths. Pyramus finds Thisbe's bloodied veil and believes she has been killed by a lion, so he takes his own life. Thisbe discovers his body and kills herself in grief.

The Legend of Dido: Dido, the queen of Carthage, falls in love with the Trojan hero Aeneas after he is shipwrecked near her city. When Aeneas abandons her to fulfill his destiny in Italy, Dido is heartbroken. She builds a funeral pyre and throws herself onto it, dying out of despair and unrequited love. Chaucer portrays her as a victim of betrayal, highlighting her loyalty and the injustice of Aeneas’ actions.

The Legend of Hypsipyle and Medea: This legend recounts the story of two women betrayed by Jason, the hero who sought the Golden Fleece. Hypsipyle, the queen of Lemnos, is seduced by Jason, who promises to marry her but abandons her after she bears his children. Medea, another woman Jason woos, helps him acquire the Golden Fleece by using her magical powers but is later abandoned as well. Both women are depicted as loyal and wronged, victims of Jason’s duplicity.

The Legend of Lucretia: Lucretia is a noble Roman woman whose tragic story is rooted in historical accounts. She is raped by Sextus Tarquinius, the son of the king of Rome. Unable to live with the shame, Lucretia takes her own life after revealing the crime to her family. Her death inspires the Roman people to revolt and overthrow the monarchy, establishing the Roman Republic. Chaucer emphasizes her virtue and courage, presenting her as a martyr for justice.

The Legend of Ariadne: Ariadne helps Theseus escape the labyrinth after he kills the Minotaur by giving him a thread to guide his way back. She falls deeply in love with him and leaves her home to be with him. However, Theseus abandons her on the island of Naxos while she sleeps. Heartbroken, Ariadne is eventually rescued by the god Dionysus, but her initial betrayal by Theseus underscores her unwavering devotion.

The Legend of Philomela: Philomela is a Greek princess who is raped by her sister’s husband, Tereus. After the assault, Tereus cuts out her tongue to silence her. Philomela manages to communicate the crime to her sister, Procne, by weaving a tapestry that depicts the events. Together, the sisters exact revenge on Tereus by killing his son and serving him to Tereus as a meal. The sisters are later transformed into birds by the gods. Philomela’s tale is one of suffering and resilience in the face of brutality.

The Legend of Phyllis: Phyllis is abandoned by Demophon, the son of Theseus, who promises to marry her but fails to return after leaving her. Overcome with grief, Phyllis kills herself and is transformed into an almond tree. Her story highlights the theme of betrayal and the consequences of unfulfilled promises.

The Legend of Hypermnestra: Hypermnestra is one of the 50 daughters of Danaus, who are ordered to kill their husbands on their wedding night. She defies her father’s command by sparing her husband, Lynceus, because she loves him. Her loyalty and courage make her an exception among her sisters, who carry out the murders.

***The Canterbury Tales*** (1387 and 1400) In 1373 on his Italian trip, he came into contact with Petrarch or Boccaccio. Giovanni Sercambi in his *Novelle* also uses pilgrim frame. He was accompanied by Sir John Hawkwood in 1378 to Milan. It was Hawkwood on whom Chaucer based his character, the Knight, in the *Canterbury Tales*. The tales are divided into ten "Fragments"; also into nine "Groups", which was the order used by Walter William Skeat whose edition *Chaucer: Complete Works.* *The Canterbury Tales* was selected by William Caxton as one of the first books to be printed in England. Dryden said about it: “here is God’s plenty.”

**General Prologue:** introduces the reader to the group of pilgrims (or every class except very high and very low) who gather at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, just outside London, before embarking on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. There are 29 pilgrims, each representing different social classes and occupations, from the noble Knight to the corrupt Pardoner. Chaucer, the narrator, provides vivid descriptions of each pilgrim, highlighting their appearance, profession, and moral qualities. The Host, Harry Bailey, suggests a storytelling contest to entertain the group on their journey. The storyteller who tells the best tale will be rewarded with a free meal upon their return. The characters except Knight, Parson and Plowman are introduced with irony. He attacks church in individual characters of Monk, Friar, Nun, Nun’s priest and Summoner. In this regard, Pardoner can be seen as a masterpiece of character-drawing.

