Middle English Literature and Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*



Part I: The Anglo-Norman Period: 1066-1350 A.D.

 The Norman Conquest of Britain took place on October 14, 1066 (The Battle of Hastings).

• 1066 also marks the end of Old English and the beginning of Middle English.



Language in Britain

 Majority of the population spoke Old English, but the clergy and the rulers spoke French.



French Influence on English Language and Literature

- Heavy consonants of Anglo-Saxon was changed to softer French.
- English begins to become standardized.
- Lines of communication are opened throughout the country
- Alliteration and Caesura are replaced with rhyme and meter, lambic Pentameter, and Rhymed Couplet.



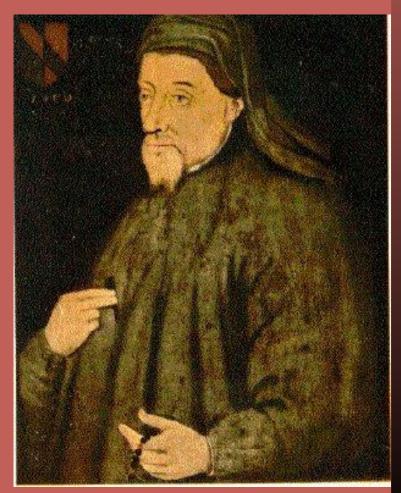
French Influence on English Language and Literature (cont.)

- French culture influenced
 Anglo-Saxon "mindset". (Arthurian Legend and Courtly Love).
- Feudalism is introduced to England.
- Strong influence of the church.



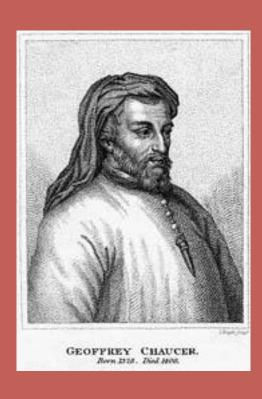
Part II: History of the Age of Chaucer

 No known year of Chaucer's birth, but it is supposed to be near 1345-1350.





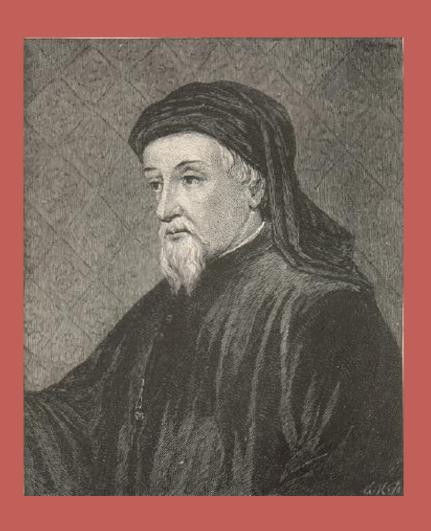
Chaucer (cont.)



- He was a public servant (Kent).
- His jobs included the following: soldier, controller of customs, justice of the peace as well as a forest official.



Etymology of the Name: Chaucer



- Chaucer comes
 from the French
 and means "the
 maker of shoes or
 hose."
- However, none of Chaucer's relatives were shoemakers or hosiers.



Chaucer's Times

- English society was evolving from medievalism to modernism.
- Age of Skepticism and satire: faith and authority were losing hold on the people.
- The Black Plague struck three times in the 14th century.
- Social structure became unstable.



Chaucer's Times

- Church was full of abuses—popes, friars, and summoners blackmailed people.
- 100 years war ended in 1453.
- Henry VII brought peace and stability in 1485.



Part III: Why We Study Chaucer

- Chaucer was the Father of English Poetry.
- He ranks with other great poets such as Milton and Shakespeare.
- He is the Master of the short tale and of literary achievement in the Middle Ages.
- In *The Canterbury Tales*, each pilgrim stands out distinctly. Each remains for all time as a "type."
- Each tale represents a plethora of thematic perspectives.



Some of Chaucer's Themes:

- Satire of the aristocratic hero figure.
- Comic revelation of the foibles of love.
- Models of marriage relationships.
- Ideals of love and sacrifice.

