# Week 13:

## Lecture 1: Intro, Geoffrey Chaucer, The Miller’s Tale

Chaucer’s linguistic resources

Middle English:

* Collection of dialects, etc
* The name given to the varieties of English language in use between 1150-1500
* Handwritten until 1470s
  + Quill pen and ink

Geoffrey Chaucer:

* Author of *The Canterbury Tales* (started writing in 1387-’92)
* Born in 1340-‘45
  + Upper Thames Street in London
  + Father – wine merchant
  + Mid-level family financially
* Lived most of his life in London
  + Wrote in the London dialect
* Occupation
  + Started as a page for the earl and countess of Ulster (1356 – 11 y/o)
  + King’s army, served in the war in France in 1359-’60
    - Was kidnapped
    - Ransom paid by king
  + John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster (1340-’99) – Chaucer’s main patron? (no records of salary for works)
  + Customs controller at the port of London (wool customs)
  + 1389: Clerk of the King’s Works
    - Making sure workers got payment
      * Robbed 3x in September 1390
* Married Philippa de Roet (2 sons) in 1366
* Visited Florence in 1373
  + Influenced by Italian literature (Dante writing in Italian instead of Latin
* Criminal convictions:
  + Charged with rape (‘raptus’ – not necessarily physical) of Cecilia Chaumpaigne
  + Beating a friar in Fleet Street
* 1399: Retires from royal service
* Dies in 1400
* Why choose English as the language of his works?
  + Wide audience, range of speakers with multiple voices
  + Full of nuances, dialects
* Overview
  + A man of the world
  + Educated but not bookish
  + The son of urban traders
  + Came into contact with a wide spectrum of medieval society
  + Life and times are reflected in his language and literary creations
  + Uses the living language of English
    - But knew French and Latin, too

Historical context:

* Poets writing in Latin/French
* England in the 1300s was multi-lingual
* Status of English was rising
* 1348-’50: The Black Plague, also 1361-‘62
* 7 gates around London, shut at night
* London population: 45 000 – 50 000
* Concept of being primarily a poet/author didn’t exist

## Lecture 2: Style and Lexicon

Middle English vocabulary was inherited from Old English, but other words (“borrowings”) were introduced from French, Latin, and Old Norse

Borrowings:

* A new word with a new concept, e.g. *skirt* (ON) and *shirt* (OE)
* A new word which overlaps with the meaning of existing words in the language, e.g. *commence* (OF), *begin* (OE)
* Rough guide:
  + Old Norse (everyday life): egg, husband, knife, leg
  + Latin (religion, learning): scripture, history, allegory
  + French (law, justice, church): justice, prison, crime, court, clergy
  + Celtic
  + Middle Dutch

Chaucer as study guide:

* *The Canterbury Tales*: “voice”: *stevene* (OE, 4x) or *voys* (Fr, 28x)
* *misericorde* (French: mercy, pity, compassion)
  + *ABC* poem: Virgin Mary (“queen of misericorde”)
  + *Troilus and Criseyde*: “of gilt misericorde” (“I forgive you”)
* *Miller’s Tale*
  + *fetisly* (elegantly), *gent, joly* (attractive)*, hende* (noble, worthy; skilled, crafty; near at hand)

Register: language selected according to use (different in different scenarios)

* Informal, formal, etc.

Chaucer’s ‘low style’:

* fast-paced narrative
* predominance of short words
* simple syntax
* direct speech
* simple vocab
* colloquialisms
* homely imagery
* scatological words
  + *ers, fart, swyve* (‘fuck’)

Malapropism: the mistaken use of a word in place of a similar-sounding one, often with an amusing effect (doggy dog world; pacifically; should of;

Lemman / Lady