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Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* I: Was his life experience limited by his birth? How did he come by his familiarity with other aspects of 14th-century English society? What factors contributed to his formal and informal education? What languages did he read and how was he likely to have learned them NA ? Know meaning of the term "frame narrative" and what Italian work author and title was a model of this genre if not a source for Chaucer see NA Know what is meant by the "fragments" of the *Canterbury Tales* NA How many *Canterbury Tales* were originally planned? How many of the projected tales were actually written? What sort of verse is used for the *Canterbury Tales*? What was its metrical form? We will discuss lines as " opening signals " for the *Canterbury Tales* as a whole; we will then consider the whole General Prologue as an example of " Estates Satire. The Three "Estates" In feudal times, medieval society was viewed as being made up of three categories of peoples, or "estates" from the Latin word "status": The second and third estates Aristocracy and peasantry are a matter of birth, while the first the Church is entered into, willingly or not, by individuals of varying social origin. While the medieval estates are not the exact equivalent of modern social classes, high status within the Church was frequently a matter of birth: In addition to these broad categories, there were also three specifically feminine estates: Note that the general i. By the later middle ages, the rigid division of feudal society into these three traditional male "estates" has begun to break down. The late fourteenth century -- the time of Chaucer, the Pearl Poet , and William Langland, author of *Piers Plowman* -- witnesses the rise of a new urban middle class made up of merchants and tradesmen. In addition to this new mercantile class "mercantile" derives from the word "merchant" , there is also new sub-division of the clergy: Geoffrey Chaucer arguably belonged to both of these new categories. Chaucer and his contemporary William Langland see NA are both highly conscious of the social divisions known as the "Estates. Allegory is a form of extended metaphor in which objects and persons within a narrative are equated with meanings that lie outside the narrative itself. The allegorical figure exists simultaneously on two levels of meaning -- the literal one what the figures does in the narrative , and the symbolic level what the figure stands for, outside the narrative. Thus, allegory evokes a dual interest: Allegory may involve the personification of abstract qualities e. Truth, Beauty ; of an event such as Death, personified e. It can be used to represent a historical personage e. Characters, events and setting may be historical, fictitious, or fabulous; the test is that these materials must represent meanings independent of the action described in the surface story. On the surface, the *Romance of the Rose* is about a young man who attends a sort of garden party; *Piers Plowman* about a peasant who guides a group of people looking for a nobleman; *Everyman* about a man on a walk and the people he meets; *Book I of the Faerie Queene* about a knight killing a dragon and rescuing a princess. Note that use of personification e. Allegory is frequently, but not always, concerned with matters of great import: It can also be used for satiric purposes. Literary Contexts for the General Prologue: Know the following terms: Note that the Pearl Poet, Langland and Chaucer were contemporaries, all working in the late fourteenth century. *Piers Plowman* is a dream vision like *The Dream of the Rood*. To what extent is a dream vision "true"? What is the attitude towards "truth" in *Piers Plowman*? Of what forms of falsehood is the Dreamer critical? What does the Dreamer have to say about the "truth" of other literary forms? While the selection we are reading does not contain allegory see "Background II, above , be aware that the poem as a whole is allegorical see NA If you are using the 7th ed. What sorts of persons are described social class, profession, age, gender? What category of people receives pride of place by being described first? To which Estate do they belong? Is this brief description essentially positive or negative? Would you consider *Piers Plowman* to be primarily an anti-ecclesiastical satire? It recounts the dream of a young man who falls in love with and tries to win a Rosebud -- the symbol, at various points, of the beloved woman, of her genitalia, and of her virginity. Read

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Rose Selections 1 , passage 2 pp. Recall how the Romance of Eneas poet played with this convention, causing Eneas to fall in love with Lavinia after reading the letter which she shoots to him on an arrow. The first lines of the Romance of the Rose were written by Guillaume de Lorris in the early 13th century ca. While Guillaume may well have considered his poem to be complete, it was picked up and continued in the late 13th century ca. Chaucer knew the Romance of the Rose well, and admired it enough to translate parts of it into English NA By so doing, he demonstrated that he too was a translatio poet. Interestingly, the midpoint of the conjoined Romance of the Rose poems the scene that comes halfway through the 22, lines of the combined texts; see Rose Selections 1 , passage 3 [pp. In this scene, the God of Love explains how the classical love poets Tibullus, Gallus, Catullus and Ovid were followed by the French poet Guillaume de Lorris, whose work will itself be followed and completed by Jean de Meun whom he calls "Jean Chopinel". If Tristan was the literary "best seller" of the twelfth century, the Romance of the Rose was the "best seller" of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. Most educated readers were likely to know it, or at least to know of it. As you read the opening lines of the General Prologue, compare to the opening lines of the French poem Rose Selections 1 , passage 1, pp. Chaucer begins his General Prologue with an evocation of April, of birdsong and flowers, and of people who ALSO are in a state of longing. Note also the reference to the "drought of March" GP line 2. Is England a country known for its dry winters? To what else might this line be a reference? What parts of Europe are notably drier in climate than England? How would a poet like Chaucer know about the climate in, say, Greece or Rome? In the first lines of the General Prologue, Chaucer does more than establish the ground rules of the pilgrimage. He also evokes the literary traditions of which he is a part. His playful manipulation of conventions drawn from both classical and vernacular poetry in a virtuoso opening sentence that is 18 lines long! The General Prologue as a Whole: Estates Satire The party described by Chaucer have gathered at the Inn in Southwark prior to departing on a pilgrimage to Canterbury see the map of the pilgrimage route online. What was the purpose of a medieval pilgrimage? In what sense is this veneration comparable to medieval veneration for the Virgin Mary? Who is the "holy blissful martyr" GP 17 and why is he of interest to the pilgrims? In what sense are they travelling to "seek" him? How many pilgrims are there? Are they a homogeneous group? What is the usefulness of this device to Chaucer? What sort of people went on pilgrimages? How is this helpful to Chaucer in his ambition to "strut his stuff" as a poet? Would all of these people be expected to like the same kinds of literature? Pay attention to the individual portraits of the pilgrims. From what walks of life do they come? Note pilgrims who represent each of the three "male" estates see Background I, above ; note also how the " Wife of Bath " represents the "female" estates of "wife" and "widow" while the Prioress presumably represents that of "virgin. Of which "estates" are these the idealized portraits? Compare the portrait of the Knight with that of the other aristocrat on the pilgrimage -- his son, the Squire. While they represent the same Estate, do they both seem to have the same values? Also pay attention to the portraits which represent two new classes that were gaining prominence in the fourteenth century: Which pilgrims represent these new classes? As you read through the various portraits, pick out a key word or phrase to describe each pilgrim. Pay attention to physical descriptions in medieval times, physiognomy was believed to be revealing of character -- see online information on the four humors. Which figures are painted in a positive or in a negative light? How would you describe each of these figures? What do we learn about their past lives and characters? What if anything is satirized? Contrast the portraits of the Wife of Bath and the other woman pilgrim described in the Prologue, the Prioress. Love is mentioned in both portraits. Is the sort of love which interests each the same, or different? How might she define this "love"?

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