

# **The Canterbury Tales Book Notes**

## **The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer**

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# Contents

<a href="#">The Canterbury Tales Book Notes.....</a>	<a href="#">1</a>
<a href="#">Contents.....</a>	<a href="#">2</a>
<a href="#">Author/Context.....</a>	<a href="#">5</a>
<a href="#">Plot Summary.....</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Major Characters.....</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Objects/Places.....</a>	<a href="#">16</a>
<a href="#">Quotes.....</a>	<a href="#">17</a>
<a href="#">Topic Tracking: Christianity.....</a>	<a href="#">21</a>
<a href="#">Topic Tracking: Loyalty.....</a>	<a href="#">23</a>
<a href="#">Topic Tracking: Sexuality.....</a>	<a href="#">25</a>
<a href="#">Topic Tracking: Violence.....</a>	<a href="#">27</a>
<a href="#">The General Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">29</a>
<a href="#">The Knight's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">31</a>
<a href="#">The Miller's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">33</a>
<a href="#">The Miller's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">34</a>
<a href="#">The Reve's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">36</a>
<a href="#">The Reeve's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">37</a>
<a href="#">The Cook's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">38</a>
<a href="#">The Cook's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">39</a>
<a href="#">Introduction to the Man of Law's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">40</a>
<a href="#">The Man of Law's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">41</a>
<a href="#">The Man of Law's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">42</a>
<a href="#">The Wife of Bath's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">44</a>
<a href="#">The Wife of Bath's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">45</a>
<a href="#">The Friar's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">46</a>



<a href="#">The Friar's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">47</a>
<a href="#">The Summoner's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">49</a>
<a href="#">The Summoner's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">50</a>
<a href="#">The Clerk's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">51</a>
<a href="#">The Clerk's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">52</a>
<a href="#">The Merchant's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">54</a>
<a href="#">The Merchant's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">55</a>
<a href="#">The Squire's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">57</a>
<a href="#">The Squire's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">58</a>
<a href="#">The Franklin's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">59</a>
<a href="#">The Franklin's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">60</a>
<a href="#">The Physician's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">61</a>
<a href="#">The Pardoner's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">62</a>
<a href="#">The Pardoner's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">63</a>
<a href="#">The Shipman's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">64</a>
<a href="#">The Shipman's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">65</a>
<a href="#">The Prioress's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">67</a>
<a href="#">The Prioress's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">68</a>
<a href="#">Sir Thopas's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">69</a>
<a href="#">Sir Thopas.....</a>	<a href="#">70</a>
<a href="#">The Prologue / Tale of Melibeus.....</a>	<a href="#">71</a>
<a href="#">The Monk's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">72</a>
<a href="#">The Nun's Priest's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">73</a>
<a href="#">The Second Nun's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">74</a>
<a href="#">The Canon Yeoman's Prologue.....</a>	<a href="#">76</a>
<a href="#">The Canon Yeoman's Tale.....</a>	<a href="#">77</a>



[The Manciple's Tale.....](#) 78

[The Parson's Tale.....](#) 79

[Chaucer's Retraction.....](#) 80



## Author/Context

Geoffrey Chaucer lived during a tumultuous period in England's history. During his early youth, the Bubonic Plague terrorized Europe, killing a large portion of the population, and forever leaving a lasting impression on those surviving the catastrophe. Throughout Chaucer's life, the Church was also in an upheaval. It was caught in a position of deception and uncertainty, perhaps because of the Plague and perhaps because of economics. Nonetheless, the fraud occurring within the holy walls influenced Chaucer's work. During his lifetime, the Hundred Years War between England and France also took place, which again placed a violent element in Chaucer's work.

It is this period of political and social turmoil in England that allowed Chaucer to produce a large body of influential work. Known as a poet and often as a friend of the nobility, Chaucer was ultimately part of the bourgeois of England. Very little is actually known about his life, despite his rearing by a middle-class family. His father was in the wine and leather trade, perhaps giving the family their surname - Chaucer - for it means a maker of footwear. He was a page in a royal household during his youth, continued his relationship with royalty throughout his life, married the daughter of a knight, Philippa, and traveled to France and Spain. His life was that of "an active, responsible civil servant and cosmopolitan courtier" (Halverson x).

Because of the political unrest of the time and Chaucer's witty, sharp, sarcasm, he wrote *The Canterbury Tales*, a group of fabliau and fragments, consisting of a piece of each of England's stereotypical citizen archetypes put together in a mixing pot on their pilgrimage to Canterbury. The destination is not as significant as is the action that occurs along the way. The Tales are not even finished and the destination is never even reached during the course of the writing.

"That *The Canterbury Tales* was left unfinished may well have been a matter of choice, not fate. It is likely that Chaucer abandoned his great literary work in the last years of his life and turned his thoughts to the salvation of his soul, as the Retraction suggests. He not only abandoned the tales but also expressed regret for having ever written them, except those explicitly religious and moral" (Halverson, xx-xxi).

These fragmented stories and prologues bring together a brilliant satire of Chaucer's contemporary England, commenting not only on the people of the time, but bringing in Christianity, perhaps primeval feminism with the Wife of Bath, anti-Semitism, sexuality, unfaithfulness, and humor. Although not all of the tales are finished, and the entire work is cut short and book-ended with a retraction, Chaucer's wit stands strong. When looking at Chaucer's work, four things must be remembered about Chaucer himself and his time period. He was a Catholic during the end of Catholicism in England, he was chivalric, he was English, and he was part of the Bourgeois. This combination of characteristics yielded what is now considered one of the most important manuscripts in the English language.



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## Plot Summary

*The Canterbury Tales* begins with the General Prologue, a detailed introduction and description of each of the pilgrims journeying to Canterbury to catch sight of the shrine to Sir Thomas a Becket, the martyred saint of Christianity, supposedly buried in the Cathedral of Canterbury since 1170. The pilgrims, a mixture of virtuous and villainous characters from Medieval England, include a Knight, his son the Squire, the Knight's Yeoman, a Prioress, a Second Nun, a Monk, a Friar, a Merchant, a Clerk, a Man of Law, a Franklin, a Weaver, a Dyer, a Carpenter, a Tapestry-Maker, a Haberdasher, a Cook, a Shipman, a Physician, a Parson, a Miller, a Manciple, a Reeve, a Summoner, a Pardoner, the Wife of Bath, and Chaucer himself. They each bring a slice of England to the trip with their stories of glory, chivalry, Christianity, villainy, disloyalty, cuckoldry, and honor. Some pilgrims are faithful to Christ and his teachings, while others openly disobey the church and its law of faithfulness, honor, and modesty.

The pilgrimage begins in April, a time of happiness and rebirth. The pilgrims hope not only to travel in this blessed time, but to have a rebirth of their own along the way. The pilgrimage consists of these characters journeying to Canterbury and back, each telling two tales in each direction, as suggested by the host. At the conclusion of the tales, the host will decide whose story is the best. The Knight is the first to tell a story, one made up properly of honor and chivalry. His tale is followed by the Miller's opposite tale of dishonor and frivolity. Chaucer frequently places tales of religion and Christ-like worship with tales of unfaithful women and cuckolded men. The Reeve, the Cook, and the Man of Law tell the next stories, while the host interjects his opinions throughout. There are several rivalries that grow from within the intertext, including the small quarrels between the Friar and Summoner and between the Miller and Reeve. Between each tale, most pilgrims have a prologue, in which they tell about themselves or allow Chaucer to illustrate the dynamics of the group. The Friar and the Summoner develop a minor feud, in which they each tell tales of ill-will towards the other's profession, and the Pardoner brings his own immoral behavior into the *Tales*. The Wife of Bath is a memorable character and is often thought of as a primordial feminist who acts on her own terms instead of those of the man.

*The Canterbury Tales* are not fully completed, for the original task of having each pilgrim tell two tales is never realized. Furthermore, two of the tales are begun and then suddenly cut off before their grand conclusion, such as the Squire's Tale and the Tale of Sir Thopas. Some of the pilgrims never even tell one story, such as the Tapestry-Maker and the Haberdasher, and the destination of Canterbury is not explicitly mentioned in the pilgrims' prologues or Chaucer's Retraction.

Chaucer concludes his tales with a Retraction, asking for mercy and forgiveness from those whom he may have offended along his course of storytelling and pilgrimage. He hopes to blame his ignorance and lack of education on any erroneous behavior or language, for he believes that his intentions were all moralistic and honorable. In the end, he gives all credit to Jesus Christ.



## Major Characters

**Host:** The host is the manager of the Tabard Inn, the origination of the journey to Canterbury. He goes on the trip and is also somewhat the proprietor of the tales, for he suggests that each pilgrim tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two on the way back. He mediates arguments between the pilgrims and interjects his comments throughout the different tales. It is the host who holds the group together during their journey.

**Knight:** As the first character mentioned in the prologue, the Knight is the epitome of nobility and honor on this pilgrimage. He is a strong and honorable fighter who was in the Crusades and fought for Christianity. He brings along his son, a Squire, to see Canterbury and tells the longest tale of Palamon, Arcite, and Emelye. It is a love triangle with a mixed ending, involving knights, battle, and chivalry.

**Squire:** The squire is repeatedly described as a lusty bachelor and has trouble competing the tale he begins. He is only twenty years old and does not possess the same vigor as his father. His incomplete tale is about gifts brought to court by a mysterious knight of Tartary.

**Prioress (Nun):** The Prioress is an emotional and sentimental woman of God who lets her feelings and tears run loose for any and all small events of death. She is weak with her self-control. The prioress tries to give off a refined impression, while all the while she is crude. She tells a gruesome tale of Jews who murder a young boy for singing about his Christian faith.

**Second Nonne (Nun):** The Second Nun is simply the secretary of the first. Her short tale chronicles the history and life of Saint Cecilia.

**Monk:** The monk is described as masculine and robust and travels with the Prioress and her secretary. He tells an animal tale of a hen and her rooster husband who find out the truth behind dreams and prophesies.

**Frere (Friar):** As one of the few pilgrims given a name, Hubert, the friar is an immoral man constantly worried about making a profit rather than turning men away from sin and bringing them to heaven. His tale is an attack on the wickedness of summoners. The friar and the summoner have an ongoing battle in these tales that brings humor to the group.

**Clerk:** The Clerk is an impoverished, unemployed Oxford student who lacks a true profession. He is simply educated and has no skills to find a job. His tale is of a woman named Griselde who marries a man of grand status. The husband repeatedly tests her virtue and devotion to him through painful years of hardship.

**Sergeant of the Law (Man of Law/Lawyer):** The Man of Law appears to be much busier than he is in reality and claims to hold much respect. He is educated and holds to



the letter of the law. His lengthy tale is of the young Roman Catholic, Constance, who endures years of pain and familial loss, but always remains true to her faith. She is a true Christian through her many exploits.

**Franklin:** The Franklin is the companion of the Man of Law and is a man of earthy pleasures. He delights especially in food, the culinary arts, and tells a tale of a woman who vows to follow through on her affair with another man if he can accomplish an impossible task to save her true love.

**Haberdasshere, Carpenter, Webbe, Dyerf, Tapycer:** These are five guildsmen on the pilgrimage who never tell a single tale. They listen and enjoy the stories.

**Shipman (Sailor):** The shipman tells the story of a woman who becomes involved with a dishonest monk in order to aid her husband. The monk dupes the woman and her husband.

**Doctour of Physik (Physician):** The Physician tells a tale about a father who murders his own daughters in an attempt to protect them from scandalous rapists.

**Wife of Bath:** The Wife of Bath is often thought of as a proto-feminist and is one of the most memorable of the pilgrims, for her prologue is longer than her tale. She has been married five times and uses her sexuality as manipulation with men to get what she wants. Her fifth young husband uses violence against her and made her deaf in one ear from a blow to the head. She is loud, opinionated, and uses the Bible to back up her supposed immoral actions. The Wife of Bath tells a story of a knight who must search for the answer to 'what women desire?'. The knight finds out that women simply wish to hold authority and control over their mates.

**Parson:** The Parson is a good man of the cloth who is devoted to God and his congregation. He is respected and blessed and tells a tale of sin existing in multiple faces. As one of the holy and moralistic men of the pilgrimage, the Parson represents the Church that is not completely dishonest.

**Merchant:** The Merchant is a wealthy pilgrim constantly talking of economics and profit. Concerned with making money, he is arrogant and vain and tells a humorous story about an unfortunate blind old man who marries a youthful woman who makes a cuckold of him in his presence.

**Reeve:** The Reeve is a thin man with a grand temper. He tells his story in retaliation to the miller's tale and it is about a Miller who is tricked by two Oxford students.

**Miller:** The Miller is very large in contrast to the Reeve. He is also rude to the other pilgrims, sharing a small quarrel with the Reeve on the journey. He tells a humorous tale of a student who manipulates an affair with the wife of a foolish Reeve.

**Pardoner:** The Pardoner is an immoral, slimy, and effeminate man who openly discusses his false actions of selling fake relics to others. He is honest to his task of fraud and openly tells a tale about three rioters who kill themselves out of avarice. As



one of the self-loathing, yet memorable characters on the journey, the Pardoner returns to his fraudulent behavior at the conclusion of his allegorical tale, trying to sell fake relics to the other pilgrims.

**Manciple:** The Manciple was also educated in the field of the law and tells a tale about how appearances are often deceiving.

