

Greco-Roman Period

Homer (8th century BC)

- The Iliad
- Epic
- One of the oldest extant (existing) works in Western literature
- Set against the Trojan War
- Starts with the fighting between Agamemnon and Achilles and tells the story of ten years of the war
- The Odyssey
- Sequel to The Iliad
- Depicts the journey of Odysseus or Ulysses back home to Ithaca, after the fall of Troy

Classical Drama

Tragedy

- Emerged in Athens in the late 6th century BC
 - As a part of religious festival Dionysia
 - Dionysus is the god of wine and ecstasy
 - Known as Bacchus among the Romans
- ### Comedy
- Developed later in association with the “satyr play”
 - Usually based on mythological subjects

Greek Theatre

- Koilon or Theatron
- Orchestra
- Thymele
- Scene or Skene
- Proscenion or Proscenium
- Diazoma

Greek Tragedy: Structure

- Prologue
- Parados
- Episodes and Stasimon

- Exodus

Greek Tragedy

- Aeschylus (c. 525-c. 456 BC)
- Father of tragedy
- The Oresteia
- Agamemnon
- Libation Bearers (Choephoroi)
- Eumenides
- Sophocles (c. 496-c. 456 BC)
- Oedipus Tyrannus
- Oedipus at Colonus
- Antigone
- Euripides (c. 480-c. 406 BC)
- Medea

Other Writers

- Aristophanes (c. 446-c. 386 BC)
- Menander (c. 342-c. 292 BC)
- Pindar (c. 522-c. 443 BC)
- Classical Critics
- Plato (c. 428-c. 348 BC)
- Initiation to Philosophy under Socrates
- The Academy established
- The Dialogues
- Aristotle (384-322 BC)
- Disciple of Plato
- Lyceum
- Poetics

Roman Classicism

- After the assassination of Julius Caesar and the battle of Actium, Octavius Caesar became the first emperor of Rome, Augustus Caesar
- Virgil (70-19 BC)
- Father of pastoral poetry

- Wrote The Aeneid
- Horace (65-08 BC)
- Odes
- Homostrophic (same stanza throughout the ode)
- Calm, meditative, colloquial
- Satires
- Speaker is an urbane, witty, tolerant man of the world
- Aimed “to laugh people out of their follies”
- Epistles (Letters)
- Ars Poetica (Epistle to Piso)

Roman Classicism

- Ovid (43 BC-c. AD 17)
- Wrote Metamorphoses
- Seneca the Younger (c. 4 BC-AD 65)
- Tragedies of Blood
- Plautus (c. 254 BC-184 BC)
- Stock characters: young men in love with slave girls, mistaken identities, cunning servants, deceived masters
- Modelled on Greek New Comedy
- Terence (c. 195 BC-159 BC)

Chaucer’s Age

Socio-Political Background

- The Black Death (1348-1353)
- Devastated Europe’s population
- Led to social, economic, and cultural changes
- The Hundred Years’ War (1337-1453)
- England and France clashed for over a century
- Affected trade, politics, and culture
- The Peasants’ Revolt (1381)
- Major uprising against social and economic inequality
- Demanded reform and greater rights
- The Rise of the Gentry (later, Middle Class)
- Growing wealth and influence of merchants and traders

- Challenged the power of the nobility
- The Decline of Feudalism
- Shift from feudal obligations to monetary relationships
- Changed social and economic structures

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340-1400)

- Born in London to a wine merchant family
- Served in the Hundred Years' War
- Worked as a civil servant and diplomat
- Married to Philippa Roet, a lady-in-waiting to Queen
- John of Gaunt was Chaucer's patron, and later the husband of Philippa's sister
- Father of English literature
- Introduced the heroic couplet (in The Legend of Good Women)
- Used vernacular English (East Midland dialect)
- Influenced by Dante, Boccaccio, and classical literature
- Works
- The Book of the Duchess
- The House of Fame
- The Parliament of Fowls
- Troilus and Criseyde
- Legend of Good Women
- The Canterbury Tales (c. 1387-1400)

The Canterbury Tales (writ. 1387-1400; pub. 1476)

