

Geoffrey Chaucer : The Father of English Poetry

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Early Life and Background

[Geoffrey Chaucer](#) was born in [London](#) between 1340 and 1345 to a wealthy wine merchant family. His parents, John and Agnes Chaucer, gave him a privileged upbringing. In 1357, Chaucer started working as a page in the household of [Elizabeth](#). This lady was the Countess of [Ulster](#). Here, Chaucer gained exposure to courtly life. This role allowed him to serve aristocrats, develop connections, and explore his talents as a storyteller and musician.

Career and Public Service

Chaucer's profession flourished in public service. He worked as a courtier, diplomat, and [civil servant](#). In 1374, he was appointed controller of wool, hides, and leather customs in London. It was a prestigious and well-paying role. He later became a public works clerk and was responsible for overseeing royal projects. Chaucer struggled financially despite his official duties, especially in his subsequent years.

Major Works and Literary Contributions

[The Book of the Duchess](#) (1368–1369) was Chaucer's first remarkable literary work. It was an elegy for Blanche of Lancaster, wife of his patron, John of Gaunt. This early work displayed his ability to incorporate French poetic traditions with original storytelling.

His other notable works include [The Parliament of Birds](#), an allegorical poem about courtly love, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, a tragic romance inspired by Italian literature. In *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer introduces psychological depth to his characters. This is a groundbreaking technique that influenced later English literature.

Chaucer's most famous work is [The Canterbury Tales](#). It is a collection of stories told by pilgrims traveling to Canterbury. Written between 1375 and 1400, it captures diverse voices and social classes, from the noble Knight to the bawdy Miller. *The Canterbury Tales* remains a foundation of English literature for its striking characters, humor, and insight into medieval life.

Historical Context and Influences

Chaucer lived during a time of consequential evolution in England. [The Black Death](#), the [Hundred Years' War](#), and the [Peasants' Revolt](#) shaped his world and writing. He also traveled to Italy, where he encountered the works of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. The works of these classic writers influenced the styles and themes of his poetry greatly.

At a time when Latin and French dominated literature, Chaucer chose to write in English. This decision made his works attainable to a broader audience and helped establish English as a prestigious literary language.

Themes and Style

Chaucer's works often analyze themes of love, morality, and human folly. He uses humor, satire, and irony to critique society while entertaining his readers. In [The Canterbury Tales](#), he uses the interactions between pilgrims to underscore the complexities of human nature and social orders.

His use of the vocabulary, alongside his mastery of poetic forms like the iambic pentameter and the rhyming couplet, set the basis for modern English poetry.

Legacy and Impact

Chaucer's impact on English literature is ample. He elevated the English language to a literary standard and paved the way for future poets like Shakespeare and Spenser. His ability to create realistic characters and convincing narratives differed from the allegorical traditions of medieval literature.

Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* remains a vital text in the study of English literature. It offers insights into 14th-century society and the evolution of storytelling. His work continues to inspire writers and readers worldwide.

Final Years

In his last years, Chaucer faced financial difficulties. He was robbed multiple times, and even to write a poem like *The Complaint to His Purse*, he pleaded for financial aid. Despite these struggles, he secured a pension from [King Henry IV](#). This advantage allowed him some stability.

Chaucer died in 1400 and was buried in [Westminster Abbey](#). His tomb became the first in what is now known as Poets' Corner. It is a resting place for many of England's greatest writers.

Conclusion

Geoffrey Chaucer's life and works reflect his time's cultural, political, and literary currents. As a poet, he blended humor, innovation, and insight to create timeless works reverberating to readers. Known as the "[Father of English Poetry](#)," Chaucer's legacy remains a foundation of English literary tradition.

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