**Summoner:** The Summoner is another immoral pilgrim not true to his profession, for he does not truly summon impious people to church. He chooses whom to select and is often paid off by sinners. His tale is in reaction to the Friar's strong anti-summoner tale and is presented as a satirical parody.

**Cook:** The Cook is one of the vulgar pilgrims of the journey who becomes involved with violence and arguments along the way. He is a commoner who does not hide his class and behavior and tells a short, incomplete fabliau.

**Canon and his Yeoman:** The Canon and his Yeoman join the pilgrimage in the middle of its course and bring a sense of mystery to the group. They heard glorious tales of the stories told en route to Canterbury and craved to be a part of that excitement. The canon does not reveal his profession and leaves the group as his Yeoman gives clues. He does not want to be discovered by any soul, so the Canon's Yeoman remains with the pilgrimage and tells a tale about the fraud of a canon.

### Minor Characters

**Arcite:** Arcite is one of the knights and royal cousins imprisoned by Theseus who falls in love with Emelye. He is pardoned by Theseus and assumes a new identity. He wins the battle at the end of the tale for Emelye's hand in marriage, but dies when thrown from his horse. He tells Emelye to marry the worthy Palamon and is buried by the kingdom.

**Palamon:** Palamon is the other royal cousin and knight imprisoned by Theseus who falls in love with Emelye. He remains in jail for seven years and escapes. He does not win the battle for Emelye's hand, but marries her after Arcite dies.

**Emelye:** Emelye is the sister of the Amazon queen Hippolyta and the object of Palamon and Arcite's affections. She does not want to marry at all and desires to remain a maid. She eventually marries Palamon.

**Theseus:** Theseus is the King of Athens who marries Hippolyta after conquering Scythia. He avenges the poor widow's husbands in Thebes and imprisons Palamon and Arcite. He builds the theater for the duel and orders the ultimate marriage between Palamon and Emelye.

**Hippolyta:** Hippolyta is the conquered queen of Amazons who marries Theseus and returns to Athens with him.



**John:** The old carpenter of Oxford who is tricked into believing that a flood the size of Noah's Flood is coming to town. He is cuckolded by his wife, Alison, and injured after falling down from the roof in a tub.

**Alison:** The young, sly, beautiful wife of John the carpenter who falls in love with Nicholas, the young student of Astronomy. She conspires with him to trick her husband and Absolon.

**Nicholas:** The young student of astronomy (or astrology) who initially befriends the old carpenter, John, and boards at his lodgings. He falls in love with John's wife, Alison, and tricks both Absolon and John about the flood. He ends up with a burned bottom.

**Absolon:** Absolon is the musician from Oxford who is in love with Alison. Nicholas and Alison play tricks on him when he serenades her and asks for kisses. He turns the chicanery around and winds up burning the two of them.

**Symkyn:** The flat-nosed, round-faced deceitful miller who lived near the brook near Cambridge. He has a wife and two children and steals from anyone he can. He is eventually beaten up by his own trickery.

**Aleyn:** Aleyn is one of the students from Cambridge who come to the Miller for ground corn for the steward. He seduces Symkyn's daughter Molly while everyone is sleeping.

**John:** John is the other student from Cambridge who comes to the miller for ground corn for the steward. He seduces the miller's wife and gets away with the corn.

**Molly:** Molly is Symkyn's eldest daughter and is seduced by Aleyn while her father is sleeping next to her.

**The Miller's Wife:** The miller's wife is a pretentious woman who is seduced by John, one of the students, in front of a sleeping Symkyn.

**Constance:** The beautiful Christian daughter of the Emperor of Rome, who is sent to Syria to marry the Sultan, and then returned on a boat to Rome after the massacre. She lives on the shores of Cumberland and marries King Alla. She gives birth to Mauritus while there, but is banished by his mother, Lady Donegild. She is reunited with her father and husband at the conclusion of the tale and returns to the shores.

**The Sultan:** The Sultan converts to Christianity to marry Constance, but unfortunately takes her to a foreign land that she does not like.

**The Sultana:** The Sultana is the Sultan's mother who devises the massacre that allows Constance to supposedly return home in lieu of marrying her son.

**Dame Hermengild:** Dame Hermengild is the Warden's wife of Northcumberland who befriends Constance. The Knight murders her and frames Constance for her death.



**The Warden:** The Warden finds Constance on the shores of Northumberland and brings her to King Alla.

**King Alla:** Alla is the King of Northumberland and is currently at war with the Scots. He marries Constance and has a child, Mauritius, with her.

**Mauritius:** Mauritius is the son of Alla and Constance and is banished by Lady Donegild with Constance soon after his birth. He later becomes emperor of Rome.

**Lady Donegild:** Lady Donegild is King Alla's mother and maliciously changes the letters of correspondence between the two. She sends Constance and Mauritius away from Northumberland while Alla is away.

**Jankin:** Jankin is the Wife of Bath's fifth husband. He is half her age and violent. He struck her on the ear so hard that she is now deaf on that side.

**The Knight:** The Knight in King Arthur's palace raped a young maiden and was forced to discover the one thing that women desire in order to save his own life. He realizes that women want control over their husbands and is forced to decide between an older, ugly woman of devotion, or a young, beautiful woman of independence. He gets the young, beautiful devoted woman in the end and lives happily ever after.

**The Old Woman:** The old woman tells the knight what women truly desire and tells him that he must marry her. She turns into a beautiful woman upon a single kiss from the knight and lives happily ever after with the knight.

**Satan (Yeoman):** Satan, the devil, says that he is a yeoman initially upon meeting the summoner. Satan and the summoner travel together, conniving different people, and eventually wind up in hell together.

**The Summoner:** The summoner works for the archdeacon and attempts to trick people into going to hell. He meets the devil along his journeys and befriends him. The two travel together, tricking others into hell. He winds up in hell with Satan.

**Thomas:** Thomas is a wealthy resident of Yorkshire, from whom the friar requests money for the church. He has recently lost a child and is disturbed by the friar's chicanery. He farts on the friar's hand in lieu of giving up his riches.

**The Friar:** The friar preaches to local residents of Yorkshire for money. He visits Thomas and requests food and money. He is farted on and run out of the house.

**Walter:** Walter is the Marquis of Saluzzo who marries the virtuous commoner Griselde. He tests her extensively throughout the years by taking away their children, declaring them dead, and stripping her of her clothing and dignity. He eventually reclaims his family and lives with them in the palace.



**Griselde:** Griselde is a virtuous commoner and the subject of Walter's unending test of devotion. She always holds true to her love for him and eventually returns to the castle to live with her long-lost two children and husband.

**January:** January is the old knight who marries young May because he believes married life to be true happiness on earth. He is cuckolded by May and his squire Damian in front of his blind eyes. Foolishly in love, January believes his wife's false tale and continues to live in lies.

**May:** May is January's young, unfaithful wife, who sleeps with Damian the squire and lies to her husband.

**Justinus:** Justinus is January's married brother, who tries to convince him that marriage is not worth the pains. He claims that January's marriage to a young woman would not last three years.

**Damian:** Damian is January's young squire who sleeps with his wife, May, in front of his eyes.

**Cambinskan:** Cambinskan is the King of Tartary who befriends a mysterious knight who brings with him a magical horse.

**Canacee:** Canacee is the daughter of King Cambiskan who receives the magical gift from the knight of animal language and herbal healing codes.

**Dorigen:** Dorigen is the wife of knight Arviragus who falls into a deep depression upon his exodus from Britain. Because she loves him so dearly and fears for his life, she promises to have an affair with Aurelius in exchange for his possible actions that could save his life.

**Arviragus:** Arviragus is a devoted husband and strong knight in Britain, but must leave his wife and country for war. He eventually realizes through honor that he must give up his beloved Dorigen in order to save her name.

**Aurelius:** Aurelius is the youthful squire who falls in love with Dorigen and makes a deal with an Orleans student so that he can have an affair with her. He eventually rescinds his forced payment of Dorigen upon realization of the pain it causes her.

**Virginus:** Virginus, a well-respected knight, murders his daughter, Virginia, when he realizes that she has been dishonored and raped.

**Appius:** Appius is the judge who manipulates the tale with others. He allows Claudius to claim that Virginus stole a slave and furthermore claims that the slave is his daughter, Virginia. When his chicanery is revealed, he is put in jail where he commits suicide.

**Virginia:** Virginia is the maiden daughter of Virginus who allows her fairness and beauty to lead her to trouble. Appius lusts after her and schemes to have her raped.



**The Three Rioters:** The three rioters are drunk men who claim to find Death and slay him. Instead of killing Death, they kill one another out of avarice.

**The Old Man:** The old man clothed in robes directs the three rioters to the gold under the oak tree, which in turn leads the rioters into avarice and allows them to kill each other.

**The Merchant:** The Merchant is a stingy businessman who vehemently wants to reclaim money lent to his wife. She goes to their border Dan John for the money, but gets into other trouble doing so.

**The Wife:** The Merchant's wife is unfulfilled in her marriage and seeks companionship with Dan John. She agrees to have an affair with him for the money that she owes her husband, but eventually repays him through sexual means.

**Dan John:** Dan John is a monk who assumes the role of the merchant's cousin and lives in his house. He lends the Merchant's wife the money she owes her husband in exchange for an affair, but secretly gets that money to pay her from the merchant himself. His plan is revealed by the Merchant at the end of the tale.

**Melibeus:** Melibeus is a wealthy and powerful ruler who vows revenge on his enemies who raped and attacked his family. His wife pleads for mercy for others from his rage.

**Prudence:** Prudence is Melibeus' wife, who despite being victimized, still desires mercy upon her attackers.

**Sophie:** Sophie is the daughter of Prudence and Melibeus who is also raped and attacked by his enemies. She is left for dead, but ultimately survives.

**Chanticleer:** A rooster on the farm of the old lady who believed that dreams were a prediction of reality. Chanticleer is almost eaten by a fox, when Pertelote squawks out loud and everyone is saved.

**Pertelote:** Chanticleer's favorite hen who did not believe that dreams were a reflection of reality. Instead, Pertelote believed that they were signs of ill humor. Pertelote saves Chanticleer from getting eaten by a fox.

**Canon:** The Canon shows the priest how to fake silver from coal and gets away with his chicanery.

**Priest:** The priest is witness to the canon's false silver and is paid off to keep the secret.

**Phoebus:** Phoebus is a God who married a woman while on earth. She was disloyal and unfaithful, regardless of his incessant watching. Because of his experience, he teaches a white crow how to speak the language of people. When he learns of his wife's affairs through the white crow, he condemns the bird to perpetual blackness and depression.



**The Crow:** The white crow is able to speak the language of humans because Phoebus enabled him to do so through teaching. However, when he reveals valuable information that displeases Phoebus, he attacks and curses the crow, and condemns them to forever be black and harsh.



## Objects/Places

**Tabard Inn:** The Tabard Inn is the initial location for the pilgrims journeying to Canterbury. They meet there and begin their trip of story telling and camaraderie. It is located in Southwark, which was at the time a suburb of London, south of the Thames River.

**Canterbury:** Canterbury is the destination of the pilgrims hoping to catch a glimpse of the relics and shrine to Saint Thomas Becket, who was murdered in the Canterbury Cathedral in 1170 and became a martyr for Christianity thereafter.

**Thebes:** Thebes is the city of several tales, including the Knight's Tale of Palamon and Arcite's love for Emelye.

**Oxford:** Oxford is a city in England that houses the University and several of the tales told on the journey to Canterbury, including the Miller's Tale, and The Wife of Bath's Tale (her fifth husband).

**Cambridge:** Cambridge is another city in England that houses a University and several of the tales told on the journey to Canterbury, including the Reeves' Tale.

**Rome:** Rome is the holy center of Christianity and the location of parts of several of the tales told on the journey. It is the home of Constance, the Christian heroine of the Man of Law's Tale.

**Northcumberland:** Northcumberland is the shore city where Constance is shipwrecked and lives in the Man of Law's Tale. Alla is the King of this nation, converts to Christianity, and marries Constance.