- Influenced by Dante's Divine Comedy and Boccaccio's Decameron
- Collection of 24 stories, told by pilgrims traveling from London to Canterbury
- 29 pilgrims plus Chaucer and the Host of Tabard Inn, Harry Bailey
- Written in Middle English, with Latin and French influences
- Use of metaphor, simile, and personification
- Written in iambic pentameter
- Reflects social, economic, and cultural changes of the time
- General Prologue is called "the portrait gallery of 14th century England"
- Frame narrative, with the General Prologue introducing the pilgrims and setting the stage

Themes

- Love and relationships
- Social hierarchy and class
- Morality and ethics
- Corruption and deception
- Spirituality and faith
- Identity and self-discovery
- Power dynamics and gender roles

General Prologue

- Structure
- 858 lines, written in iambic pentameter
- Divided into three sections:
- Introduction to the pilgrimage (lines 1-42)
- Description of the pilgrims (lines 43-718)
- Conclusion and invitation to the tale-telling contest (lines 719-858)
- Themes
- Pilgrimage and spiritual journey
- Social hierarchy and class
- Morality and ethics
- Satire and social commentary
- Storytelling and performance

The Knight

- Member of the nobility
- “He was a truly parfit, gentil knight”
- “He was and worthy wight, and worthy of his meede”
- Honorable, chivalrous, and courteous
- Respects women and the Church
- He wears a tunic of fustian (a type of cotton fabric) and a coat of mail (armour)
- Travelled extensively throughout Europe and Asia
- Fought in as many as 15 battles in the Crusades
- Wise, just, and dignified
- Humble and modest

The Squire

- Member of the nobility
- Son of the Knight
- Apprentice to chivalry
- Young, energetic, and stylish
- “A Squire ther was, yong and ful of vigour”
- “With lockes crulle, as they were laid in press”
- “His yelow locks, shone like the sonne”
- Plays the pipe
- Lover and lusty bachelor whom “slept no more than doth a nightingale”

Wife of Bath

- A complex, multifaceted character
- Confident, assertive, and outspoken
- “A worthy wyf was in that land”
- Experienced in marriage and love
- Strong-willed and independent
- Member of the rising middle class
- Successful businesswoman (wealthy) good at embroidery
- “Her hose were of fyn scarlet reed”
- “On her feet a pair of sharpest spurs”
- Challenges traditional feminine virtues
- Represents the emergence of a new female identity
- Advocates for women's rights and equality

The Monk

- Member of the clergy
- “A manly man to be an abbot able”
- High-ranking official
- Ignores spiritual duties and values
- Was corrupt
- “A Monk ther was, a fat and ful lusty man”
- “His heed was balled, and shone like any glas”
- Loves hunting, dogs, and fine food (roasted swan)
- Compared to the Prioress in religious affectation

- Gives importance to material wealth
- “His boots were soft, his horse was good and fat”
- Cloak sleeves lined with fur and pinned with a gold brooch

The Pardoner

- Member of the clergy
- “A Pardoner ther was, with a voys so high”
- Had long, greasy, yellow hair
- Greedy, corrupt, and deceitful
- Cunning and persuasive
- Sells fake papal indulgences (“come from Rome all hot”) and relics
- “His wallet lay biforen hym in his lappe”
- Exploits people's faith for personal gain
- Represents corruption within the Church

The Miller

- Short, stout fellow who can “outwrestle even a ram”
- Broad beard red as a sow
- Nostrils black and wide
- Mouth as big as a furnace
- Represents the common man
- Loud-mouthed, rough, drunken, and boastful
- Embodies the tensions between social classes
- “A Miller was ther, of a systern browne”
- Loves to tell stories and share his thoughts
- Plays the bagpipe
- Cheats by pushing the scales with his thumb
- The narrator says he had a “gold thumb”

The Prioress

- Clergy woman named “Eglantyne” (romantic name meaning sweet briar)
- Beautiful, lady-like, pleasant
- “A Prioress ther was, and that so charitable”
- “Her smyle was ful simple and coy”
- Had fine table manners

- Sang her service divine in a fashionable nasal tone
- Swore fashionably by the oath of St. Loy
- Suggestion that she is pretentiously tender-hearted
- “She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous” but did not care for people as much

The Merchant

- “A Merchant was ther with a forked berd”
- “In motley, and high on his horse he sat”
- Cunning, clever, materialistic and worldly
- Successful businessman who was secretly in debt
- Represents the emerging middle class
- Embodies the tension between materialism and spirituality.