**The Knight’s Tale:** Taken from Boccaccio’s *Teseide,* the Knight narrates a courtly romance of two knights in decasyllabic couplets, Palamon and Arcite, who are captured during a war and imprisoned in a tower in Athens. From their prison window, they both fall in love with Emily, the sister of the Duke Theseus. After their release, the two knights vie for Emily's hand in marriage. They engage in a tournament, where Arcite wins but is mortally wounded by a fall from his horse. On his deathbed, Arcite requests that Emily marry Palamon, and she agrees. The tale ends with the two knights' rivalry resolved in death, and Palamon and Emily marry. The story is formal exercise in medieval chivalry and lacks depth.

**The Miller’s Tale (fabliau)** The Miller (Robin) insists on telling a tale which is a comic and bawdy story of a carpenter named John, his young wife Alison, and her two suitors: Nicholas, a scholar, and Absalom, a parish clerk. Osewold the Reeve protests as he tells the story (as he was linked to carpentry) but he goes on telling it anyways. Nicholas and Alison plot to deceive John by convincing him that a great flood is imminent and he must sleep in a tub suspended from the rafters. While John is preoccupied, Nicholas and Alison have an affair. Absalom, who is also in love with Alison, attempts to woo her, but she tricks him into kissing her backside. Humiliated, Absalom seeks revenge and burns Nicholas with a hot poker, causing him to cry out in pain. John, hearing the noise, falls from his tub and is mocked by his neighbors. The tale is full of crude humor and satire.

**The Reeve’s Tale (fabliau)** The Reeve (Osewold) tells a tale story of revenge and trickery but first he talks about how he would requite Miller’s tale with an energetic one but that he is growing old and infirm. Two students, John and Alan, travel to a mill run by a dishonest miller. The miller, named Simkin, cheats them by giving them less flour than they are owed. In retaliation, John and Alan devise a plan to humiliate the miller. They seduce his wife and daughter, with Alan sleeping with the wife and John with the daughter. When the miller discovers what has happened, he is furious and embarrassed. The students escape with their flour, and the miller is left to suffer the consequences of his dishonesty.

**The Cook’s Tale:** of which only 60 lines have survived, is about Perkyn, a poor apprentice who lives a disreputable life. He spends his earnings on drinking, gambling, and hanging out with thieves. Perkyn is eventually dismissed from his apprenticeship due to his immoral behavior. The tale ends abruptly, with no clear resolution, leaving Perkyn’s fate uncertain. The story presents a cautionary tale about vice and poor choices, though its incomplete nature means it lacks a clear moral conclusion.

**The Man of Law’s Tale:** in rhyme royal, it tells the story of Constance, daughter of Roman emperor and a virtuous Christian woman who is married off to the Sultan of Syria. Sourced from Nicholas Trivet’s *Anglo-Norman Chronicle.* After the marriage, Constance is betrayed by her husband’s family, who try to kill her and her son. She is exiled to the sea and eventually washes up on the shores of Northumberland, where she is taken in by the King of England. After a series of trials and hardships, Constance is reunited with her son and her husband, who converts to Christianity. The tale is a story of divine providence, perseverance, and the ultimate reward of virtue.

**The Wife of Bath’s Tale:** It has a prologue in which she talks of her 5 husbands and how experience and not authority is her guide. This account is interrupted by bawdy remarks and quarrel of Friar and Summoner. In this tale, told in decasyllabic couplets, a knight in King Arthur’s court is condemned to death for raping a young woman. However, the queen spares him and gives him the task of discovering what women most desire. The knight spends a year searching for an answer, and eventually, an old woman tells him that women most desire sovereignty (maistrye) over their husbands. The knight returns to the queen and tells her the answer, and as a reward, he is allowed to marry the old woman. At first, he is disgusted by her appearance, but she transforms into a beautiful woman after he allows her to choose their marriage’s direction. The tale challenges gender roles and explores themes of power in relationships.

