Geoffrey Chaucer (1340-1400)

Life
- considered to be the "Father of English Poetry"
- his father—prosperous wine merchant; obtained position in court for Geoffrey (opportunity for Chaucer to observe ruling aristocracy)
- served Kings Edward III, Richard II, and Henry IV
- married rich
- traveled extensively
- held many various influential jobs (court page, soldier, controller of customs, justice of the peace, member of Parliament, supervisor of construction and repairs at Westminster Abbey and the Tower of London)
- first person to be buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey

Writings & Writing Style
- rhyme royal: 7-lined stanza in iambic pentameter; rhyme scheme—ababbcc
- moralistic
- excellent use of rhetoric
- *Troilus and Criseyde*
- *Canterbury Tales*

The Canterbury Tales

Introduction
- ranks as one of the world's finest works of literature
- provides the best contemporary picture of 14th century England
- introduces a group 29 pilgrims (plus Chaucer himself & the host) traveling together on a pilgrimage to the cathedral in Canterbury, where archbishop Thomas a Becket was murdered in 1170.
- story begins at the Tabard Inn in Southwark; moves to road to Canterbury

Form
- a **frame story**—several stories within a unifying story
  - the frame—the pilgrimage (originally planned as a round trip)
  - within the frame—24 individual stories the pilgrims tell
- form of *CT* borrowed from *The Thousand and One Nights* and Boccacio's *Decameron*
- originally planned for each pilgrim to tell 2 stories on the way to Canterbury and 2 on the return trip

- Chaucer died before finishing 124 projected tales (29 original pilgrims + Chaucer/narrator + host = 31 pilgrims total x 4 stories each = 124)

Style and Characterization
- Pilgrims
  - memorable, vividly drawn individuals with unique personalities and universal character traits
  - interact and clash with each other on the journey
  - drawn from class structures--
    - of (the fading) feudal society (knight, squire, reeve)
    - of open classes in emerging cities (merchant, innkeeper)
    - of powerful, hierarchical church of time (nun, friar, priest, pardoner)
- Brings together people from 3 main segments of medieval society:
  - Church
  - Court
  - Commoners (including the rising merchant/middle class)
- Reveals character (foibles, concerns) of each pilgrim through his descriptions and through each pilgrim's story
  - Foible—a minor character flaw (like a misdemeanor)
  - Vice—a major sin (like a felony)

Characterization
Def.: the way in which an author develops/describes a character's personality.
- **Indirect**: when we learn about/draw conclusions from the way a character
  - Acts
  - Speaks or thinks
  - Physical appearance (looks & physiognomy)
  - Physical appearance (dress)
  - What others say about him or her
- **Direct**: when an author states directly what a character is like—author makes and presents his own judgments
- **How do the two types of characterization differ, regarding the reading audience?**
  - Showing v. telling
  - Work

Other terms to know—

- **Foils**—a pair of characters with opposing traits; creates **juxtaposition**—placing opposites side by side, thus enhancing (augmenting) the differences between them

- **Exemplum**: an anecdote (a brief story) intended to teach a moral—usually within a sermon