The Man of Law

- Member of the professional class
- Knowledgeable, experienced and respected
- Wealthy land buyer and social climber
- “Seemed busier than he really is”
- Skilled in law and jurisprudence
- Can cite cases as far back as William the Conqueror
- Confident and authoritative

The Franklin

- Member of the landowning class
- Jovial, generous, and hospitable
- White beard
- Loves food, drink, and company
- Compared to St. Julian for his hospitality
- Values comfort and pleasure
- Praised as “the son of Epicurus”

The Reeve

- Member of the landowning class
- Cunning, clever, experienced and skilled in management
- Choleric—ill-mannered
- Agents, shepherds and labourers were afraid of him

- Good at managing estates and keeping accounts
- Also a good carpenter

The Shipman

- Member of the emerging middle class
- Widely travelled and experienced
- The hot sun made him brown
- Undoubtedly a rascal
- Stole from merchants
- Threw prisoners into the sea
- His ship was called the Magdalen

The Physician

- Good at his profession
- But did not know the Bible
- Love of gold, which the narrator says is because it is “cordial in medicine”

The Clerk of Oxford

- Member of the intellectual class
- Devoted to the study of philosophy
- Wore threadbare clothes
- Was polite and spoke only when necessary
- Owned 20 books and prayed for those who helped him study

The Summoner

- Member of the clergy
- Officer of the ecclesiastical court
- Ignores spiritual values
- Pursues material gain and power
- Took bribes
- Vulgar in nature and appearance
- Had scaly eyebrows
- Loves garlic, onions, leeks
- Drinks red wine to excess
- Spouts a few Latin phrases

The Friar

- Wanton and merry
- Belonged to the mendicant order (has to live by begging)
- Was more interested in immoral affairs
- Good singer, who plays the fiddle
- Neck was as white as a lily

The Parson

- Member of the clergy
- Spiritual leader of his community
- Respects spiritual values, humility, compassion
- “If gold rusts, what will iron do?”
- His brother is the Plowman

The Plowman

- Member of the peasant class
- Virtuous and hard working
- Lives a simple and humble life

Social Commentary

- Provides insight into medieval society, culture, and values
- Critique of corruption in the Church
- Satire of social classes and professions
- Commentary on morality and ethics
- Exploration of human nature and psychology

William Langland (c. 1332-1386)

- Lived in London and wrote about social issues
- Wrote in alliterative verse
- Focused on social justice and morality
- Criticized corruption and inequality
- Works
- The Vision of Piers Plowman

John Gower (c. 1330-1408)

- Lived in London
- Wrote in Middle English, French and Latin
- Focused on politics, morality, and social issues

- Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde is dedicated to "O Moral Gower"
- Criticized corruption and advocated for reform
- Works
- Speculum Meditantis (French)
- Vox Clamantis (Latin)
- Confessio Amantis (English)

Early Renaissance in England

Early Renaissance

- Renaissance is French for rebirth
Major Developments
- Revival of Classical Learning
- Renewed interest in ancient Greek and Roman texts, leading to a resurgence in classical education
- Humanism
- Emphasis on human potential, individualism, and intellectual curiosity
- Development of Art and Literature
- Emergence of notable writers like Chaucer, University Wits and Shakespeare
- Emergence of artists like Hans Holbein

Early Renaissance

- Printing Press established
- Introduction of movable-type printing by Gutenberg (in England, Caxton 1476) led to widespread dissemination of knowledge
- Exploration and Trade
- English explorers (like John Cabot) established new trade routes, expanding cultural exchange
- Religious Reformation
- Catholic Church authority is challenged, paving the way for Protestantism
- Growth of Cities
- Urbanization and economic expansion in cities like London

William Caxton (c.1422-c.1491)

- Was a merchant and diplomat, translator and printer
- Established England's first printing press (1476) in Westminster; the first to be printed was The Canterbury Tales
- Caxton's printing helped standardize English spelling and vocabulary
- Printed and translated influential works, popularizing literature among the middle class

- Caxton's press facilitated widespread access to classical texts, contributing to the Renaissance's revival of learning
- This led to the formation of English national identity and cultural heritage

Major Publications of Caxton

- The History of Troy (1474) published by Caxton in Belgium
- The Canterbury Tales (1476)
- Morte d'Arthur (1485)
- The Description of Britain (1480)

Thomas Malory (c.1415-71)

