

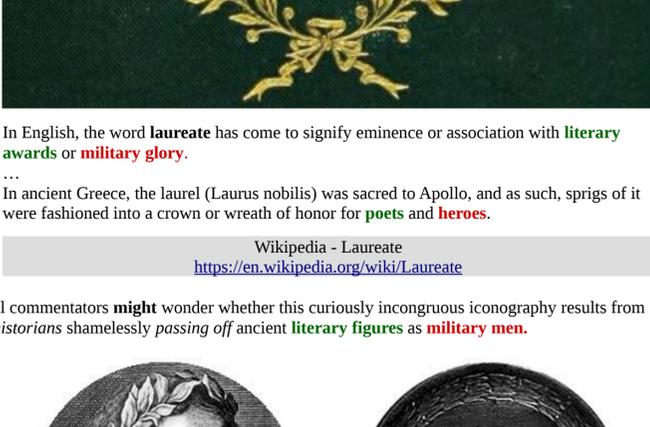
Saints & Sinners Edwin Johnson goes to Canterbury



Canterbury Tales Mural - Ezra Winter - 1939 - Library of Congress

14th August 2023

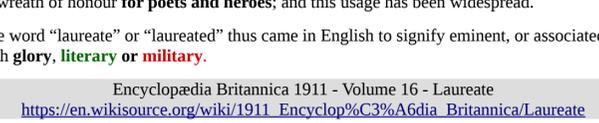
A curiosity of *history* is the honouring of **literary** and **military** figures with laurel crowns.



In English, the word **laureate** has come to signify eminence or association with **literary awards** or **military glory**.
 ...
 In ancient Greece, the laurel (*Laurus nobilis*) was sacred to Apollo, and as such, sprigs of it were fashioned into a crown or wreath of honor for **poets** and **heroes**.

Wikipedia - Laureate
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Laureate>

Cynical commentators **might** wonder whether this curiously incongruous iconography results from *court historians* shamelessly *passing off* ancient **literary figures** as **military men**.



Sir William Davenant 1606-1668 Poet & Playwright. World War I Victory Medal - 1919 The Portable Antiquities Scheme The Trustees of the British Museum

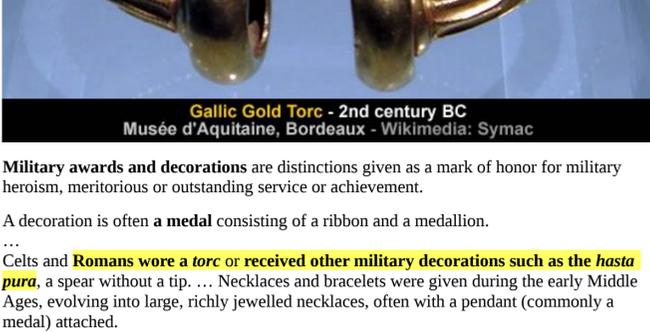
The **laurel**, in ancient Greece, was sacred to Apollo, and as such was used to form a crown or wreath of honour for **poets** and **heroes**; and this usage has been widespread.

The word "laureate" or "laureated" thus came in English to signify eminent, or associated with **glory**, **literary** or **military**.

Encyclopædia Britannica 1911 - Volume 16 - Laureate
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Laureate

Either way:

It appears **military men** prefer very unambiguous accolades.



Gallic Gold Torc - 2nd century BC Musée d'Aquitaine, Bordeaux - Wikimedia: Symac

Military awards and decorations are distinctions given as a mark of honor for military heroism, meritorious or outstanding service or achievement.

A decoration is often a **medal** consisting of a ribbon and a medallion.
 ...
 Celts and **Romans** wore a **torc** or received other military decorations such as the **hasta pura**, a spear without a tip. ... Necklaces and bracelets were given during the early Middle Ages, evolving into large, richly jewelled necklaces, often with a pendant (commonly a medal) attached.

Wikipedia - Military Awards and Decorations
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Military_awards_and_decorations

The Roman Titus Manlius in 361 BC challenged a Gaul to single combat, killed him, and then took his torc. Because he always wore it, he received the nickname *Torquatus* (the one who wears a torc), and it was adopted by his family. After this, **Romans adopted the torc as a decoration for distinguished soldiers and elite units during Republican times**. A few Roman torcs have been discovered. Pliny the Elder records that after a battle in 386 BC (long before his lifetime) the Romans recovered 183 torcs from the Celtic dead, and similar booty is mentioned by other authors.

Wikipedia - Torc
<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Torc>

While the British establishment enjoys emphasising it's **poet laureates**.