**Yorkshire:** Yorkshire is another city in England where the Summoner's Tale is set.

**Saluzzo:** Saluzzo is the mountainous Italian city, which is the setting of the Clerk's Tale.

**Flanders:** Flanders is the setting of the Pardoner's drunken tale of avarice and of the Tale of Sir Thopas.



# Quotes

## Quotes

### The General Prologue

Quote 1: "When that Aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour,  
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breath  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tender croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,  
And smale foweles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages),  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmers for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And specially from every shires ende  
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blissful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke." General Prologue, l.1-20

### The Knight's Tale

Quote 2: "And now thou woldest falsly been aboute / To love my lady, whom I love and serve / And evere shal, til that myn herte sterve. / Nay, certes, false Arcite, thow shalt nat so! / I loved hir first, and tolde thee my wo." Knight's Tale, l.284-288

### The Miller's Prologue

Quote 3: "By Goddes soule, quod he, that wol nat I, / For I wol speke, or elles go my wey." Miller's Prologue, l. 24-25

### The Miller's Tale

Quote 4: "Thy wyf shal I wel saven, out of doute.  
Go now thy wey, and speed thee heer-about.  
But whan thou hast, for hire and thee and me,  
Ygeten us this knedyng tubbes thre,  
Thanne shaltow hange hem in the roof ful hye,  
That no man of oure purveiaunce spy.  
And whan thou thus hast doon, as I have seyde,  
And hast oure vitaille faire in hem yleyde,



And eek an ax, to smyte the corde atwo,  
Whan that the water comth, that we may go." Miller's Tale, l.375-384

### **The Reeve's Tale**

Quote 5: "And therefore this proverbe is seyde ful sooth, / Hym thar nat wene wel that  
yvele dooth; / A gylour shal hymself bigyled be." Reeve's Tale, l.399-401

### **Introduction to the Man of Law's Prologue**

Quote 6: "To breke forward is nat myn entente." Introduction to the Man of Law's  
Prologue, l.40

### **The Man of Law's Prologue**

Quote 7: "Bet is to dyen than have indigence. / Thy selve neighebor wol thee despise, /  
If thou be povre, farwel thy reverence!" Man of Law's Prologue, l.16-18

### **The Man of Law's Tale**

Quote 8: "Bitwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn / They trowe that no cristene prince  
wolde fayn / Wedden his child under oure lawes swete / That us were taught by Mahoun  
oure prophete." Man of Law's Tale, l.88-91

### **The Wife of Bath's Prologue**

Quote 9: "I pray you, telleth me, / Or where comanded he virginitee?" Wife of Bath's  
Prologue, l.61-62

### **The Wife of Bath's Tale**

Quote 10: "I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me / What thyng is it that wommen  
moost desiren. / Be war and keep thy nekke-boon from iren." Wife of Bath's Tale, l.48-50

### **The Friar's Tale**

Quote 11: "That lay by hem, they tolde it in his ere.  
Thus was the wenche and he of oon assent;  
And he wolde fecche a feyned mandement,  
And somne hem to chapitre bothe two,  
And pile the man, and lete the wenche go." Friar's Tale, l.58-62

### **The Summoner's Prologue**

Quote 12: "This frere bosteth that he knoweth helle, / And God it woot, that it is litel  
wonder; / Freres and feendes been but lyte asonder." Summoner's Prologue, l.8-10

### **The Clerk's Tale**



Quote 13: "Lat me allone in chesyng of my wyf, / That charge upon my bak I wole endure; / But I yow preye, and charge upon youre lyf / That what wyf that I take, ye me assure / To worshipe hir, whil that hir lyf may dure, / In word and werk, bothe heere and everywhere, / As she an emperoures doghter weere." Clerk's Tale, l.106-112

### **The Merchant's Tale**

Quote 14: "Ne se ye nat this honorable knyght,  
By cause, allas! that he is blynd and old,  
His owene man shal make hym cokewold.  
Lo, where he sit, the lechour, in the tree!  
Now wol I graunten, of my magestee,  
Unto this olde, blynde, worthy knyght  
That he shal have ayen his eyen syght,  
Whan that his wyf wold doon hym vileynye.  
Thanne shal he knowen al hire harlotrye,  
Bothe in repreve of hire and othere mo." Merchant's Tale, l.1010-1019

### **The Squire's Tale**

Quote 15: "And what man that is wounded with a strook / Shal never be hool, til that yow list of grace / To stroke hym with the plate in thilke place / Ther he is hurt; this is as muche to seyn, / Ye moot with the plate swerd ageyn / Strike hym in the wounde, and it wol close." Squire's Tale, l.152-157

### **The Franklin's Prologue**

Quote 16: "But sires, by cause I am a burel man, / At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche, / Have me excused of my rude speche. / I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn; / Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn." Franklin's Prologue, l.8-12

### **The Physician's Tale**

Quote 17: "Anon his herte chaunged and his mood, / So was he caught with beautee of this mayde, / And to hymself ful pryvely he sayde, / This mayde shal be myn, for any man." Physician's Tale, l.126-129

### **The Pardoner's Prologue**

Quote 18: "My theme is alwey oon and evere was, / Radix malorum est Cupiditas." Pardoner's Prologue, l.5-6

Quote 19: "I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,  
And whan the lewed peple is doun yset,  
I preche so, as ye han heerd bifoore,  
And telle an hundred false japes moore." Pardoner's Prologue, l.63-66

### **The Shipman's Tale**



Quote 20: "He is na moore cosynto me / Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!"  
Shipman's Tale, l.149-150

Quote 21: "And wel ye woot that wommen naturelly  
Desiren thynges sixe as wel as I  
They wolde that hir housbondes sholde be  
Hardy, and wise, and riche, and therto free,  
And buxom unto his wyf, and fressh abedde." Shipman's Tale, l.173-177

### **The Prioress's Tale**

Quote 22: "This Provost dooth the Jewes for to sterve, / That of this mordre wiste, and  
that anon. / He nolde no swich cursednesse observe; / Yvele shal have that yvele wol  
deserve." Prioress's Tale, l.142-145

### **Sir Thopas**

Quote 23: "Alle othere wommen I forsake, / And to an elf-queene I me take / By dale  
and eek by downe." Tale of Sir Thopas, l.83-85

### **The Second Nun's Tale**

Quote 24: "I have an Aungel which that loveth me,  
That with greet love, wher so I wake or sleepe,  
Is redy ay my body for to kepe.  
And if that he may feelen out of drede  
That ye me touche, or love in vileynye,  
He right anon wol sle yow with the dede,  
And in youre yowthe thus ye sholden dye.  
And if that ye in clene love me gye,  
He wol yow loven as me for youre clennessse,  
And shewen yow his joye and his brightnesse." Second Nun's Tale, l.33-42

### **The Manciple's Tale**

Quote 25: "And to the crowe, O false theef, seyde he, / I wol thee quite anon thy false  
tale; / Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtngale, / Now shaltow, false theef, thy song  
forgon, / And eek thy white fetheres everichon." Manciple's Tale, l.188-192

### **Chaucer's Retraction**

Quote 26: "Now preye I to hem alle that herkne thai litel tretys or / rede, that if ther be  
any thyng in it that liketh hem, that / therof they thanken oure Lord Jesu Crist, of whom  
procedeth / al wit and al goodnesse." Chaucer's Retraction, l.1-4

Quote 27: "So that I may been oon of / hem at the day of doome that shulle be saved. /  
Qui cum patre, &cetera." Chaucer's Retraction, l.29-30



# Topic Tracking: Christianity

Christianity 1: In the General Prologue, various pilgrims are introduced, including a Nun, a Monk, and a Friar, all notable figures in the Church. They represent distinct areas of Christianity, with some holding to strict worship of Christ and others overtly disobeying the laws. This initial introduction of the various religious icons on the pilgrimage foreshadows tales of sin and worship that will be told throughout the journey.

Christianity 2: As the General Prologue continues, more characters are introduced with regard to Christianity and to the Church. This time, these icons of religion represent the corruption of the church, for the Summoner summons people on a subjective basis, while the Pardoner sells fake relics.

Christianity 3: The Man of Law introduces his tale with reverence for Christ and the Church. As a man of principles and the law, he claims to command respect and comments on greed as a problem in society.

Christianity 4: The Sultan realizes in this tale that he cannot marry his woman of choice because he is a Muslim and she a Christian. The Emperor of Rome would never allow his daughter, a devout follower of Christ, to marry a Muslim. The Man of Law's Tale is illustrating the importance of loyalty to Christ.

Christianity 5: Even on the shores of Northumberland, the strength of Christianity reigns supreme. Dame Hermengild and her husband find out who Constance is, and eventually convert to Christianity out of fear.

Christianity 6: The Friar's tale is about a summoner, who should be a good Christian and member of the Church. However, this summoner is unlawful, unfaithful to the church's governing of summons, and engages in un-Christianlike behavior, such as having sexual relations with prostitutes.

Christianity 7: The summoner and the devil are two figures representing Christianity in this tale. Because they illustrate deception in the church and do not truly represent the goodness of Christ, they wind up in hell.

Christianity 8: The summoner's tale tells of friars and their so-called devotion to God and to Christ. The friar in this tale claims to live a holy life because it is modest and impoverished. He also tells Thomas that his son's illness persists because he does not give money to the Church. He uses his position in the Church to elicit money. This example is another illustration of the futility and deception within the Church at the time.

Christianity 9: This tale details the life of a young boy of Christian valor. He worshipped Christ and sang songs to the Virgin Mary daily. It is this love for Christianity that gets him killed by the Jew.



Christianity 10: The little boy becomes a martyr for Christianity in the end of this tale by coming back to life because of his love for the Christian God. Because he desires to return to death, his status as a martyr for Christianity is cemented. He desires only to worship and sing to the Virgin Mary.

Christianity 11: The Monk's Tale is not so much a tale, but a list of short mini-tales that detail the importance of Christian worship. Many of the characters that he lists do, in fact, die because of their abandonment of God or their direct opposition to Christ.

Christianity 12: Cecilia died for the honor of God and Christianity. She suffered violent, brutal attacks and never died, most likely because of her faith in God. Her worship and loyalty to her religion allowed her to live through much pain. Although she ultimately died, her life would forever be remembered for Christian love and devotion.

Christianity 13: The Parson's Tale is simply a description/list of how to achieve penitence in Christianity. He details every step necessary to become penitent and have contrition. This tale is a classic religious and hopeful attempt to illustrate the good that still may remain in the Church.

Christianity 14: Chaucer concludes his grand *Canterbury Tales* with a retraction stating that any tale which brought offense to anyone is only due to his ignorance. He gives reverence to Christ once again in his retraction, reminding his readers that everything he writes is with the hope that he will be granted mercy and redemption in the afterlife.



## Topic Tracking: Loyalty

Loyalty 1: This first mention of loyalty falls in the realm of the Knight's Tale. The wives of the murdered soldiers feel loyal to their fallen husbands and desire a proper burial. They would be disloyal to their wedding vows if they allowed the bodies to rot. Furthermore, Theseus felt a twinge of loyalty to humanity as he returned with troops to Thebes to bury the soldiers. Loyalty and honor to mankind are motivating factors in his decision to take over Thebes and bury the soldiers.

Loyalty 2: Both Palamon and Arcite have always remained loyal to their hearts and to their love for Emelye throughout the tale. All three people involved in the love triangle also fall back on a faith and a loyalty to a God. Emelye prays to Diana, while Palamon prays to Venus and Arcite to Mars. Their faith in these three deities will hopefully aid them in their battle.

Loyalty 3: Nicholas and Alison have an affair, proving Alison's disloyal and unfaithful behavior to her husband John. This is just one of the numerous examples of a wife making a cuckold of her husband. The affair leads to much more outlandish behaviors of disloyalty, such as the plan they devise to trick John.

Loyalty 4: Symkyn is deceptive and disloyal to the young students from Cambridge. He manipulates their actions so that he can steal their corn and then keenly offer them lodgings as a friend. His actions are unfaithful to his fellow man and also to his supposed new acquaintances, for these actions stem from lies.

Loyalty 5: Although by the end of the tale the miller's wife tries to help him, there is much disloyalty and unfaithfulness in this tale. Molly sleeps with Aleyne, while Symkyn's wife and John make him a cuckold, again illustrating the futility of marriage vows.

Loyalty 6: Constance accepts her fate of marrying the Sultan, whom she does not love, because she knows that women must be loyal to their families and subject to men. She is faithful to her father and to the rules of the land and time.

Loyalty 7: The question of loyalty resides in the knight of this tale. Can he be loyal to himself and an older woman, or does he need a young beautiful bride? The knight, chooses the younger woman; however, out of loyalty and faithfulness, he kisses the old woman as she is. Because of this faith, he gets both the faithful wife and the young beautiful maiden in one body.

Loyalty 8: In this tale, loyalty seems to be the object of all tests. Walter perpetually tests his common wife, Griselde, with all sorts of random and cruel trials for her loyalty. She passes every time, and eventually proves herself to her husband.

Loyalty 9: May and Damian conspire together for a possible affair, proving May's disloyalty to her husband and Damian's disloyalty to his master. January will learn that his brother was correct about marrying a younger woman.



Loyalty 10: Dorigen is so loyal to her lover that she would do anything to save him from death. The question arises as to what true loyalty is: Is it giving herself to another man for the sake of her true love, or is it dying instead of becoming disloyal and unfaithful to her lover? Regardless, she makes a pact with Aurelius to save her beloved.

Loyalty 11: This tale brings up another illustration of true loyalty. Arviragus tells Dorigen to follow through on her promise, to remain loyal to her word, despite his pain and despite the heartbreak that would ensue because of it. He teaches her and illustrates through his words and actions the importance of loyalty and faith in one's word. Because of Arviragus' actions, Aurelius does not force Dorigen into having sexual relations.

Loyalty 12: Although supposedly three friends, these three riotous men fall into avarice and have no loyalty to one another. Immediately after being confronted with the opportunity of wealth, their loyalty to each other is lost. The third rioter goes to town and buys poison to kill the other two. However, as soon as he returns, his supposed loyal friends, who soon drink the poisoned wine and die as well, stab him to death.

Loyalty 13: Dan John and the merchant's wife engage in a brief sexual encounter, resulting in the wife's disloyalty to her husband and John's disloyalty to his supposed friend. The two conspirators are unfaithful to the merchant by not only sleeping together, but by allowing John to manipulate the money owed from the wife to the merchant.