**The Friar’s Tale:** The Friar’s Tale is about a corrupt summoner, a man who is responsible for calling people to appear in church court. The summoner is dishonest and extorts money from people to avoid punishment for their sins. One day, he meets a devil disguised as a yeoman, and the devil reveals to the summoner that he too is a fraud, leading him to hell for his wickedness. The story highlights the corruption of religious officials, as both the summoner and the friar are shown to be hypocrites.

**The Summoner’s Tale:** The Summoner’s Tale is a satirical story about a greedy friar who seeks donations from a poor man. The friar convinces the man to donate his money, but when the man refuses, he tricks him into thinking that he has a special connection to God. However, the man outwits the friar and makes him believe he has received a gift, only to expose the friar's greed by tricking him into receiving a fart. The tale humorously mocks the corruption of the church and the greed of religious figures. The account of Friar going to a sick man is the most realistic account given.

**The Clerk’s Tale:** in rhyme royal, it is a tragic story of Griselda, a poor woman who marries Walter, a wealthy nobleman. The Clerk acknowledges Petrarch as a source (who in turn took it from *Decameron*). Walter tests her loyalty and patience by subjecting her to cruel trials, including taking away their children and pretending to marry another woman. Griselda remains obedient and humble throughout the trials. Eventually, Walter reveals that the trials were tests of her character, and she is rewarded with the return of her children and her husband’s love. The story explores the idea of unconditional love and patience, though it also raises questions about the imbalance of power in relationships. Chaucer interrupts towards the end as he feels bored by it. He says that neither should the wives be tested thus nor Clerks be led to write stories about them.

**The Merchant’s Tale:** in decasyllabic couplets, it is about January, an old man who marries a young woman named May. January is blind and naive, while May is unfaithful to him. She falls in love with his squire, Damian, and they secretly plot to deceive him. One day, January miraculously regains his sight, but May convinces him that her affair was part of his cure. The tale explores themes of marriage, deception, and the foolishness of the old husband.

**The Squire’s Tale:** an **unfinished** story of magic and adventure. It begins with Cambyuskan, the King of Tartary, who receives wondrous gifts from a mysterious knight. These gifts include a brass horse that can fly, a mirror that reveals all secrets, and a ring that makes its wearer invisible. The tale ends abruptly, as it is incomplete, and the promised adventures do not fully unfold. The tale suggests a world of wonder and fantasy, but it is left unresolved.

**The Franklin’s Tale (Breton lay)** centers on Dorigen, a young woman who is married to Arveragus, a noble knight. When Arveragus is away, Dorigen promises to marry Aurelius if he can remove the rocks that threaten her husband’s safe return. Aurelius miraculously removes the rocks with magic, and Dorigen feels bound to honor her promise. However, when she is faced with the prospect of marrying Aurelius, she reveals the truth, and Aurelius, moved by her loyalty to her husband, releases her from her promise. He in turn is released from a big debt. The three then get together in courteous behaviour and Franklin asks who among them was most free. The story highlights the themes of honor, selflessness, and the complexities of promises.

**The Physician’s Tale:** tells the story of Virginius, a nobleman, and his daughter Virginia, who is sought after by the corrupt judge Appius. When Appius lusts after Virginia, he uses his authority to falsely accuse her of being his slave, intending to claim her for himself. Virginius, unable to protect his daughter from such a fate, is forced to kill her in order to preserve her honor. The tale explores the themes of justice, virtue, and the tragic consequences of abuse of power, highlighting Virginius’ anguished decision to sacrifice his own daughter to save her from dishonor. Disheartened by this sombre tale, Host asks Pardoner for a merry one.

**The Pardoner’s Tale (exemplum):** He first asks for a drink then reveals how his relics are pig bones and how he bullies people into giving him money. The Pardoner’s Tale is a moral story about three riotous young men who set out to find and kill Death after an old man tells them that it is a person who kills others. Along the way, they meet a gold coin, which leads to their downfall. The youngest of the three goes to buy poison to kill his companions, while the other two plot to kill him. In the end, all three men die, each victim of their own greed. The Pardoner uses this tale to preach against the vices of greed and gluttony. The tale is both a moral lesson and an ironic commentary on the Pardoner's own corrupt nature, as he is also guilty of the greed he condemns. Then Pardoner goes and asks Harry to kiss his relics for some money as he is the most sinning in the company which outrages him and Knight has to intervene to make peace.

