



## The Doctor

*In the 'General Prologue' to The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer includes representatives of all social classes. Among his pilgrims, there is also a member of the new middle classes, a Doctor.*

Geoffrey Chaucer  
*The Canterbury Tales*  
(ca 1387-1400)  
General Prologue

A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded;  
No one alive could talk as well as he did  
On points of **medicine** and of **surgery**,  
For, being **grounded**<sup>1</sup> in **astronomy**,  
5 **He watched his patient closely for the hours**<sup>2</sup>  
When, by his **horoscope**, he knew **the powers**  
**Of favourable planets**, then ascendent,  
Worked on the images for his dependent<sup>3</sup>.  
The cause of every malady you'd got  
10 He knew, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot<sup>4</sup>;  
He knew their seat, **their humour** and condition.  
He was a **perfect** practising physician.  
These causes being known for what they were,  
**He gave the man his medicine then and there**<sup>5</sup>.  
15 **All his apothecaries in a tribe**  
**Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe**  
**And each made money from the other's guile**<sup>6</sup>;  
They had been friendly for a goodish while<sup>7</sup>.  
He was **well-versed** in **Aesculapius** too  
20 And what **Hippocrates** and **Rufus** knew  
And **Dioscorides**, now dead and gone,  
**Galen**<sup>8</sup> and **Rhazes**, **Hali**, **Serapion**,  
**Averroes**, **Avicenna**, **Constantine**<sup>9</sup>,  
**Scotch Bernard**, **John of Gaddesden**, **Gilbertine**<sup>10</sup>.  
25 **In his own diet** he observed some measures;  
**There were no superfluities for pleasures**,  
**Only digestives, nutritives and such**.  
He did not read the Bible very much.  
**In blood-red garments**<sup>11</sup>, **slashed**<sup>12</sup> **with bluish grey**  
30 **And lined with taffeta**, he rode his way;  
Yet he was **rather close as to expenses**<sup>13</sup>  
And kept the gold he won in pestilences.  
**Gold stimulates the heart, or so we're told.**  
**He therefore** had a special love of gold.

- 1 **being grounded.** Conoscendo a fondo.
- 2 **closely for the hours.** Seguendo le ore celesti.
- 3 **images for his dependent.** Talismani di cera che rappresentavano il paziente.
- 4 **dry ... hot.** Arsura, freddo, umidità o caldo. Si pensava che tali condizioni influenzassero i temperamenti e gli umori (flemmatico, collerico, sanguigno e malinconico) dell'uomo.
- 5 **then and there.** Subito.
- 6 **guile.** Astuzia.
- 7 **for a goodish while.** Di vecchia data.
- 8 **Aesculapius ... Galen.** Esculapio, Ippocrate, Rufo, Dioscoride, Galeno erano autorità mediche dell'antica Grecia.
- 9 **Rhazes ... Constantine.** Razis, Ali, Serapione, Averroè, Avicenna, Costantino Afro erano medici di origine araba.
- 10 **Scotch ... Gilbertine.** Bernard Gordon, John of Gaddesden e Gilbertus Anglicus erano medici inglesi vissuti tra XIII e XIV secolo.
- 11 **garments.** Abiti.
- 12 **slashed.** Con inserti di.
- 13 **close as to expenses.** Accorto nelle spese.

### VISUAL ANALYSIS

**1 READ** the text and divide it into four parts. Then write a heading to each section.

**2 LOOK** at the visual analysis of the text. Write down what each highlight and colour represents.

	.....	Gold .....
	.....	grounded .....
	.....	
	.....	
	.....	

**3 COMPLETE** the summary with the words from the box.

planets

learned

nourishing

pursued

profits

taffeta

cause

authorities

humours

astrology



The Doctor was a very **(1)** ..... man because he had studied all of the important medical **(2)** ..... of the past and of his day. He also knew about **(3)** ..... and relied upon the positions of the stars and **(4)** ..... , in addition to the medieval theory of the **(5)** ..... , to find the right cure for his patients. Once he had found the **(6)** ..... of his patients' illnesses, he sent them to his friend the apothecary, with whom he shared the **(7)** ..... . He was so wealthy that he could afford to buy expensive blue and scarlet clothes made of **(8)** ..... . Although he was wealthy, the Doctor showed moderation, following a modest **(9)** ..... diet while saving up most of his gold. The Doctor is one of the most educated among the pilgrims, but Chaucer ironically implies that he **(10)** ..... his learning for financial gain.