Loyalty 14: Many of the mini-tales in the Monk's stories die because of their disloyalty to either their family or God. Because of their unfaithfulness, the monk lists their brutal deaths in order to teach a lesson. Loyalty is vitally significant for a long and happy life in the medieval period.

Loyalty 15: The priest and canon's exchange of information on how to falsify silver illustrates deception in society. This deception is a type of disloyalty to their fellow man and can bring more harm than good. It is also an example of disloyalty within the Church to both God and their fellow men.

Loyalty 16: Phoebus's wife is unfaithful to him with another man. The white crow witnesses this display of disloyalty and tells Phoebus, forever condemning him into ebony solitude. This tale is another example of a wife acting unfaithful and disloyal to her husband.



## Topic Tracking: Sexuality

Sexuality 1: The Wife of Bath's introduction in the General Prologue is the first mention of any sort of sexual behavior or so called misconduct discussed on the journey. She is ostentatious in her presentation and carries with her an aura of sexuality that is apparent to all. Her initial description alludes to her multiple marriages and use of femininity to get what she desires.

Sexuality 2: Nicholas and Alison engage in sexual relations after Alison's husband, John, has fallen asleep. This sexuality is extra-marital and leads to more problems, for it is done under secretive behavior. Furthermore, a mere kiss requested by Absolon is turned into a small joke. In this case, sexuality leads to violent behavior.

Sexuality 3: Aleyn and John both engage in extra-marital sexual behavior with women they should respect. Aleyn sleeps with Molly and John with the miller's wife, all in front of the miller. They use sex, not only as enjoyment, but as a means of revenge.

Sexuality 4: The Wife of Bath openly discusses her sex life with the other pilgrims and uses the Bible to support her multiple partners. She claims that the Bible never commanded virginity and that there is nothing wrong with having five husbands, and possibly a sixth when ready.

Sexuality 5: The Wife of Bath concludes her tale with a moral, granting women to be submissive to their husbands, so long as they are satisfied in bed. Sexual satisfaction is extremely important to the Wife of Bath, and she is proud to display her thoughts.

Sexuality 6: Damian and May have sex together in the pear tree, while May's blind husband, January, watches on. The on-looking Gods suddenly give January back his sight so that he can witness and truly see the disloyalty of his wife and squire.

Sexuality 7: Aurelius wants Dorigen sexually and uses that power over her. His bargain and economic means of exchange is sexuality. Dorigen, likewise, realizes how strong the contract of sexuality is and contemplates taking her own life in lieu of giving up her body and sexuality.

Sexuality 8: The Governor and Appius's plot to deflower Virginia falls in the realm of sexuality. As in many of these tales, a large plot and source of deviance is the deflowering of young maidens. In this tale, Virginia's role and identity are ascribed to her name, giving the text even more weight. Death is often the better outcome or result than the loss of virtue, chastity, and honor.

Sexuality 9: The wife admits to Dan John that she has no lust for her husband in bed. These two establish that sexuality is a vital and important element in marriage, and the fact that she has no chemistry and attraction for her husband poses a problem of honor and respect. Soon after she admits to her lack of sexual attraction for her husband, she engages in a small sexual, extra-marital act with Dan John: a kiss.



Sexuality 10: The merchant's wife realizes that she has committed a sinful act and agrees to repay her husband, not with money, but with sexual favors in bed. She will abide by any rules that he has in the future, and she will be loyal to him sexually.

Sexuality 11: Valerian insists on seeing the truth behind why Cecilia will not give herself to him sexually. He believes it to be important in marriage and cannot understand why she resists. Cecilia resists sex at all costs and becomes a martyr to Christianity.



## Topic Tracking: Violence

Violence 1: As Theseus and his soldiers go to Thebes to fight, they engage in acts of violence. As simple as this tale is told, men fight and kill other men. This is the first mention of violence throughout the tales and certainly not the last. They are full of fighting and death. In this instance of violence, Theseus and his soldiers defeat Thebes quickly, in order to move on to other violent acts.

Violence 2: Arcite and Palamon decide to battle for Emelye's hand in marriage. Their battle involves fighting, violence, swords, and possibly death. This battle is thrown together fairly quickly, for it was common to fight for love and use violence to reach a conclusion at that time.

Violence 3: The battle between Palamon and Arcite involves swordplay, thrashing, striking, and ultimately death. This violent display of affection is typical of men wooing women in medieval times.

Violence 4: Although not direct violence, as in a duel or battle, the violence enacted in the Miller's Tale is accomplished through deception. When Absolon burns Nicholas's rear end, he is taking a small hot iron and slightly violently inflicting pain. And when the tub falls from the roof, injuring John, he is violently embarrassed and hurt by the fall. The violence in this tale stems not from sword fighting and battle play, but from small jokes and personal attacks.

Violence 5: The Reeve's Tale involves violence on a more personal level. Towards the conclusion, Symkyn fights with Aleyn after he discovers the sexual behavior that occurred during the night, while the miller's wife attempts to join the battle to help her husband, but unfortunately strikes him doing so. Her ribs are broken, he is struck, and the two students escape nonetheless. The small battle in the miller's house resulted in minor violence and injury and illustrates that violence exists not only on the battlefield.

Violence 6: The Sultana's great feast in the Man of Law's Tale yields much violence in a single command of action. She has everyone at the feast killed in a great massacre, except Constance, to prove a point and to allow Constance to return home. This violent mass murder is a small event in the tale that houses much more violence.

Violence 7: The knight enamored with Constance violently kills Dame Hermengild by slitting her throat. He frames Constance for this crime and is sentenced to death, another act of violence.

Violence 8: The warden's steward comes aboard the boat in which Constance is banished and attempts to rape her. Although no blood is spilled, a rape is an act of violence, which at this time in history may not have been considered violence, but is certainly now a violent criminal act. The attempted rapist dies by drowning.



Violence 9: The Wife of Bath tells of her fifth husband, Jankin, and his physical domestic abuse. He hit her on the ear so hard one time that she lost hearing on that side forever. This small violent act between a husband and wife was probably common at the time, but the Wife of Bath discusses it as if it were horribly violent and unusual. While his maltreatment of her is violent, the Wife of Bath used it to get what she wanted from him in the end.

Violence 10: Again, rape is the act of violence in this tale. A knight finds a maiden walking alone and simply decides to rape her. He is taken to the king and has one year to free himself from punishment by death if he can discover what women truly desire. Although the tale does not surround the violent act, it does set the catalyst for the tale to ensue.

Violence 11: This instance of small violence is not from one of the tales, but rather from the pilgrims themselves. The Friar and Summoner have problems with one another and begin to fight. The host eventually pulls them apart and tells the Friar to begin his tale of an unlawful summoner.

Violence 12: The violence in this tale is self-inflicted and brought upon by selfish avarice. The three rioters, in an attempt to become rich, killed themselves and each other. The two rioters stabbed the third to death in a violent and brutal attempt to win more money for themselves. However, soon after their supposed victory for more money, they drank the poisoned wine and died as well.

Violence 13: The Jew in this tale violently cuts the throat of the young boy singing to the Virgin Mary. Instead of simply hitting him or scolding him, the tale dictates that the Jew violently kills the young boy with a knife. Any type of murder is considered violence, and as seen throughout the tales, there is massacre, murder, and violent deaths dispersed in these pages.

Violence 14: Melibeus's daughter, Sophie, was brutally murdered in five places on her body: feet, hands, ears, nose, and mouth. This violent death is, again, fairly typical in these tales. However, despite the gruesome murder of this young woman, revenge seems to overtake the violence. Sophie miraculously comes back to life after her brutal murder, which is another common theme in the tales. Innocent victims of violence are often reborn because of religious or philosophical worship.

Violence 15: Cecilia's death is described in violent terms and was a brutal procedure of torture. She was burned, slashed, and hit, and still never killed. She eventually died by way of desolation with her wounds. Her violent death made her a martyr for Christianity.



# The General Prologue

The Canterbury Tales begin in April, as the narrator (Chaucer) begins a pilgrimage from the Tabard Inn at Southwerk to the famed Canterbury, where Sir Thomas a Becket, a martyr for Christianity, is supposedly buried. The General Prologue is a basic descriptive list of the twenty-nine people who become pilgrims to journey to Canterbury, each telling a story along the way. The narrator describes and lists the pilgrims skillfully, according to their rank and status.

*"Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour,  
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tender croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,  
And smale foweles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages),  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmers for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And specially from every shires ende  
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blissful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke."* General Prologue, l.1-20

The first pilgrim mentioned in the prologue is properly the Knight, a worthy man who has fought in the crusades. A Squire accompanies the Knight as his son and is a young bachelor of twenty years with an eye for women. The Knight also brings along his Yeoman, or his second servant. A shy, polite Prioress who is well mannered and proper wears a fine broach with inscriptions about love, her secretary, also known as the Second Nun, and a Monk also join the pilgrims to see the martyr. The Monk loves to hunt and is robust and masculine, while the friar, Friar Hubert, is an overtly immoral man who cares more about money and profit than truly helping men stay away from sin.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 1

Next in the prologue is the Merchant from Flanders who is pompous and verbose on economics. He continually talks about increasing his profits in several ways. Although simply concerned about money, the narrator comments that he is truly a good man, nonetheless. The Clerk is an unemployed Oxford student making the pilgrimage perhaps to help him find money and a job. He is dressed in rags, alluding to his impoverished status. The Man of Law is a revered soul who believes he is owed respect, for he is knowledgeable of the law and appears to be much busier than he is in



actuality. The Franklin accompanies the Man of Law on the pilgrimage and is simply concerned with the pleasures in life - namely food. His desires lie far from those of academia and worship.

The narrator then gives a list of five guildsmen of little importance on this trip. They are the Weaver, the Dyer, the Carpenter, the Tapestry-Maker, and the Haberdasher. There is also a Cook and a Shipman (or Sailor) from the port of Dartmouth, and a Physician. The strong-willed Wife of Bath also makes the journey to Canterbury, wears bright, ostentatious clothing for the ride and tells of her five marriages and multiple youthful partners in bed, striking intrigue and curiosity amongst the pilgrims on the journey.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 1

The next pilgrim is the Parson, a man of honor and kindness who remains true to Christ and his congregation. His brother, a Plowman, is also on the journey and is described with equally benevolent words by Chaucer. The last few pilgrims who are mentioned briefly are a physically large Miller, an intellectual and academic Manciple from a lawyer's college, a slender, fiery-tempered Reeve, a Summoner, and a Pardoner. The Summoner is immoral and unfair in his position of summoning people to church for their crimes, for he picks and chooses those whom he likes and dislikes, while the poor Pardoner is simply weak and effeminate.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 2

All of these travelers are in the Tabard Inn prepared to make their way to Canterbury. The host, now described as a merry, bold, strong man, makes the recommendation that each person tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two stories on the way back. Everyone draws from a bundle to select the first tale tellers and the Knight is the fortunate soul who begins these tales on the way to Canterbury.



# The Knight's Tale

The first tale of the pilgrimage begins with a prince named Theseus who married the queen of Scythia, Hippolyta, bringing her back to Athens with her sister Emelye, after conquering their Amazon kingdom. As he returned home, Theseus saw many women in black, kneeling and shrieking on the side of the highway. The eldest woman asked Theseus for pity because she and all of the women lost their husbands at Thebes. The lord of Thebes, Creon, refused to bury the dead bodies. Instead, he simply tossed the bodies into a large pile, leaving them to rot. An embittered Theseus declared vengeance upon Creon and ordered his troops to go to Thebes to fight.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 1

Topic Tracking: Violence 1

While in Thebes, Theseus vanquished Creon and the soldiers began to dispose of the dead bodies. While doing so, they came across two young knights who were not quite dead: royal cousins named Palamon and Arcite, who were then imprisoned by Theseus for life. While in prison, they spotted Emelye in the garden outside and both fell in love. Palamon prayed to escape prison to be with his Venus, while Arcite declared that he would rather die than not have her. The two cousins argued and quarreled over who wanted Emelye more, calling one another traitors: "And now thou woldest falsly been aboute / To love my lady, whom I love and serve / And evere shal, til that myn herte sterve. / Nay, certes, false Arcite, thow shalt nat so! / I loved hir first, and tolde thee my wo. Knight's Tale, l.284-288

One day during their bickering, Pirithous, one of Theseus's childhood friends, came to Athens. He knew Arcite in Thebes and requested his freedom. Arcite leaves prison with the solitary promise that he would never be seen again in Theseus's kingdom. So, although Arcite had his freedom, he could not pursue Emelye. Palamon was jealous of Arcite, because he believed that Arcite could raise an army against Theseus to return for Emelye's love. At this point in the tale, the Knight interjects a question. Which is worse: Palamon, the imprisoned man who can still see Emelye or Arcite, the free man who cannot see his beloved?

Arcite has been free for two years in Thebes. One night he dreamed that he saw Mercury telling him to be free of care and hope. He should go to Athens to overcome his grief and see his beloved. He planned to disguise himself and pass as an unknown. He did so and assumed a post as a page with the name of Philostratus for Emelye's steward. Theseus soon named this page a squire of the chamber. At the same time, Palamon was living in prison still for seven years and soon devised a plan to escape and flee the city. He planned to hide outside the city and go towards Thebes. The morning of Palamon's escape, Arcite was horseback riding in the same area. The two men spotted one another and revealed their true selves. They planned to meet in the same place the next day and fight for Emelye. They did so armed in battle gear, while Theseus, Hippolyta, and Emelye were hunting. The hunting party came across the battling cousins and stopped the violence. Palamon reveals Arcite's and his own identity



to Theseus as they both reveal their love for Emelye. Theseus immediately ordered their deaths until the women took pity on the cousins, begging for mercy. Theseus agrees and states that they cannot declare war on anyone else except they must wage a battle against each other, with one hundred knights each, to decide whom Emelye will marry.