**The Shipman’s Tale (fabliau)** originally intended for Wife of Bath, it is about a merchant, his wife, and his friend, a monk. The monk seduces the merchant's wife, and in return, she borrows money from her husband to give to the monk. The merchant is eventually told that his wife has given the monk a loan, and when he confronts her, she insists the monk paid her with a gift. The monk and the wife manage to deceive the merchant, leaving him unaware of their affair. The tale explores the themes of deception, cleverness, and the tricks people play to get what they want.

**The Prioress’s Tale (saint’s tale)** a miracle of St. Hugh of London, it tells in rhyme royal the story of a Christian boy who is murdered by Jews because he sings a hymn to the Virgin Mary. After his death, the boy miraculously continues to sing the hymn, and his mother finds his body. The Jews are punished for the crime, and the boy is glorified as a martyr. The tale presents a highly charged religious narrative that reflects medieval attitudes towards Jews, sainthood, and the sanctity of the Virgin Mary. It is a tale filled with devotion and the miraculous, presenting the boy as a symbol of pure faith.

**The Tale of Sir Thopas:** told by Chaucer, is a parody of chivalric romance. Sir Thopas, a foolish knight, embarks on a quest to find a fairy queen to marry. He faces numerous comic obstacles, and his tale is filled with absurdities. The tale is interrupted by the Host, who criticizes it for being overly ridiculous and dull. The Tale of Sir Thopas mocks the conventions of the chivalric genre, emphasizing the absurdity of some medieval ideals of heroism and romance. He is shut after some 30 stanzas and then switches to a prose tale. **The Tale of Melibee:** The Tale of Melibee is a story of patience and marital harmony. Melibee, a wealthy man, is injured in an attack by his enemies. His wife, Prudence, advises him to seek peaceful reconciliation rather than vengeance, and Melibee eventually follows her counsel. The tale explores themes of wisdom, temperance, and the importance of listening to one's spouse. It is presented as a moral story about the benefits of patience and wisdom in handling conflicts. The host tells him that he wishes his wife as much patience with him as Prudence.

**The Monk’s Tale:** he first begins by outlining the definition of tragedy as the fall from prosperity to misery. It is a series of tragic stories in 8-line stanza rhyming ababbcbc about the downfall of great men. He tells of historical figures such as Adam, Samson, and Hercules, who were all great in their prime but eventually fell from grace due to their vices. The tale serves as a meditation on the fragility of fortune and the inevitable downfall that awaits all powerful men. It is a reflection on the transient nature of success and the permanence of ruin. He is interrupted by Knight who is bored and Host agrees with night and asks him instead to tell a story of hunting which he refuses to.

**The Nun’s Priest’s Tale (beast fable)** The Nun’s Priest’s Tale is a comedic fable about a rooster named Chanticleer, who is fooled by his wife, Pertelote, into thinking that his bad dreams are meaningless. Chanticleer is eventually captured by a fox, but through his wit and cleverness, he manages to escape. The tale serves as both an entertaining story and a lesson about the dangers of vanity and the importance of being cautious in the face of danger. It is a reflection on fate, pride, and the unpredictability of life.

**The Second Nun’s Tale (saint’s tale)** The Second Nun’s Tale recounts the life of Saint Cecilia, a Christian martyr who was forced to marry a pagan but secretly converted her husband and his brother to Christianity after invocation to Mary in Prologue in rhyme royal. Cecilia’s devotion to God and her resistance to earthly pleasures lead to her martyrdom. The tale is a hagiographic story, emphasizing the saint's unwavering faith and piety. It is a story of moral integrity and divine reward, portraying Cecilia as an ideal Christian figure who is ultimately rewarded with sainthood. At this point, the Canon, an alchemist, and his Yeoman join and Teoman shames him by telling the group how he fleeces people with his alchemy tricks and the Canon takes off, leaving Yeoman with the company.