- 15th-century English writer and knight
- Wrote during the Wars of the Roses (1455-1485), reflecting turmoil and quest for order
- Imprisoned multiple times for various crimes
- Familiar with French and English literature
- Malory drew from French sources
- This cross-cultural exchange was typical of Renaissance

Le Morte d'Arthur (1485)

- Considered one of the most influential Arthurian works
- First printed by William Caxton in 1485
- Compiled from French and English sources
- Chrétien de Troyes, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight
- Combined diverse sources, creating a cohesive, engaging narrative
- Divided into 21 books, covering King Arthur's life and reign
- Themes of chivalry, loyalty, honour, love, and power
- Revitalized interest in chivalric romances
- This reflected Renaissance humanism's emphasis on classical values
- Written in prose, which was unusual at that time
- Malory pioneered English prose narrative, departing from traditional verse

Le Morte d'Arthur (1485)

- Characters and Plot Elements
- King Arthur, legendary British leader
- His Knights are called the Roundtable
- Merlin, the wizard advising Arthur
- Lancelot and Guinevere, the ill-fated lovers

- Gawain, Arthur's chivalrous nephew
- Mordred, Arthur's illegitimate son
- Quest for the Holy Grail
- Arthur's downfall, Camelot's destruction
- The characters' inner lives and motivations added depth to the Arthurian legend

Ballads

- A ballad is a narrative poem or song, typically with folk origins
- Ballads tell stories, often with a focus on emotion, drama, or tragedy
- A ballad has medieval origins (12th-15th centuries)
- Influenced by folk songs, minstrels, and troubadours
- Evolved through oral transmission and adaptation
- Printed collections emerged in 16th-17th centuries
- Ballads influenced literature (Example: Shakespeare, Romantic poets)

Ballads

- Features
- Simple, direct language
- Ballad Stanza or quatrains or couplets
- Rhyme scheme is usually ABAB
- Repetition in refrains, choruses
- Folkloric themes such as love, loss, legend, history
- Storytelling is the focus

Types of Ballads

- Folk Ballads
- Derived from oral traditions
- Example: "The Gest of Robin Hood"
- Narrative Ballads
- Tell stories
- Examples: "The Wife of Usher's Well", "Sir Patrick Spens"
- Romantic Ballads
- Focus on love and relationships
- Example: "The Nut-Brown Maid"

Types of Ballads

- Tragic Ballads
- Explore sorrow, loss, or death
- Example: “The Ballad of Reading Abbey”
- Legendary Ballads
- Retell myths, legends, or historical events
- Example: “Sir Gawain and the Green Knight”
- Literary Ballads
- A narrative poem by an author based on folkloric themes
- Example: “The Rime of the Ancient Mariner”

Thomas More (1478-1535)

- English lawyer, philosopher, and statesman
- Educated at Oxford and Lincoln's Inn
- Friend and advisor to King Henry VIII
- Opposed Henry VIII's divorce, leading to his execution
- Canonized as a saint by the Catholic Church in 1935

Utopia (1516)

- Thomas More coined the word Utopia (meaning nowhere land) from Greek
- Latin novel in two parts, exploring ideal society
- Influenced by Plato's Republic and Aristotle's Politics
- Translated by Ralph Robinson in 1551
- Critique of European society, politics, and economy
- Describes fictional island Utopia, its laws, customs, and institutions

Utopia (1516)

- Book I
- Introduces Raphael Hythlodai, a traveller who visited Utopia
- Criticizes European society, politics, and economy
- Book II
- Describes Utopia's society, laws, and customs
- Utopia is an island nation with 54 cities
- No private property or wealth
- Everyone works, but only 6 hours a day
- No crime, no prisons

- Euthanasia (mercy killing) allowed
- Religious tolerance
- Women's rights and education supported
- Rational governance

Utopia (1516)

- Influence on later writers
- Inspired utopian works like Francis Bacon's New Atlantis
- Shaped modern political philosophy, especially John Locke and Rousseau
- Influenced socialist and communist thought like that of Marx and Engels

Other Early Renaissance Writers

- John Skelton (1460-1529)
- Wrote rough skeltonic verse
- William Tyndale (1494-1536)
- Translated the Bible and was burnt at stake
- Roger Ascham (1515-68)
- Wrote The School Master and Toxophilus
- Raphael Holinshed (1529-80)
- Wrote historical documents called Chronicles, which became the source for Shakespeare's history plays