Topic Tracking: Violence 2

For the famous duel between Palamon and Arcite for Emelye's hand in marriage, Theseus had an ostentatious and loud theater built a mile in circumference. On the day of the battle, each cousin brought a lucky charm and each prayed to Venus. Palamon asked Venus to let Arcite kill him if Arcite is the man to marry Emelye. The statue of Venus shook at this prayer, alluding to her presence. Emelye prayed to Diana so that she could remain a maiden for the entirety of her life. She craves peace and a rekindling of the friendship between the two men. However, she will abide and marry one of them if it is her destiny. Arcite prayed to Mars for a victorious battle. The Gods are actively participating in this war.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 2

Theseus's rules of battles stated that nobody should suffer a mortal blow. They also stated that if one party is exhausted and cannot fight, he must leave the field. Both armies are prepared and equally ready to fight. Arcite initially pursued Palamon with vengeance, which he returned equally. Arcite's aid took down Palamon and pierced him with a sword. Palamon was almost saved by his aid, when they are both wounded. Theseus declared Arcite the winner, thus disappointing Venus. As Arcite was declared the winner, a large earthquake trembled the grounds, frightening the horse Arcite was upon, and throwing him off. Arcite was killed by the fall. Before he died, however, he told Emelye that her future husband, Palamon, was the most worthy man she could marry. Theseus ordered the new wedding of Emelye and Palamon after a commemorative funeral for Arcite.

Topic Tracking: Violence 3

## The Miller's Prologue

The host is still laughing from the knight's tale and wants this tale telling game of stories to go on. He asks the Miller who is drunk to tell a story that will counteract the knight's. When the host realizes that the Miller is drunk, he asks him to wait until later to tell his tale, to which the Miller responds, "By Goddes soule, quod he, that wol nat I, / For I wol speke, or elles go my wey." Miller's Prologue, l. 24-25. He plans to tell a story of a carpenter, his wife, and another man - another love triangle. The Reeve is furious with the Miller for telling such a story of a cuckolded man, to which the Miller responds that he the Reeve may just be a cuckold himself, too. Most men have wives whom they love, but who just may be making cuckolds of them, as well. The host forewarns the readers that they can turn the page to another tale of valor and holiness if they do not wish to read about such immorality as told by the drunken Miller. The readers cannot hold the host responsible for what the Miller tells.



# The Miller's Tale

An older carpenter living in Oxford named John needed extra money, so he took in a boarder. The boarder was a poor student of astronomy named Nicholas. John had married a younger, attractive woman, Alison, whom Nicholas, the sly, seductive scientist adored. One day while John was away, Nicholas made a pass at Alison. Alison told him that her husband was a jealous man, but that she would meet him as soon as she could without worry or fear that he would find them.

Alison went into town one day where she met Absolon, a parish clerk known for singing and guitar playing, who also proclaimed his love for Alison, who was hopelessly in love with the young Nicholas. Absolon even came to Alison's window that night in a futile attempt to woo her. On a Saturday, John left Oxford to go to Oseney on business and the two conniving lovers decided to find a plan that could use John's wit to trick him. They devised a plan:

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 3

*"Thy wyf shal I wel saven, out of doute.  
Go now thy wey, and speed thee heer-aboute.  
But whan thou hast, for hire and thee and me,  
Ygeten us thise knedyng tubbes thre,  
Thanne shaltow hange hem in the roof ful hye,  
That no man of oure purveiaunce spye.  
And whan thou thus hast doon, as I have seyde,  
And hast oure vitaille faire in hem yleyde,  
And eek an ax, to smyte the corde atwo,  
Whan that the water comth, that we may go."* Miller's Tale, l.375-384

The intricate manipulation included three tubs that could be used as boats to be hung from the roof, as to remain inconspicuous. When rain equal to Noah's Flood arrived, only the three of them would survive. That night, when the three went up to the roof, John eventually fell asleep and Nicholas and Alison escaped to have sex. The following morning, Absolon returns to Alison's home to serenade her, despite her desire for his absence. She agrees to give him a single kiss if he agrees to close his eyes. Willingly he follows her command, as she pulls down her pants and has him kiss her buttocks. The two lovers mock Absolon mercilessly, who leaves the scene embarrassed and embittered. He walks to a blacksmith and procures a hot forging iron that he plans to use in retaliation. He returns to Alison and Nicholas asking for another kiss. Nicholas removes his clothing and intends to trick Absolon yet again, and fart in his face. Instead, Absolon burns his rear end with the hot iron. In pain, Nicholas cries out for water, startling a slumbering John who thinks that the massive flood has arrived, in turn cutting the rope that held the tub to the roof. The senseless carpenter falls from the roof in the tub to the ground.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 2

Topic Tracking: Violence 4

Everyone in town arrives on the scene to see what happened. All three men received some sort of punishment: John was declared mad and was painfully injured by the fall, Absolon was sorely humiliated, and Nicholas was burned on his rear end.

## The Reve's Prologue

Everyone enjoyed the Miller's tale, except for Oswald the Reeve, for he is a carpenter by trade and somehow associates with the carpenter John in the tale. He rambles about the woes of old age, yet still retains his lust and energy. The host reminds him that they are on a pilgrimage and do not have all day to complain, so Oswald the Reeve tells the pilgrims that his tale will use force and is in rebuttal to the Miller's tale, which he thinks is aimed at him. The small rivalry between the Miller and the Reeve is illustrated through his tale.



# The Reeve's Tale

In a town called Trumpington near Cambridge, a miller named Simon (nick-named Symkyn) lived near a brook. The miller wore loud clothing, had a round face, flat nose, played the bagpipes, wrestled, and fished all the time, during which he always carried a knife. He had married into a noble family, of whom his father-in-law was a parson. Symkyn was constantly jealous of everyone else. He had two children with his pretentious wife: a twenty-year old daughter and a toddler.

Symkyn was extremely deceitful and dishonest in his work and cheated the college most of all. He stole corn and meal from the dying steward of Cambridge. There were two students of Cambridge, John and Aleyn, who had received permission to see the corn ground at the mill. While at the mill, Aleyn tells Symkyn that he must bring back ground corn to the ill steward. Symkyn slyly let the students' horse loose while they were grinding the corn, forcing them to rush after it, forgetting the meal. Symkyn took the flour and had his wife knead it into dough. When the students returned to the meal to retrieve their meal, they were shocked to find it stolen and begged the miller for help. Symkyn then offers them lodging for the night.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 4

The miller's older daughter, Molly, slept in the same room as the students and Symkyn, who annoyed everyone in the room by snoring loudly. Aleyn desires to seduce Molly as revenge for his stolen corn, much to John's warning of the miller's danger. John is humiliated as Aleyn has sex with Molly so close to him. John thereupon seduces the miller's wife, to have his fun, as well. In the morning, Molly tells Aleyn where his missing meal was hiding and Aleyn tells John of his sexual exploits. Symkyn overhears the students' conversation and grabs Aleyn by the neck in an attempt to fight. Aleyn punches Symkyn and the two begin to fight. The miller unfortunately tumbles over his wife and breaks her ribs. The miller's wife then finds a staff to aid in the minor battle and tries to hit Aleyn with it, but unfortunately strikes her husband. The two students run away with their meal, leaving the couple lying on the ground. The deceitful miller got his just desserts: he was beaten, made a cuckold, lost a daughter to seduction, and lost his meal. The reeve reminds the group of the proverb: "And therefore this proverbe is seyde ful sooth, / Hym thar nat wene wel that yvele dooth; / A gylour shal hymself bigyled be." Reeve's Tale, l.399-401.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 3

Topic Tracking: Violence 5

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 5

# The Cook's Prologue

The cook from London enjoyed the Miller's tale greatly and laughs at the misfortune of inviting guests into one's house. The host urges the Cook to begin his tale, which is full of jest and is about an innkeeper.

## The Cook's Tale

In the cook's town, there lived a young apprentice nicknamed Perkin Reveller, for his short, stout build, and his pension for taverns. Although he was skilled, he played around too much with girls and dice, until one day his master found out about his untamed antics. The master knew that his behavior was not lawful, so he was fired. The apprentice left the master's house on his own and went to a friend's house for company. That house was none other than a whorehouse with thieves - his proper home.

# Introduction to the Man of Law's Prologue

The host realizes that it is the 18<sup>th</sup> of April and ten o'clock, by the sun and the shade. He remarks that a quarter of the day has passed and that they must waste no more time. The host then asks the lawyer, the Man of Law, to tell a tale, as to not stand in idleness any longer and waste time. The lawyer agrees, for he had made a promise to do so and "To breke forward is nat myn entente" Introduction to the Man of Law's Prologue, l.40. The lawyer comments that Chaucer has already told so many tales of lovers and wives and myths that there are not many stories left to tell or even re-tell. He proceeds to list numerous famous medieval stories and their redundancies in history, and eventually decides on a tale in which he shall tell in prose.



# The Man of Law's Prologue

The Lawyer begins to talk about poverty and evil and the effects of it on society. He questions peoples' morals and reverence to Christ, when people are greedy and do not help others in need. He, as a lawyer, begins to place judgment on people in his prologue. He cynically states that society seems to only care about money; and that society shuns poverty. "Bet is to dyen than have indigence. / Thy selve neighebor wol thee despise, / If thou be povre, farwel thy reverence!" Man of Law's Prologue, l.16-18. He explains to the group that he will tell them a tale that a merchant taught him years ago.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 3



# The Man of Law's Tale

The Man of Law's tale begins with a company of traders making a journey to Rome from Syria. While in Rome, they meet the emperor's daughter, Constance, who was well known through the land for both her beauty and her good nature. When they returned to Syria, they told the Sultan stories of Constance and he immediately became enraptured with her. He desired to marry this wonder-girl, but received bad news from his advisors who told him that a Christian emperor could and would never allow his daughter to marry a Muslim. "Bitwene hir bothe lawes, that they sayn / They trowe that no cristene prince wolde fayn / Wedden his child under oure lawes swete / That us were taught by Mahoun oure prophete." Man of Law's Tale, l.88-91.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 4

Thereupon those words, the Sultan decided to convert to Christianity with his baronets so that he could marry Constance. Upon conversion, the Roman Empire gave Constance to the Sultan in marriage much to her dismay, for she did not wish to live in a foreign country. Constance did accept the marriage, for she believes that women must be subject to men's decisions and rulings.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 6

When the Sultan's mother, the Sultana, hears of Constance's actions, despite her happiness, she sends for her own council to never renounce the Islamic faith. She likens Constance to the biblical character of Eve who tempts others to sinful actions and plan to simply pretend to accept Christianity, meanwhile remaining true to their Muslim faith. They will host a feast celebrating the newly married couple, during which the Sultana will have every attendee killed. The great feast occurred and Constance was the only survivor of the massacre. She was then returned to Italy on a boat with food, but with no methods of navigation.

Topic Tracking: Violence 6

Constance lived on this small boat for years, surviving on Christian prayer, until it crashed on the shores of Northcumberland. She was found by the warden of a castle near the shores and refused to reveal her true identity to these strangers. The warden and his wife, Dame Hermengild were private pagan worshipers and eventually learned who Constance was from a blind Christian on the beach. Hermengild and her husband became Christians out of fear.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 5

The lord of the castle, Alla king of Northcumberland, however, was at war with the Scots at this time. Influenced by Satan, a young knight fell in love with Constance, despite her refusal of his affections. This knight planned revenge against her one night and broke into her bedroom that she shared with Dame Hermengild. He slit Hermengild's throat



and placed the knife next to Constance, framing her for the murder. The warden and Alla returned home to find Hermengild dead. The knight immediately accused Constance of the murder, yet nobody believed her to be guilty. Nonetheless, she was sentenced to death. Constance prayed for a miracle, for she believed herself to be innocent. Alla overheard her prayers and pleas and decided to have the Knight swear on a Bible that Constance is guilty. Upon doing so, he was struck down and his eyes burst. When Alla witnessed such a miracle, he immediately converted to Christianity and sentenced the knight to death instead of Constance.

Topic Tracking: Violence 7

Alla soon married Constance, much to his mother's, Lady Donegild, dismay. King Alla was away in Scotland soon after the marriage when Constance gave birth to their first child named Mauritius. Lady Donegild intercepted each letter from Constance to Alla and changed the content, stating that their new baby was evil and wicked. Alla returned the letter, vowing to love his child no matter what malevolence he brings, to which Lady Donegild changed that letter with one banishing Constance and the baby to the same boat which brought them to the shores.

Upon King Alla's return to the shores, he murdered his mother for her cruel intentions and malevolence. However, his actions did not save Constance, who was already living in another foreign kingdom where the warden's steward came aboard her ship and attempted to rape her. She was saved by his sudden drowning from the ship, most likely due to her faith in Christ.