**The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale:** focuses on the deceitful practices of alchemists, specifically a Canon who claims to have discovered the secret to making gold. The Yeoman, who is his assistant, reveals how the Canon’s promises are false and that he is a fraud who is ruining the lives of others. The tale exposes the corruption of those who seek wealth through dishonest means and warns against the dangers of greed and the pursuit of illusionary gains.

**Manciple’s prologue and tale:** the prologue is a fight between him and the cook who is drunk. He tells the tale of a telltale crow who informs husband of his wife’s infidelity.

**The Parson’s Tale (sermon)** in his prologue he says he has no story and he won’t “rum ram ruf’ but tell a sermon. He says he doesn’t like alliterative poetry of north nor rhyme so he chooses prose. It is a lengthy sermon on penitence, where the Parson discusses the Seven Deadly Sins and offers guidance on how to avoid them. He explains the importance of repentance, humility, and living a virtuous life. The tale is more of a moral guide than a narrative story and is intended to teach the audience how to live a good life. It serves as a stark contrast to many of the other tales in \*The Canterbury Tales\*, which often feature bawdy humor or immoral characters. The Parson’s Tale emphasizes the themes of Christian virtue and redemption. Right after the sermon, follows Chauver’s retraction.

**The Tale of the Doctor:** The Tale of the Doctor centers on the story of Apollonius of Tyre, a nobleman who suffers great misfortune. His wife is falsely accused of infidelity and is abandoned, only for Apollonius to learn years later that she was innocent and that they were tragically separated. The tale explores themes of fate, loss, and the complexity of human relationships. It is a story filled with dramatic twists and poignant moments.

**Knight’s Second Tale:** The Knight’s Second Tale recounts the further adventures of the knights Arcite and Palamon, where their rivalry is explored in greater depth. The tale focuses on their determination to win Emily's love despite the obstacles they face. It delves into the lives of knights and their complex motivations.

**Chaucer's Retraction** is an apology appended towards the end in which he asks for forgiveness for the vulgar and unworthy parts of this and other past works, and seeks absolution for his sins. It is a parallel to the *Decameron*, by Giovanni Boccaccio.

*The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse*

*Fortune* (1390s) "Chaucer as narrator" openly defies *Fortune*, proclaiming that he has learned who his enemies are through her tyranny and deceit, and declares "my suffisaunce" (15) and that "over himself hath the maystrye".

**Great Vowel Shift** studied by Otto Jespersen (1860–1943) happened between the 1400s and 1600s.

**Rime royale** or **Rhyme royal:** rhyme royal stanza consists of seven lines, usually in iambic pentameter. The rhyme scheme is ABABBCC. In practice, the stanza can be constructed either as a tercet and two couplets (ABA BB CC) or a quatrain and a tercet (ABAB BCC). Chaucer first used the rhyme royal stanza in his long poems *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Parlement of Foules.* Also in four of the *Canterbury Tales*: the Man of Law's Tale, the Prioress' Tale, the Clerk's Tale, and the Second Nun's Tale. He might have sourced it from the Italian *ottava rima*, with the omission of the fifth line. John Gower used rhyme royal in *In Praise of Peace* and *Confessio Amantis.* James I of Scotland used rhyme royal for his Chaucerian poem *The Kingis Quair*. John Lydgate in his *Fall of Princes*. 20th century usage includes W. H. Auden's *Letter to Lord Byron*, W. B. Yeats's *A Bronze Head* and John Masefield's *Dauber.*

## **Julian of Norwich (**1343 to 1416)

known for her *Revelations of Divine Love* is considered earliest known female writer.

# Alliterative Revival

## John Gower (1330 to 1408) “Moral Gower”

Gower’s formative years were spent partly in Kent and partly in Suffolk, as Stanley and Smith suggest. In 1399 Henry IV granted him a pension. Gower's friendship with Chaucer led Chaucer to dedicate his *Troilus and Criseyde* in part to "moral Gower". He praises Chaucer in the mouth of Venus at the end of the *Confessio Amantis*.

*Cinkante Ballades* includes ballades in Anglo-Norman French.