The origins of the **poet laureateship** date back to 1616 when James I of England granted a pension to the writer **Ben Jonson**. Although there were subsequent court poets it was not until 1668, and the appointment of **John Dryden** by Charles II, that the post was made an established royal office within the royal household. Dryden, who had been appointed following the success of his 1667 poem *Annus Mirabilis*, was dismissed from office in 1689 following the accession of the Protestant William III and Mary II to the throne. Dryden, a Catholic convert, refused to take the Oath of Allegiance to the new monarchs and he was dismissed from the laureateship—the only holder to have been removed from office.

Wikipedia - Poet Laureate of the United Kingdom
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poet_Laureate_of_the_United_Kingdom

Poet laureates enabled *court historians* to post **Geoffrey Chaucer** as their first **volunteer laureate**.

POETS LAUREATE.	BIRTHPLACE.	WHERE EDUCATED.	DATE OF APPOINTMENT.	DEATH AND BURIAL.
GEORFFREY CHAUCER	London . . . 1328	Cambridge (?) . . . . .	..... 1368	25 Oct., 1400, Westminster Abbey.
SIR JOHN GOWER	Yorkshire . . . 1320	.....	..... 1400	..... 1402, St. Mary Overy, Southwark.
HENRY SCOGAN . . . . .	.....	Poet Laureate to Henry IV.	.....	.....
JOHN KAY . . . . .	.....	Poet Laureate to Edward IV.	.....	.....
ANDREW BERNARD	Toulouse	Poet Laureate to Henries VII. & VIII.	November, 1486	..... 1523
JOHN SKELTON	Norwich . . . 1460	Oxford & Cambridge	..... 1489	June, 1529, St. Margaret's Church, Westminster.
ROBERT WHITTINGTON . . . . .	..... . . 1480	Oxford . . . . .	..... 1512	..... 1530 (?)
RICHARD EDWARDS	Somersetshire 1523	Corpus Christi, Oxford.	..... 1561	..... 1566
EDMUND SPENSER	London . . . 1553	Pembroke Hall, Cambridge.	February, 1580	16 Jan., 1599, Westminster Abbey.
SAMUEL DANIEL	Taunton . . . 1562	Magdalen Hall, Oxford.	..... 1598	13 Oct., 1619, Beekington.

NOTE.—The above have been styled *Volunteer Laureates*.
 Poets Laureate of England - Walter Hamilton - 1879

Poets Laureate of England - Walter Hamilton - 1879
<https://archive.org/details/poetslaureateofe000walti/page/n29/mode/1up>

In England, the term "poet laureate" is restricted to the official office of Poet Laureate, attached to the royal household. However, no authoritative historical record exists of the office of Poet Laureate of England.

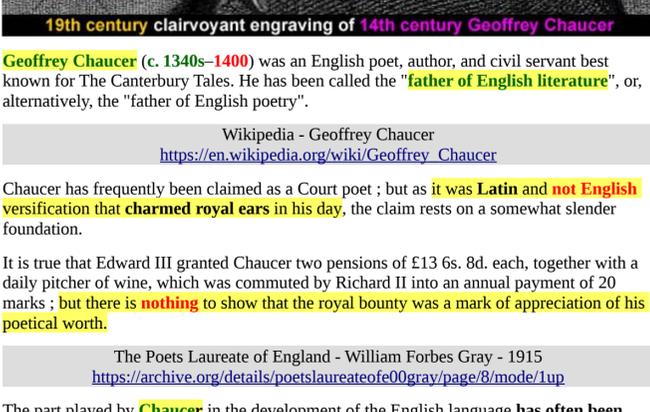
The office developed from earlier practice when minstrels and versifiers were members of the king's retinue. Richard Cœur-de-Lion had a versificator regis (English: king's poet), Gulielmus Peregrinus (William the Pilgrim), and Henry III had a versificator named Master Henry. In the fifteenth century, John Kay, a versifier, described himself as Edward IV's "humble poet laureate".

According to Wharton,[citation needed] King Henry I paid 10 shillings a year, to a versificator regis. **Geoffrey Chaucer (1340–1400)** was called Poet Laureate, being granted in 1389 an annual allowance of wine.

W. Hamilton describes Chaucer, Gower, Kay, Andrew Bernard, John Skelton, Robert Whittington, Richard Edwards and Samuel Daniel as "**volunteer Laureates**".

Wikipedia - Poet Laureate
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Poet_Laureate#United_Kingdom

Geoffrey Chaucer enabled *court historians* to launch their **father of English literature** narrative.



19th century clairvoyant engraving of 14th century Geoffrey Chaucer

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340s–1400) was an English poet, author, and civil servant best known for *The Canterbury Tales*. He has been called the "**father of English literature**", or, alternatively, the "father of English poetry".