Topic Tracking: Violence 8

The tale returns to the original story of the Sultan and the Sultana of Syria. In response to the massacre of his Christian men in Syria, the Emperor of Rome sent an army to the Sultan. On the way, a leading senator in the Roman army met Constance and brought her back to Rome. However, when she arrived home, nobody remembered her. At the same time, King Alla traveled to Rome to come to terms with the deaths and banishments of his mother and wife. The senator feasted with Alla and Mauritus and recognized him as vaguely familiar. Everyone was reunited with family: Constance with her father, and Alla and Constance who returned to England, and Mauritius (Maurice) who eventually became the emperor of Rome.



# The Wife of Bath's Prologue

The Wife of Bath begins her tale with a prologue that lasts longer than the story itself. She talks proudly and openly about her multiple experiences with marriage, namely five. She overtly ignores any Christian principles when discussing her five marriages and returns to the Christian principle of being fruitful and multiplying, as something that she adheres to dearly. She uses many supposed lines from the Bible to support her personal actions, proving them lawful.

She mentions that she will welcome a sixth husband when ready and points out that King Solomon had multiple wives. She also mentions that Jesus never explicitly stated any laws about virginity, and goes on to mention that people have body parts for sex and should use them accordingly. "I pray you, telleth me, / Or where comanded he virginitee?" Wife of Bath's Prologue, l.61-62.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 4

The Pardoner immediately interjects negatively on the Wife of Bath's actions, to which she responds with descriptions of each of her husbands. Three of them were good men, while two of them were young (and implicitly not good). The three benevolent husbands were rich, old, and kind, and the Wife of Bath knew how to manipulate them by withholding sex until she got what she wanted. However, her fourth husband was young and had a mistress with the marriage. The two had met their matches in one another, as they shared many of the same qualities, until he unfortunately dies. The fifth husband, Jankin, however, was a cruel man, for he was violent in his actions. He was an Oxford student who was living with one of the Wife of Bath's friends while she was still married to her fourth husband, and when he died, the two were married: Jankin, age twenty and the Wife of Bath, twice his years. She gave him all of her property and he still never let her have her way with any actions or disputes, and one time he struck her so hard on the ear that she lost hearing forever from that side. He cited Roman history as proof that a wife should be submissive, yet the Wife of Bath could not be submissive in a way that he liked.

Topic Tracking: Violence 9

The Wife of Bath then cites stories from the Bible that denigrate women. She illustrated how women in books are written by monks who have no personal contact with women. She claims that these stories would be different if women wrote them. After her violent attack by Jankin, he became so penitent that he gave up his authority in their marriage. From then on, they were kind to one another, for both parties got what they wanted. Having detailed her personal life, the Wife of Bath is now ready to tell her tale.



# The Wife of Bath's Tale

The Wife of Bath returns to the Arthurian times of fairy queens and elves to tell her story. One day, one of King Arthur's knights found a maiden walking alone, and raped her. The crime of rape usually was awarded death; however, the queen begged to save the knight's life. She told the knight that she could save his life if he could answer the one question: What do women desire? "I grante thee lyf, if thou kanst tellen me / What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren. / Be war and keep thy nekke-boon from iren," Wife of Bath's Tale, l.48-50.

Topic Tracking: Violence 10

The queen gave the knight one year to find the answer to her question before he lost his life. The knight began his journey to discover what women desire, but could find no satisfactory answers or responses. He was told wealth, status, sexual performance, happiness, and other such answers, but never found one solitary answer. After the full year almost passed, he knew that he must accept his death and return to the Queen. Before he gave up, he met an old woman who agreed to tell him the answer if he would marry her. She said that women desire control and sovereignty over their husbands. The knight returned to the queen and gave that answer, which turned out to be the correct response. The knight, now forced and bound to marry the old lady, became miserable and wished for death instead, for he knew he must now marry her. The two begin to quarrel and put each other down, for he believed her not only to be ugly, but of low-birth, and she called him a snob and un-gentlemanlike. The old woman decided to give the knight a choice.

He can marry her, an ugly old woman who is kind and devoted, or have a young, beautiful maiden with independence. He chooses to free the old woman and proceeds to kiss her old body. When they kiss, the old woman transforms into a beautiful young lady. The two live happily ever after and they were devoted to one another. The Wife of Bath concludes her tale with a moral that allows Christ to grant all women submissive husbands who will always satisfy them sexually in bed.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 7

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 5

# The Friar's Prologue

The devout and well-mannered Friar complements the Wife of Bath on her tale and tells the group that he, too, has a story about an impious summoner. The summoner starts to pick a fight with the Friar for introducing such a tale, until the host breaks the two apart and tells the Friar to begin his tale.

Topic Tracking: Violence 11



# The Friar's Tale

The Friar's Tale is about an archdeacon's summoner extremely adept in discovering those against whom the Church declares malevolent. The Church has strict laws against fornication, witchcraft, and lechery. Although immoral to the core, the summoner was powerful in discovering the lechers and forcing them to pay large amounts to the church. The Summoner in the group of pilgrims interrupts the Friar's tale with concern; however, the fair host allows the Friar to persist with his story. A feud has developed between these two pilgrims to Canterbury: the Friar and the Summoner. The Friar insists that *his* summoner would only summon those who had money to actually pay the church and would also hire the help of prostitutes, who in exchange for names of clients would be given safety. Incidentally, the summoner also hired those prostitutes for sexual services.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 6

*"That lay by hem, they tolde it in his ere.  
Thus was the wenche and he of oon assent;  
And he wolde fecche a feyned mandement,  
And somne hem to chapitre bothe two,  
And pile the man, and lete the wenche go."* Friar's Tale, l.58-62

The summoner was traveling one day to issue a summons to a hunting yeoman. Aware that his profession was not favorable, he assumed the identity of a bailiff. The yeoman also claimed to be a bailiff and therein offered his hospitality to his supposed kindred spirit. Both the summoner and the yeoman travel together until the summoner inquires as to the yeoman's lodgings. He plans to steal from him. The yeoman claims to make his money through extortion and the summoner claims to do the same. The two eventually admit to their own villainy, until the yeoman reveals that he is the devil living in hell. The two discuss their shape, dwellings on earth, ability to on take human form, and labors. The summoner inquires to the yeoman's (devil's) labors on earth, to which he responds that he and everyone else is an instrument of God. The devil tells the summoner that the two will meet again and he will give more evidence of hell than either Dante or Virgil could offer.

The summoner recommends that the two continue on their journey, with each taking a share of their earnings. They bump into a carter whose wagon was stuck in the mud and was overtly cursing the devil for his pains. The summoner gladly suggests that the yeoman (the devil) take all of the carter's possessions as revenge. As the carter prays to God, the horses pull the wagon out of the mud. The summoner had many more plans for the two together; however, the devil plans to leave him. He says that they will meet again soon. An old crone, the woman whom the summoner wanted to visit with the devil, is given a summons to meet with the archdeacon for excommunication. She cannot attend due to illness and requests to pay the summoner to attend in her place. He demands a sum too large for her poor livelihood, and she cannot pay, despite her guiltlessness. She begins to curse the summoner for his unfair request, saying that she



would like to give his body to the devil. The devil overhears the crone's request and grants his presence in hell that night. When she spoke, both the yeoman (devil) and the summoner arrived in hell, the home of true summoners.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 7



## The Summoner's Prologue

The Summoner, enraged by the Friar's tale, brings his own story into the group of pilgrims for entertainment. His tale is about a felonious friar: "This frere bosteth that he knoweth helle, / And God it woot, that it is litel wonder; / Freres and feendes been but lyte asonder." Summoner's Prologue, l.8-10. In his tale, a friar is thrown into hell and sees the horrors therein. The angel that leads him to hell, tells him also that many friars do live there, and they fly and swarm out of the devil's 'arse-hole.' The Summoner begins his tale about saving all people but the unsalvageable friars.



# The Summoner's Tale

In Holderness, a marshy part of Yorkshire, a friar preached sermons begging for donations to the church and later from the local residents for charity. The friar went to Thomas, a local resident's house, who was ill, and requested a meal from his wife, who told him that their child died less than two weeks earlier. The friar told them that he had a vision that their child had died and gone to heaven, as did his fellow friars. These 'holy men' have special powers that allow them to live richly spiritually on this earth. The friar goes on to say that his close relationship to God lies in impoverished lifestyle. Thomas's illness persists, he says, because he does not give enough money to the Church. The friar then tells a tale of an angry king who had sentenced a knight to death because he returned home without his partner. The king believed the knight to have murdered the partner solely because he had arrived alone. As another knight was leading the knight to his death sentence, the two stumbled across the supposed murdered knight. The third knight went to the angry king to reverse the first knight's sentence. However, he was met with more disturbances. The king sentenced all three to death.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 8

The friar tells of another furious king named Cambyses. He was a drunkard and killed one of his knight's son's because of his foolish pride. He believed he still held his coordination in his drunken stupor and shot an arrow to prove his soberness. Yet another ireful king, Cyrus of Persia, destroyed the river Gyndes because one of his horses drowned in it. The friar again requests money from Thomas for the monks, to which Thomas responds that he is sitting on the gift. Thomas farts on the friar's hands and the servants chase him away. Furious, the friar found the lord of the manor upon exit and complained that Thomas' gift was supposed to be divided equally. The lord responded that the fart would be equally split among all deserving monks and the tale ends.

## The Clerk's Prologue

The host spots the quiet Clerk reading alone and asks him to tell a tale, not of sin or woe or even boredom, but of happiness and adventure. To the host's very detailed directions, the Clerk responds with a tale that he learned from another clerk from Padua named Petrarch, now deceased.



# The Clerk's Tale

The Clerk's tale opens with an extensive description of the Italian base of a mountain called Saluzzo. There lived a marquis named Walter who refused to marry until his townspeople convinced him to do so on one condition. He planned to choose his own wife and everyone must accept her with as high esteem as an emperor's daughter, despite her class or wealth. "Lat me allone in chesyng of my wyf, / That charge upon my bak I wole endure; / But I yow preye, and charge upon youre lyf / That what wyf that I take, ye me assure / To worshipe hir, whil that hir lyf may dure, / In word and werk, bothe heere and everywhere, / As she an emperoures doghter weere. Clerk's Tale, l.106-112.

One day while hunting, Walter stumbled upon Griselde, the humble daughter of Janicula, and he realized that he had found his wife. She was beautiful, virtuous, charitable, and courageous, and could pass for any nobility. On his wedding day, much to the town's surprise, Walter visited Janicula to ask for Griselde's hand in marriage. They were wed and Griselde's virtue spread throughout Saluzzo, as she gave birth to a baby girl. Soon after the child's birth, Walter decided to test his wife, for although he loved her, the public did not see the child's nobility and wished her dead. He told everyone that the baby was dead, secretly sending her to live with his sister, the Countess of Panago, in Bologna. Walter felt pity for his grieving wife and they soon gave birth to a boy, replacing the loss of the previous baby. Again Walter gave her the test and sent the child away because of its lack of supposed nobility. She said that she would agree to its death only if it would please him and she gave up all rights to her motherhood.

Walter continued to come up with more tests for his wife's loyalty, much to the public's surmise. They could not believe his harsh treatment of his wife and thought him a murderer of his own children. Walter next decided to present Griselde with a fake papal bull declaring Walter's necessity to take on a new wife. Griselde, once again, accepted her fate and protested her love for the marquis, solely requesting her dignity upon exodus from the palace. He did not even allow her clothing and she silently left the palace to return home with her father, naked and embarrassed.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 8

Walter's sister, the Countess of Panago came to Saluzzo with Griselde's two children, alive. Griselde received a message from Walter of his new wedding and requested her to plan the event. Again, she complied with his wishes, for the new wife was more fair and virtuous than even she. Walter then revealed the truth. The supposed new wife was the first baby girl and that he was only testing Griselde's loyalty throughout the years. Griselde returned to the palace as Walter's wife and the two children were returned to their original parents, where the family now treated each other with respect and kindness.



The Clerk claims that the moral to his tale lies in the fact that he believes all women should be as steadfast and loyal as Griselde. Yet, they do not have to suffer necessarily to the extent that Griselde did over the years with Walter.

## The Merchant's Prologue

The merchant comments on the previous tale by telling of his wife's horrible cruelty. He believes that all married men must live with sorrow and misfortune. Other pilgrims, who have been recently married, ask the merchant to tell them a tale of such curses, since the host believes him to be knowledgeable in the art of marriage.



# The Merchant's Tale

January, a prosperous knight from Lombardy, finally decided at age sixty to marry, after being convinced by others that paradise on earth is the married life. January's brother, Justinus, tried to convince him otherwise by citing scholarly advice from Tehophrastus who said that men should never wed; servants always show more diligence and respect and certainly never claim as much as a wife does. January responded with several biblical stories of ruined male lives without wives, such as Adam and Eve.

The elderly knight desired a wife younger than thirty, much to Justinus' displeasure, for he warned him that the young, foolish woman could be shrews or drunkards. Although everyone knows that Justinus has a wonderful wife, he knows that she also has her faults. The two brothers quip over marriage benefits and drawbacks, residing on Justinus' prediction that he will not please his wife for more than three years. January decides to marry a young woman, much to everyone's heeding, believing that he would find perfect happiness.