***Speculum Meditantis*** ("mirror of meditation") (completed around 1380) aka ***Mirour de l'Omme*** is an Anglo-Norman (French) poem in iambic octosyllables with the theme of man's salvation. Only part of the poem survives; the conclusion has been lost. Discovered by G. C. Macaulay. The union of the Devil and Sin produces the seven daughters: Pride, Envy, Ire, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lechery. Reason and Conscience fail to control them. God sends the seven Virtues to oppose the Devil's forces. This section is an "extensive examination of the corruption of the Three Estates of society -- Church, State and Workers. Everyone is tainted." Repentance requires the intercession of the Virgin.

***Vox Clamantis*** (written around 1370s) translates to "the voice of one crying out", the first of seven books is a dream vision giving a vivid account of the Peasants' Rebellion of 1381. It is an estate satire (satirizing clergy, land etc). Fisher concludes that books II-V were written in the 1370s. Written before the Peasants' Revolt, Wickert groups the MS into 2: A-text (Macaulay's "initial version," Fisher's "b-version") and B-text (Macaulay's "final version," Fisher's "c-version").

Book I *Visio Anglie*: begins by describing the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 and rebels are condemned in the form of personal nightmare. Wickert divides Book I into three sections: Beast Vision (Chapters 2-12 ;first week of June); Beast Vision (Chapters 2-12 ;first week of June); Troy Vision (Chapters 13–15; 13–14 June) and Ship Vision and Epilogue (Chapters 16–21; 13–15 June). In the prologue, he provides his name in a cryptogram and says that without caring for future reputation, “I shall enter the recent misfortunes that my country has exhibited”. Begins with the description of a spring day and the the night falls and has a dream vision which is a the **Beast Vision**: revolting peasants are transformed into asses, oxen, swine, dogs, cats, foxes, birds, flies and frogs and jackdaw, with the leaders of the revolt (Wat Tyler was a leader). He then predicts universal ruin. The rebellious peasants are equated to the companions of Ulysses who were transformed to beasts by Circe. Henry Knighton, a historian of the time was more sympathetic to peasants. Wat Tyler "speaks out of character, as an enemy to his own cause". **Troy Vision** alludes to Britain's founding by Brutus of Troy; behind the Trojan figures are (Queen Mother=Hecuba; Richard II=Priam; Archbishop Simon Sudbury=Helenus). He suggests that New Troy (Britain) might share the fate of the historic Troy as he depicts beheading of the Archbishop of Canterbury and how a brothel and Church are considered same by people nowadays. **Ship Vision**: gives account of Ceyx and Alycone told in Ovid's *Metamorphoses* of the bloody end of Wat. The ship amid storm is steered by Edward III and his son and as it finally reaches a safe ahrbour, the dreamer meets an old who tells him of the quarrelsome Britain. The dreamer yearns for peace but a celestial voice advises him to stoically accept perpetual strife on this world (but in the other life). The follows the **Epilogue** in which he wakes up and thanks God and Mary as he sees revolting oxen return to yoke and apologizes for the length of the dream. **Book II** goes on with him suggesting that the problems of the day are the result of sin rather than fortune. **Book III Clergymen**: pope is criticized along with priests. This part is perfunctory service. **Book IV Religious Orders**: others including monks, Canons regular, nuns, and mendicant friar are criticized. Comparable to Chaucer's Friar Huberd. **Book V Knights, Peasant & Townsmen**: the knights who now did deeds for justice rather than for fame are no more to be seen but now they indulge in love for single women (courtly love) and then he goes on praising good knights. He then indulges in condemnation of bad women. Then he talks about agriculture folks as being divinely punished. Here comes the lines: “When Adam delved and Eve span, / Who was then the gentleman?” The unruly serf is compared to a weed in a field of grain. John Northampton is the target of his satire. **Book VI Lawyers & Advice for a Prince** satirizes lawyers uncompromisingly and the section which is seen as "Mirror for a Prince" shows how the king must govern himself and be governed by law. It shows how a wicked leader can damage state and is influenced by truisms of Cicero's *De re publica*. It praise of the Black Prince. **Book VII 1-8 Sundry Sins**: deals with a reinterpretation of Nebuchadnezzar's dream of a statue (Biblical) comprising gold, brass, iron and clay segments. He associates the iron of the statue with misers and clay with lechery.Seven Deadly Sins & Decay of a Corpse are dealt with in this section with a focus on mediation on death. Then he talks of worldly estates. **Patriotic Conclusion** of this book (and the poem) deals with his "deep love for England" as he laments the nations's decay due to sin. Text A concludes with these lines “I am worse than all men; but may the founder / of the world grant me relief through a priest. Amen” while Wickert's B-text has an appendix poem called *Cronica Tripertita* in 3 sections in leonine hexameter which talks about "Lancastrian propaganda under the guise of history. In it he talks about Merciless Parliament; Richard exacted his revenge and Henry IV supplanted Richard II as king.