Wikipedia - Geoffrey Chaucer
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Geoffrey_Chaucer

Chaucer has frequently been claimed as a Court poet ; but as **it was Latin and not English versification that charmed royal ears in his day**, the claim rests on a somewhat slender foundation.

It is true that Edward III granted Chaucer two pensions of £13 6s. 8d. each, together with a daily pitcher of wine, which was commuted by Richard II into an annual payment of 20 marks ; **but there is nothing to show that the royal bounty was a mark of appreciation of his poetical worth**.

The Poets Laureate of England - William Forbes Gray - 1915
<https://archive.org/details/poetslaureateofe00gray/page/8/mode/1up>

The part played by **Chaucer** in the development of the English language **has often been overrated**. He neither corrupted it, as used to be said, by introducing French words which it would otherwise have avoided, nor bore any such part in fixing it as was afterwards played by the translators of the Bible.

1911 Encyclopædia Britannica - Volume 6 - Geoffrey Chaucer by Alfred William Pollard
https://en.wikisource.org/wiki/1911_Encyclop%C3%A6dia_Britannica/Chaucer,_Geoffrey

It's said the **father of English literature** finished his *magnum opus* in 1400.



Canterbury Tales Mural - Ezra Winter - 1939 - Library of Congress

The *Canterbury Tales* is a collection of **twenty-four** stories that runs to **over 17,000 lines** written in **Middle English** by **Geoffrey Chaucer** between 1387 and 1400.

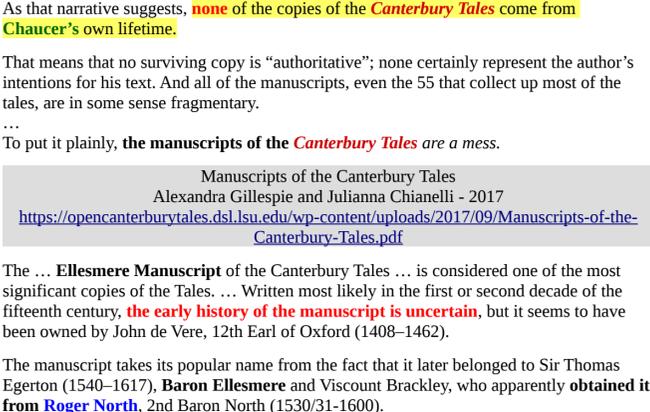
It is widely regarded as Chaucer's **magnum opus**.

The tales (mostly written in verse, although some are in prose) are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together from London to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral.

...
 It has been suggested that the **greatest contribution** of *The Canterbury Tales* to English literature was **the popularisation of the English vernacular** in mainstream literature, **as opposed to** French, Italian or **Latin**.

Wikipedia - The Canterbury Tales
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Canterbury_Tales

It's also said **none** of the *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts were written during Chaucer's lifetime.



Prologue - Canterbury Tales - Geoffrey Chaucer - Ellesmere Manuscript MS EL 26 C 9, The Huntington Library, San Marino, California

There are 55 **medieval manuscripts** in existence that put together some version of the *Canterbury Tales*. There are also some manuscript fragments, cases where a leaf or two remains from a book otherwise lost.

...
 As that narrative suggests, **none of the copies of the Canterbury Tales come from Chaucer's own lifetime**.

That means that no surviving copy is "authoritative"; none certainly represent the author's intentions for his text. And all of the manuscripts, even the 55 that collect up most of the tales, are in some sense fragmentary.

...
 To put it plainly, **the manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales are a mess**.

Manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales
 Alexandra Gillespie and Julianna Chianelli - 2017
<https://opencanterburtales.dsl.lsu.edu/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/Manuscripts-of-the-Canterbury-Tales.pdf>

The ... **Ellesmere Manuscript** of the *Canterbury Tales* ... is considered one of the most significant copies of the Tales. ... Written most likely in the first or second decade of the fifteenth century, **the early history of the manuscript is uncertain**, but it seems to have been owned by John de Vere, 12th Earl of Oxford (1408–1462).

The manuscript takes its popular name from the fact that it later belonged to Sir Thomas Egerton (1540–1617). **Baron Ellesmere** and Viscount Brackley, who apparently **obtained it from Roger North**, 2nd Baron North (1530/31–1600).

Wikipedia - Ellesmere Chaucer
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ellesmere_manuscript

Roger North, 2nd Baron North (1530-1600) ... **politician at the court of Elizabeth I**.

Wikipedia - Roger North, 2nd Baron North
https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Roger_North,_2nd_Baron_North