On the night of their wedding, January lusted after his new wife, May, believing his forceful actions to be justified because of their ceremonious union. January's squire, Damian, was also in love with May, however, and wrote a love letter to her that he pinned in a silk purse near his heart. Damian was not with January one day, and all the squires told him that Damian was sick. May and January went to visit the poor squire, where Damian slipped May his love letter. She immediately tore up the note to destroy any evidence of his affection for her. She returned the note with one of her own of pity for him. Damian went into January's prized garden to look for May. It was in this garden that January would often bring his young wife for sexual exploits and romantic endeavors. However, January was now becoming possessive of May, therein giving Damian much heartache.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 9

May had made an extra key to the garden to give to Damian. January entered the garden looking for his wife with lustful urges, when Damian walked in and quickly hid in a tree. As the three were in the garden, the King of Fairies, Pluto, was looking onto the scene with his Queen Proserpina, talking of injustices done by women upon men. They decide to use this love triangle as an example.

*Ne se ye nat this honorable knyght,  
By cause, allas! that he is blynd and old,  
His owene man shal make hym cokewold.  
Lo, where he sit, the lechour, in the tree!  
Now wol I graunten, of my magestee,  
Unto this olde, blynde, worthy knyght  
That he shal have ayen his eyen syght,  
Whan that his wyf wold doon hym vileynye.*



*Thanne shal he knowen al hire harlotrye,  
Bothe in reprev of hire and othere mo."* Merchant's Tale, l.1010-1019

A blind January could not climb the tree in the garden and instead, lifted his wife up into it. While in the tree, she had sex with Damian in front of the blind January. Pluto was enraged and immediately restored January's sight so that he could see his wife's injustice. May denied her actions and convinced January that he must still be blind, for he could never have seen what he believes to have seen, for it simply could never happen. A foolish old knight, January, believed his young wife's story and the tale concludes.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 6

# The Squire's Prologue

The host beckons a tale of love and honor from the squire, for he knows those sentiments well. The squire excuses himself for any wrongdoings in the tale he may tell, and begins a good story of love.



# The Squire's Tale

A young noble king by the name of Cambinskan ruled over the land of Tartary with honor and skill. He was the most renown, honorable, and ambitious king in the entire world at this time. He had two sons, Algarsyf and Cambalo, and one daughter, Canacee, by his wife, Elpheta. Canacee was so beautiful that even the squire cannot give her true beauty justice through his poor English oration.

Cambinskan held a large feast to celebrate the twenty-year anniversary of his reign, during which a knight with a gold ring and a sword entered the hall. The knight had been sent from the king of Arabia and India, offering him a brass horse that can miraculously transport a person safely anywhere on the earth within twenty-four hours. The mysterious knight also presents Canacee a mirror that can foresee imminent misfortune. It also has the ability to determine the character of friends and foes, and enables whoever wears the ring to understand the language of any bird and the healing properties of all herbs. This coveted ring is the source of much commotion at the feast. The knight also offers a magical sword whose flat will cure any wounds inflicted by the sharp edge of the knife, but can also slice through any armor. "And what man that is wounded with a strook / Shal never be hool, til that yow list of grace / To stroke hym with the plate in thilke place / Ther he is hurt; this is as muche to seyn, / Ye moote with the plate swerd ageyn / Strike hym in the wounde, and it wol close. Squire's Tale, l.152-157.

The knight was then led to a chamber whilst the ring was given to Canacee. The brass horse, however, could not move until the knight taught people how to move it. Like other mythical horses such as Pegasus, this brass horse became an enigma and source of delight for the people at the feast. They soon learned that the simple way to move the horse was to twirl a peg in its ear.

The morning following the great feast everybody but Canacee stayed in slumber until late. Canacee had dreamed of the ring and the mirror, allowing her sleep to be satisfactory, something that she had not experienced in much time. As she went on a stroll with her maids in the morning, she came across bleeding peregrine falcon that had injured itself and was crying in agony. Canacee picked up the falcon and spoke to it, for she had gained the power from the ring from the knight. The falcon told her a tale of a handsome tercelet who was as seditious and erroneous as he was beautiful. The tercelet, however, fell in love with a kite as well as with the falcon, and simply could not choose between the two. Canacee was able to heal the bird with herbs, another magical trade learned from the Knight. The tale then returns to King Cambinskan, but abruptly ends.

## The Franklin's Prologue

The Franklin talks about songs of joy that the Britons sang in the hills. He has one of those songs committed to memory, but warns the pilgrims that he has no education, so the tale may not be told with eloquence. "But sires, by cause I am a burel man, / At my bigynnyng first I yow biseche, / Have me excused of my rude speche. / I lerned nevere rethorik, certeyn; / Thyng that I speke, it moot be bare and pleyn." Franklin's Prologue, l.8-12. After his grand apology, the Franklin begins his tale.



# The Franklin's Tale

A young Breton knight named Arviragus marries the beautiful Dorigen in the opening of the Franklin's tale. In an unusual egalitarian marriage, their union consists of a couple in which neither is servant nor master, dominant nor subservient. Arviragus is unfortunately sent away to Britain to work for two years soon after their marriage, leaving Dorigen alone in tears. He continued to send letters to her, yet they never erased her pain. She would walk over to the cliffs sometimes with her friends, overlooking the ocean. Perhaps one of the ships would bring back her beloved. Through the days of looking at the ocean, she became worried that the rocks on the shore would destroy her husband's ship upon return.

Dorigen and her friends had garden parties, in which they invited many singers and squires, including the young, Aurelius, who had been in love with Dorigen since her arrival in Brittany. Aurelius declared his undying love for Dorigen and she agreed to become his lover if he could clear the rocks near the shore that could endanger the incoming ships that may contain Arviragus. Aurelius knew that the hopeful task was impossible and thereupon contacted a law student in Orleans who was skilled with the sciences of illusions and other such magic. Aurelius set out to journey to Orleans to meet this student, where in the house of the illusionist, Aurelius found fantastical objects. The law student had the powers to remove all the rocks from the shore for one week in exchange for one thousand pounds. Aurelius was thrilled with the bargain and told a melancholy Dorigen, who realized that she must either give up her body or her name to Aurelius. Dorigen cites several famous maidens who gave up their lives for their faith and their lovers, in lieu of giving themselves to other men, such as Lacedaemon, Hasdrubal's wife, and Lucrece.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 7

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 10

Arviragus eventually returned home to a somber Dorigen who told him of the events that occurred during his absence: that she must succumb to Aurelius because of her promise to him to save Arviragus from the rocks near the shore. Arviragus is honest with Dorigen and promises to bear the burden and chagrin of what she must do. He remarks that one must stay true to a promise above all else and then sends Dorigen to Aurelius to fulfill her promise. Aurelius is so beguiled by Arviragus's honor that he lets Dorigen go free without fulfilling the promise. Aurelius proceeds to pay the law student for his services, who does not force him to pay his debt because of his great respect and honor for his deed. All three men had proven themselves generous and honorable. The tale concludes with the open-ended question: Which of the three men is the more chivalrous, honorable, and desirous?

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 11



# The Physician's Tale

Titus Livius talks about a knight called Virginius, who had many riches, friends, and honor, and also a single child by his wife. This daughter was a perfect creation, almost molded from the hands of Pygmalion. She was fourteen years old, with long golden hair, white skin, and a blessed virtue of chastity. She would often feign illness in order to get out of certain people's company. With all this idleness and boredom in her life, she became curious, causing Virginius to keep an extra special eye on her so that she would remain as virtuous as she was thought.

She read books every day and went to church with her mother. Meanwhile, stories of her virtue and beauty spread through the countryside. A young justice, the Governor of the town, saw the young maid and fell in love with her. "Anon his herte chaunged and his mood, / So was he caught with beautee of this mayde, / And to hymself ful pryvely he sayde, / This mayde shal be myn, for any man." Physician's Tale, l.126-129. He knew that she would never dissent into sin with him, so he sent for a man from town to conspire a plan to deflower the young maiden without getting caught. A man named Claudius, under false pretenses of a judgeship, brings a complaint against Virginius, claiming that he has possession of his young female slave (truly his daughter). The judge gives custody to the churl, Claudius, and takes the young maiden from her father, Virginius. A bitter and saddened Virginius tells his daughter Virginia that he must kill her to end both of their pain. He cannot allow her virtue to be disgraced. She pleads to him for her life, until she faints. Upon awakening she realizes that she must die for him, and Virginius swiftly cuts off her head, as to avoid pain, and brings it to the judge. Judge Appius decrees that Virginius be hanged for the deed; yet the townspeople cry for his life, and both Appius and Claudius are thrown in prison, wherein Appius slew himself. Claudius was to be hanged until Virginius pardoned him of his ill doings into exile.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 8



## The Pardoner's Prologue

The Pardoner begins his tale by talking about his motto, "My theme is alwey oon and evere was, / Radix malorum est Cupiditas." Pardoner's Prologue, l.5-6. He has a speech committed to memory that he divulges to his public at church. He shows his bag of relics, which he openly admits are all fake, and explains how he sells them to people as pardons for their grievances. He has advice for men who believe their wives to be unfaithful and states that these women have no claim to any of his relics. The Pardoner explains his fabricated actions:

*I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,  
And whan the lewed peple is doun yset,  
I preche so, as ye han heerd bifoore,  
And telle an hundred false japes moore."* Pardoner's Prologue, l.63-66

The Pardoner continues to dispel his dishonesty to the pilgrims by telling them about his greed and lack of integrity with those he supposedly pardons of sins. He claims to preach nothing but avarice, for he is guilty of all sins, which he claims to preach against. He would rather be rich and drunk and have a woman in every town than help poor, hungry peasants seeking aid. Now fully drunk, the Pardoner embarks upon his tale that he claims will not be as vicious as he is, and will conclude with a moral for all.



## The Pardoner's Tale

In Flanders, a group of three men did nothing but engage in riotous and irresponsible behavior. One night in a tavern they saw other men carrying a corpse to a grave. A young onlooker told the rioters that the dead man was one of their friends who was slain by a thief named Death. They claim that Death has killed thousands and they vow to slay Death by themselves. As the three riotous drunkards journey to slay Death, they come across an old man clothed in robes who claims that Death will never take him away. He tells them that they will find Death himself under a nearby tree.

The three men find a bushel of gold under the tree instead of Death and agree to divide it equally amongst themselves. They realize that they will look like robbers when they arrive in town with their newfound wealth and thereupon draw straws to see who will go into town to procure food and drink for the three. They plan to stay in the forest with the gold until it is safe to leave in the middle of the night. The youngest of the rioters drew the shortest straw and went into town. While away, the two remaining men decide to kill the third upon his return so that they could split the money in two, instead of three. While he was in town, the young man bought poison for the wine bottle, which he planned to give to the two others so that he could keep the money for himself. When the three men were reunited in the forest, the two older rioters stabbed the youngest and then drank the wine. All three men died.

Topic Tracking: Violence 12

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 12

The Pardoner interjects into his tale at this point preaching against avarice. He then plans to sell his fake relics to the rest of the pilgrims, illustrating avarice at its best.

# The Shipman's Prologue

The host wants to hear a story from the priest. As the two are about to engage in conversation, the Shipman interrupts with news that he will tell the next tale. This story, however, will not be about law or physics or other sciences, but rather a modest tale about Latin.



# The Shipman's Tale

In Saint Denis, a merchant lived with a very beautiful and extravagant wife who spent most of her time in sociable festivals and dances. He foolishly lost money on buying her objects of material wealth such as clothing, to aid in her self-indulgent appearance. In need of money, the wealthy merchant housed and befriended a young monk of thirty years named John. Dan John claimed to be his cousin and thereupon the two established a friendship. John, who was kind and generous to the servants, planned a trip to Burges, which was interrupted by an invitation from the merchant and his wife. The three enjoyed one another's company for three full days.

On the morning of the merchant's supposed departure from Saint Denis, all three awoke early and walked in the garden: the merchant balancing his books, Dan John to pray, and the wife to worry about John. She tells him that she has no lust for her husband in bed and feels melancholy. The two promise to disclose what is truly bothering one another, for they have genuine feelings and kiss. Dan John reveals that he is not truly the merchant's cousin: "He is na moore cosyn unto me / Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!" Shipman's Tale, l.149-150. The wife tells him that she does not have love nor honor for her husband. She also explains the six things she expects from a man as a husband:

*"And wel ye woot that wommen naturelly  
Desiren thynges sixe as wel as I  
They wolde that hir housbondes sholde be  
Hardy, and wise, and riche, and therto free,  
And buxom unto his wyf, and fressh abedde."* Shipman's Tale, l.173-177

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 9

She tells John that she must pay a debt to her husband of one hundred francs, as to be a respectable woman. He loans her the money and kisses her, for they both realize that they are not truly cousins. Before the merchant leaves for Flanders, Dan John asks him for one hundred francs to buy cattle. The merchant secretly gives the money to Dan John and then talks to his wife and to John about their friendship and trust. The merchant happily gives him the money, which he immediately gives to the wife. The merchant told the two to keep an extra eye on his land and books, to make sure that nothing goes awry. The two then fall into bed together while the merchant is away, to repay Dan John for his supposed good deed for the wife.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 13

The merchant eventually returns to Saint Denis to find out the truth of what happened with the hundred francs and his wife. The merchant had repaid his loan in Paris and realized what occurred with the money. He embraced his wife in bed and revealed the truth to her about Dan John's chicanery. The wife is shocked and upset by her actions and gullibility and promises her husband the merchant that she will be true to him and

repay him for all she has done in bed. They were married and now would become an intimate couple. The tale ends as the merchant forgives her for her actions.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 10

# The Prioress's Prologue

The Prioress discusses beauty and God and her tale of the Maiden-Mother. She talks about the burning bush and the power of the almighty, and then summons the Virgin Mary to help her tell a tale.