***Confessio Amantis*** (1386 to 1390; second recension 1392; third recension 1393; 8 books) "The Lover's Confession" written in English (octosyllabic couplets) as "fewe men endite In oure englyssh". It uses a frame story of confession of an ageing lover to the chaplain of Venus. First recension’s prologue says composed at the request of Richard II and was one of the most-often copied manuscripts of the time. It is inspired by Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*. It was dedicated to Richard II and to Geoffrey Chaucer "disciple and poete" of Venus. But the second recension removes them and adds Henry of Lancaster, the future Henry IV as dedicatee (as Macaulay believes). C. S. lweis sees "sweetness and freshness" in the verse and praises its "memorable precision and weight". In the prologue, de he identifies in the three estates (government, church, and people) of his time and gives an account of the dream of Nebuchadnezzar identifying the statue's feet of iron mixed with clay with the medieval world that Gower perceives as hopelessly divided and in danger of imminent collapse. He says he chose a middle approach (not of wit which dulls a man) in writing: “And wryte a bok betwen the tweie, / Somewhat of lust, somewhat of lore”. Amans or the Lover roams in a forest in May and being lovesick he invokes Venus and Cupid. Upon hearing he’s about to die, Venus summons her chaplain Genius to hear his confession. Later, Venus cures him of his infatuation. Genius leads Amans through the seven deadly sins, interpreting them in the context of the courtly love tradition. Each book of the poem shall be devoted to one sin: pride, envy, wrath, sloth, avarice, and gluttony (only six). At the 6th sin in book 6, Amans interjects and asks Genius to stop and instead teach him of wisdom. Then he relates education given by Aristotle to Alexander the Great in book 7. Book 8 returns to the confession and 7th sin of lechery is discussed (but since it’s Venus’s court, it isn’t a sin and instead incest is picked which Amans is clear of). *Apollonius of Tyre*’s story is discussed in this section. One of the more than 100 tales told is thw tale of *Apollonius* which was the source for Shakespearean *Pericles.*

*In Praise of Peace* a poem in which he sees himself as the loyal subject of Henry IV and approves his coronation.

## **William Langland (1330 to 86)** Shropshire

***Piers Plowman*** (1377) or *Visio Willelmi de Petro Ploughman* (*William's Vision of Piers Plowman*) English alliterative un-rhymed allegorical narrative poem. Poem refers to author as “my name is longe wille" which might refer to "William Longwille, pseudonym of a Norfolk rebel in 1381. It is divided into sections called *passus* (Latin for "step"). Contains first known reference to a literary tradition of Robin Hood tales. Comes in 3 versions A-, B-, and C-texts with B-text being the most widely edited. It concerns the narrator/dreamer's quest for the true Christian life in the context of medieval Catholicism in the form of the dreamer seeking, among other things, the allegorical characters Dowel (*"Do-Well"*), Dobet (*"Do-Better"*), and Dobest (*"Do-Best"*). It begins in the Malvern Hills as Will falls asleep and has a vision of a tower set upon a hill and a fortress in a deep valley where he sees humankind being punished. They see King as a cat and his people as rodents who consider whether to bell the cat. Holy Church visits Will and explains the tower of Truth. Lady Mede ('payment') is to marry False and King proposes she marry Conscience while it denounces her and later Conscience and Reason convince the King not to marry Mede to False. Will wakes up. Reason gives a sermon to the Field of Folk and they repent. The Seven Deadly Sins make confession and decide to go on pilgrimage to St Truth. They get lost, and Piers Plowman makes his first appearance: he will help the penitents if they help him plough his half-acre. They do while those who refuse to work are punished by hunger which once satiates and they fall back to idleness. Truth sends Piers a pardon which is challenged by a priest as he sees it as a mere statement stating those who do good will be saved and those who do evil will be harmed; and Will is awakened. Now he starts seeking Do-wel. He falls asleep and meets Thought which instructs Will in 'Do well, do better, do best'. Wit, the guiding principal of all is seen. Later he sees confrontation of Dowel and the Castle of Flesh and sees the importance of being governed by 'Inwit'. Meets Wit's wife, Dame Study. Who rebukes him for his illiteracy. Goes to meet Clergy and Scripture to learn and Scripture rebukes him for his lack of self-knowledge. He has a dream-within-a-dream in which he meets Fortune. He serves her into old age, but she abandons him. Will has an argument with Reason as he informs it that it’s not enough for salvation. He meets Imaginatif, who advises Will to be patient. He awakes and falls back to sleep as Imaginatif teaches Will and focuses on need for humility and the importance of Grace. He then wakes and after sleeping dreams of sharing a feast with Conscience, Scripture, Clergy and Patience; he encounters a greedy Doctor of Divinity. Piers the Plowman offers a definition of Do Well, Do Better and Do Best. Conscience and Patience meet Haukyn the Active Man, who wears a coat of Christian faith which is, however, soiled with the Seven Deadly Sins. Conscience teaches Haukyn to seek forgiveness and do penance; Patience teaches Haukyn about the merits of embracing poverty. Haukyn cries out for God's mercy, which awakens Will. He meets Anima ('spirit') who talks of charity and he realizes that Piers the Plowman is Christ. He starts to search for Charity. He has another dream-within-a-dream, this time about the Tree of Charity, whose gardener is Piers the Plowman. He participates in re-enactment of the Fall of Man and then witnesses as the Devil is defeated. He meets Faith/Abraham, who is himself searching for Christ. Also meets Hope/Moses searching for Christ. He learns about the Good Samaritan and wakes up. He experiences Love and the intersection of human and divine time. Falls asleep again and witnesses the Four Daughters of God (Truth, Justice, Mercy, Peace) in debate; the Harrowing of Hell; and Redemption. Wakes up and now exhorts his family to hear Mass. In the Mass he falls back to sleep and meets Conscience once more. Conscience recounts the life and Passion of Christ and how Piers/Peter was given his power by Grace/Christ. Hears about Pentecost and sees Pride attacking Unity/Holy Church. Wakes up and Will meets Need. Sleeps and dreams of the Antichrist. Kynde sends Old Age, Death, and Pestilence, to chastise people: Will is attacked by Old Age. He witnesses Holy Church undermined by a hypocritical Friar. Conscience goes on pilgrimage to seek Piers the Plowman, and calls on Grace for help—whereupon Will wakes up.

Samuel Pepys owned a copy of *Piers Plowman*. Milton cites "Chaucer's Ploughman" in "Of Reformation" (1641) when he is discussing poems that have described Constantine as a major contributor to the corruption of the church.

See: Walter Kennedy's "In Praise of Aige" and *The Parliament of the Three Ages*

**Richard the Redeless** ("Richard without counsel") about him being poorly advised, an anonymous poem, may be attributed to him. It might be pseudepigrapha (false attribution).

***Pierce the Ploughman's Crede*** which is alike *Plowman's Tale*, also known as the *Complaint of the Ploughman* has historically been attributed to "Robert Langland" (i.e., William Langland).

**Other Alliterative Revival poem:**

***Mum and the Sothsegger*** (anonymous) a medieval debate poetry between the principles of the oppressive figure of *Mum* ("Silence", as in "to keep mum") and the unruly, wild *Sothsegger* ("Truth-Speaker", cognate with the modern word "soothsayer").