## The Prioress's Tale

In one part of Asia, there was a Jewry for usury and other such ill-renown tasks, who hated Christ and all Christians. On the other side of the town, there was a small school for Christian children. A widow's son of seven years attended the school, where he kneeled in prayer to the Virgin Mary and was reverent of all subjects relating to Christ the savior. He prayed, yet never knew what the songs meant, for they were in Latin. He asked an older student what the songs meant in his own language, and the student responded that it is for the Virgin Mary. The young boy learned the song and sang it over and over again with glory in his voice. One day he walked through the Jewry singing the song to Jesus's mother and enraged the Jewish usurer. He conspired with the other Jews to chase this boy down and cut his throat in vengeance.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 9

Topic Tracking: Violence 13

The widow, worried about her son, set out to find him. She was told he was last seen in the Jewry and she prayed to the mother of Jesus that he be alive. The provost of the school carried the slain boy away and bound the Jews. "This Provost dooth the Jewes for to sterve, / That of this mordre wiste, and that anon. / He nolde no swich cursednesse observe; / Yvele shal have that yvele wol deserve." Prioress's Tale, l.142-145. The Jews were hanged and the boy was placed on the altar preparing for his coffin. Upon contact with the holy water, the young boy opened his eyes, spoke, and came back to life, despite the cut of his throat. He says that the Virgin Mary spoke to him and protected him from all death so that he may sing to her, as he has always done, by placing a small pearl in his mouth. The abbot removed the pearl, at the boy's request, returning him to his death and placing him in the status of a martyr.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 10

# Sir Thopas's Prologue

The host confronts Chaucer to tell a story of mirth, since he is always to himself and far from gossip. Chaucer responds that he knows no tales, except one long rhyme that he learned years ago about Sir Thopas.



# Sir Thopas

Sir Thopas was born in Flanders, with red lips and a comely nose. He was an excellent hunter, and despite his popularity among the women, was chaste. One day, he rode out into the wild open on his stallion following a glorious female voice. After riding so heavily for the day, he decided to give his horse a rest, and then spoke to the heavens for answers. He declares that he must fall for an elf-queen, for no women in town would make his match. "Alle othere wommen I forsake, / And to an elf-queene I me take / By dale and eek by downe." Tale of Sir Thopas, l. 83-85

Sir Thopas continued to ride until he came across the fairy world and a giant named Sir Oliphant. Oliphant threatened to slay his horse and then warned him of the queen. Sir Oliphant began to throw stones at Thopas, who miraculously escaped the treachery to return home. At home, Sir Thopas requested the aid of several of his men to return and fight for love: the elf-queen. They helped him prepare in his regal battle gear to fight the giant. As he prepares with elaboration, his chivalric description trails off into silence before the tales concludes.



## The Prologue / Tale of Melibeus

The host argues over the tales and the futility of Melibeus's rhyme. He says that he will try to point out the morals of his story as they come, and prays that he does not sound repetitive, for he comes towards the end of the pilgrim's tales.

This section of *The Canterbury Tales* is not so much a tale, as Chaucer calls it a "treatise" that is written in prose and not completed. It cites Ovid and Seneca, among other great philosophical minds of the past, and details the moralistic story of Melibeus. Melibeus married the dutiful Prudence and had a daughter named Sophie. Sophie was viciously murdered one day in five places: her feet, hands, ears, nose, and mouth. Melibeus cried for his daughter and declared his revenge on her attackers. The tale becomes a test of courage and restraint, as Prudence tries to sway him away from vengeance with the voice of reason. The physicians announce Sophie's miraculous recovery as the townspeople discuss a course of action. Melibeus's desires are turned down and he eventually listens and agrees to Prudence's moralistic actions. Prudence convinces Melibeus to put his trust in fortune and give up revenge. Prudence arranges a peace treatise between Melibeus and his enemies, although he does not quite grasp the meaning behind Prudence's philosophical words. The tale ends with a prayer onto the Lord.

Topic Tracking: Violence 14



# The Monk's Tale

As the tale of Melibeus concluded, the host claimed that he wanted his ill-tempered wife to hear the story of Prudence. The Monk resigns to tell the next tale, which is a series of tragedies, as opposed to the singular stories of the other tales. The monk records several historical and biblical characters falling from grace. The first mentioned is Lucifer, followed by Adam's exodus from Paradise, Samson's fall because of his wife, Daniel and Nebuchadnezzar, and so on. Each story is greater in detail than the previous one. Balthazar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, worshipped false gods, idols, despite his warning from Daniel. His kingdom was also divided. Zenobia, the queen of Palmyra, refused her female duty by not marrying, and was eventually destroyed by Romans. King Pedro of Spain was another of the fallen so-called heroes in this list of holy rollers. He was murdered by his brother, similar to Peter, the king of Cyprus. Bernabo Visconti imprisoned his nephew falsely and died in a curious fashion, while Count Ugolini, while imprisoned in the tower of Pisa, attempted to eat his own appendages in lieu of starvation, but eventually died from lack of food with his family. Nero killed himself after cutting open his mother to view her womb and having the philosopher Seneca murdered. Holofernes lost his head in his sleep due to his harsh orders for worship, and Antiochus was punished by God because of attacks on the Jews.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 11

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 14

The monk continues on with stories of Alexander the Great, Julius Caesar, and concludes with Croesus, the King of Lydia, who was hanged because of his pride and wealth. The extensive journey through malevolent souls who have fallen from grace is unique to the tales, for none are fully developed and many are touched upon briefly. All share the common denominator of a single fault keeping them from heaven.



## The Nun's Priest's Tale

An old woman kept a small farm with many animals, including a prized rooster named Chanticleer. Chanticleer crowed incessantly and had seven hens, including the beloved Pertelote. During his sleep, Chanticleer groaned and dreamed that a large yellow dog chased after him. Pertelote mocked Chanticleer's cowardly behavior and said that dreams are nothing but meaningless visions brought upon by ill humor and bad health. Chanticleer responded that he believed dreams to be prophetic and began to tell the story of a traveler who predicted his own death through a companion's dream of a murder where the victim's body was taken away. He goes on to talk about another man's dream that a friend had drowned and that those exact events actually came true. Chanticleer and Pertelote talk of many famous sayings and proverbs until they realize that men and women are perfect for one another. Chanticleer then goes in the morning to search for herbs, where a fox grabs him. Pertelote squawked loudly, alerting the old woman who chased the fox. During the chase Chanticleer was able to trick the fox into speaking, which allowed him to escape from the fox's mouth. The tale ends with everyone alive and safe.



## The Second Nun's Tale

The Second Nun begins a tale telling of the life of Saint Cecilia, born of noble blood in Rome. She was constantly praying to Christ and lived a reverent and virginal life of worship. When she was of age to marry a man named Valerian, she placed a shirt of hair under her garments to protect herself. After her marriage, she told Valerian of a guardian angel who looks over her:

*"I have an Aungel which that loveth me,  
That with greet love, wher so I wake or sleepe,  
Is redy ay my body for to kepe.  
And if that he may feelen out of drede  
That ye me touche, or love in vileynye,  
He right anon wol sle yow with the dede,  
And in youre yowthe thus ye sholden dye.  
And if that ye in clene love me gye,  
He wol yow loven as me for youre clennessse,  
And shewen yow his joye and his brightnesse."* Second Nun's Tale, l.33-42

Valerian replied that he would abide by those rules if it were truly an angel of whom she was speaking. However, if it is another man who prevents them from intimacy, he will slay them both. Valerian plans to see this angel with his own eyes and proceeds to journey to Via Appia to request the old man, Urban, whom Cecilia claims will show him what he wants. When he is purged of his sin, as a pure Christian, he will see the angel.

Topic Tracking: Sexuality 11

Once purged of his sins, Valerian returns home to find Cecilia with the angel. He has a crown of flowers that supposedly only the pure and chaste can see. Cecilia's brother, Tibertius, is summoned and views the floral crown. The angel gives it to Valerian and Tibertius and they proceed to see Urban once more. Before they left, the angel urges Tibertius to cease his idol worshipping.

The two men meet with Urban once again and wonder how Cecilia can worship three gods, to which he responds that they are the Trinity - each a part of the one Christian god. The two men are Christened and then sent off to the prefect, Almachius, for execution. One of the sergeants, Maximus, claimed that he saw their spirits ascending to heaven during their executions, and he was then beaten to death. Cecilia buried him with her two men and was therefore summoned by Almachius. She appeared collected and presentable, without fear, and condemned his worship of idols. Almachius planned to have her executed by boiling, however, she suffered no burns. He then planned to have her executed by swordplay; however, again, after three slashes she suffered no mortal wounds. She was left to die by the executioner as Christians attempt to save her. She eventually dies and is declared a saint by Pope Urban.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 12  
Topic Tracking: Violence 15



## The Canon Yeoman's Prologue

After the story of Saint Cecilia concluded, the pilgrims continued on their journey and bumped into two men, one of whom the narrator believes to be a canon (alchemist). The Canon's Yeoman said that the two of them desired to become a part of the pilgrimage, for they had heard of the glorious tales. The host requested a tale of the Canon. The Yeoman responded that the Canon only knows tales of jolly and mirth. He also proclaimed himself a worthy and admirable man that everyone should be honored to know. The Canon's Yeoman claims that his master is a man of great honor. The Canon departs from the pilgrims because he is ashamed of his Yeoman's overt immodesty of his abilities. After his departure, the Canon's Yeoman decides to tell his own tale.



# The Canon Yeoman's Tale

The Canon's Yeoman begins his tale about a priest in London who was visited by a false clerk requesting a loan. Within two days, the loan is repaid and the clerk desires to illustrate his method of repayment. The priest could not believe the avarice involved in such an action. The canon has the priest tell his servant to gather three ounces of quicksilver and coal. The canon quickly made it appear as if he had created silver within his crucible. The priest then exchanged the fake silver for real money if he promised to never reveal the unlawful method. The Canon's Yeoman concludes the tale with a warning to the pilgrims that all fraud, such as this one, will wind up in punishment one way or another.

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 15



## The Manciple's Tale

When Phoebus lived on this earth, he was a lusty bachelor and a fine archer, slaying serpents and singing with great musical harmony. He was the most handsome and chivalrous knight in the kingdom and one day taught his white crow how to speak the language of humans. Phoebus had a wife, whom he loved more dearly than his own life, and guarded her with the greatest protection possible. He knew that he must let a free spirit fly like any other caged animal, but he made sure to keep her closed in and guarded at all times, nonetheless. While Phoebus was absent one day, his wife sent for his substitute, with whom she was having secret affairs. The white crow, enclosed in its cage, watched the whole time, never saying a word, until Phoebus came home. Upon hearing from the crow that his beloved wife was unfaithful, an enraged Phoebus slew his wife with an arrow and then blamed the crow for telling such stories. He cursed the crow to forever be the color of black and to speak never again: "And to the crowe, O false thief, seyde he, / I wol thee quite anon thy false tale; / Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtngale, / Now shaltow, false thief, thy song forgon, / And eek thy white fetheres everichon." Manciple's Tale, l.188-192

Topic Tracking: Loyalty 16

The Manciple then concludes his tale with a moral that one should never tell another that someone has gone to bed with his wife, and that all men should guard their tongues, for one can never retract what has been said. People are slaves to other's words.



# The Parson's Tale

The Parson's Tale opens with a discussion of ways to reach Jesus Christ, namely Penitence, the acceptance of one's own guilt. Contrition is the crust of a penitent person and is reached six ways. A man must remember his sins, have disdain for his sins, have a fear of hell, remember all the good he must do on this earth while he is alive, remember the sins of Jesus Christ the savior, and finally hope to never sin and accept his glory in heaven. This is contrition, the first half of penitence. The second half of penitence is confession, in which man must confess his sins to Jesus. Confession is the admittance of both venial sins and sins of deed. The Parson then lists the seven deadly sins: Pride (the worst sin of all), Ire, Envy, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lechery. Chastity and Abstinence are some remedies for these sins. When all sins are fully described, the Parson concludes his moralistic tale by saying that the fruit of this penitence is redemption in Jesus Christ the savior.

Topic Tracking: Christianity 13

## Chaucer's Retraction

Chaucer concludes his tales with praise to Jesus Christ. "Now preye I to hem alle that herkne thai litel tretys or / rede, that if ther be any thyng in it that liketh hem, that / therof they thanken oure Lord Jesu Crist, of whom procedeth / al wit and al goodnesse." Chaucer's Retraction, l.1-4. He adds that if anyone does not understand these tales, then it is due to his ignorance and not his intention, which was to fully capture the goodness of Christ in tale. He requests pardon from Christ for any problems there may be with the text. He hopes to be granted mercy and kindness so that he may ascend to heaven at his time and concludes the long tales of Canterbury with this final line: "So that I may been oon of / hem at the day of doome that shulle be saved. Qui cum patre, &cetera." Chaucer's Retraction, l.29-30

Topic Tracking: Christianity 14