



Multiple Critical Perspectives™

Teaching Geoffrey Chaucer's

The Canterbury Tales

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A Message to the Teacher of Literature

OPEN YOUR STUDENTS' EYES AND MINDS with this new, exciting approach to teaching literature.

In this guide, you will find reproducible activities, as well as clear and concise explanations of three contemporary critical perspectives—feel free to reproduce as much, or as little, of the material for your students' notebooks. You will also find specific suggestions to help you examine this familiar title in new and exciting ways. Your students will seize the opportunity to discuss, present orally, and write about their new insights.

What you will not find is an answer key. To the feminist, the feminist approach is the correct approach, just as the Freudian will hold to the Freudian. Truly, the point of this guide is to examine, question, and consider, not merely arrive at “right” answers.

You will also find this to be a versatile guide. Use it in concert with our *Teaching Unit* or our *Advanced Placement Teaching Unit*. Use it along with our *Response Journal*, or use it as your entire study of this title. However you choose to use it, we are confident you'll be thrilled with the new life you find in an old title, as well as in your students.

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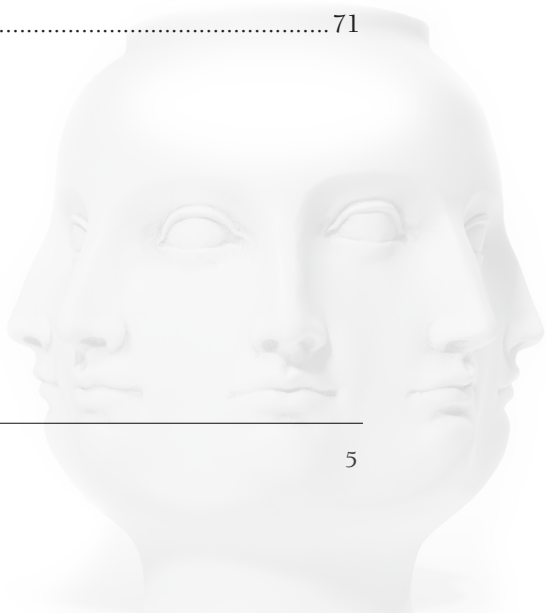
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General Introduction to the Work

Chaucer's Life and Historical Context

THE 14TH CENTURY was a tumultuous era of English history, when the very foundations of society were shaken by war, disease, and rebellion. It was a period of both internal and international conflict, in which the Hundred Years' War created enmity between England and France, while social discord, bloodshed, and corruption raged at home. In this era of relative chaos, Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer was born circa 1343 into a middle-class family of vintners. As a young man, he served as a page in the household of Prince Lionel, the Duke of Clarence, and his wife, Elizabeth de Burgh, the Countess of Ulster. Chaucer quickly became a favorite of the noble family, and he followed Lionel to France and fought in the Hundred Years' War. One year later, in 1360, Chaucer was captured and held for a ransom of £16, which King Edward III paid. Once back in England, the writer served as the Comptroller of London, collecting customs taxes on wool and leather. In addition, he held other civil servant jobs. In 1366, he married Philippa de Roet and raises four children with her: Thomas, Lewis, Agnes, and Elizabeth. Meanwhile, Chaucer wrote many famous works of literature, including *The Parliament of Fowls*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *Triolus and Criseyde*, and of course, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Since Chaucer's background and occupation brought him into contact with people of all social classes, the writer was exposed to the discontent of the lower class, the corruption of the aristocracy and Church, and the lifestyle of the military. The political and social outrages of medieval England were satirized in *The Canterbury Tales*, and while the text is still significant and poignant to modern-day audiences, the tales are more meaningful when viewed in their historical context.

One important historical factor was the Black Death, or bubonic plague, which killed 20% of England's population in the 1350s. The largest percentage of those who died were serfs and peasants, who lived in unsanitary, squalid conditions and had a greater exposure to the disease. As a result, there was a shortage of laborers, and those few who survived knew that lords needed vassals to tend their land. The commoners unionized, demanded higher wages, and—when Richard II levied a heavy poll tax to support the war with France—rebelled. This Peasants' Revolt of 1381 is alluded to in the “Nun's Priest's Tale.”

As the traditional, albeit oppressive, social structure was being shaken, and families were being devastated by the plague, the people sought solace in the God of Christianity, putting their faith in predestination and the hope of a peaceful afterlife. The Church, however, was filled with corrupt clergy, who valued monetary gain and personal advancement over charity and moral living. Rather than being won by election, as had been the custom, church livings (called Benefices) were sold by the Pope. The result was that many parishes were served by the younger sons of noblemen who stood to inherit nothing of their fathers' estates but could live comfortably on the income of church lands. Several actually held

multiple benefices, but they were uneducated and disinterested in providing the sacraments and spiritual guidance that were supposed to be at the root of the Benefice. Some never visited their churches at all. These “clergymen,” who by vocation were supposed to set a good example and spread the word of God, gleaned money off their congregations and pursued lives of luxury more suiting an English gentleman than a Catholic priest. The characters of the Monk, the Friar, and the Prioress in *The Canterbury Tales* are examples of corrupt members of the clergy, who shirk their responsibilities as religious leaders and live in dissolute and selfish lives.

The most egregious transgressions, however, were committed by Pardoners, who were newer additions to the Church and who sold indulgences. An indulgence was guarantee of absolution from sin—sold for a fee, often in advance of the actual sin. As the Pardoner boasts in his tale, individuals like himself manipulated the illiterate and superstitious poor into giving them money, and instead of giving the donations to the Church, kept it for themselves.

The Canterbury Tales can be viewed as a satire in which Chaucer illustrates the corruption in all of the three estates. The author emphasizes stereotypes, such as the dishonest Miller, the licentious Friar, and the avaricious Pardoner. The witty, lighthearted, and often humorous voice of Chaucer’s persona cloaks the underlying cynicism, the direct result of the corruption and injustice of the medieval period.

Plot Summaries

The General Prologue

In the General Prologue, Chaucer establishes the frame narrative by setting the scene and introducing the characters. It is the month of April, and a group of thirty individuals from all estates chance to meet at the Tabard Inn. As each prepares to go on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas Beckett, Chaucer describes him or her. They decide to travel together, and the Host, Harry Bailey, proposes a game to amuse them along the way. He suggests that they hold a storytelling competition. Each person will tell four tales—two on the journey to Canterbury and two as they return to the Tabard. The Host will serve as judge and select the best tale. The winner of the competition will be treated to a meal at the Tabard Inn, for which the other pilgrims will pay. The pilgrims all agree to participate, and the Host has them draw lots to determine who will tell the first tale. The Knight picks the shortest straw and goes first.

The Knight's Tale, Part One

Duke Theseus, on his return home from Scythia with his new queen, Hippolyta, and her sister Emily, is stopped on the road by a group of grieving widows. Their husbands, under the command of Polynices, have attacked Thebes and were killed in battle. However, Creon, the king of Thebes, refuses to allow the wives to bury their husbands' bodies, instead leaving the corpses in the open. In defense of the widows, Theseus wages a war against Thebes and decimates its army. Among the dead bodies, Theseus finds two Theban knights, alive but wounded. He imprisons them in a tower in Athens. The two knights are members of Theban royalty, cousins by the name of Arcita and Palamon.

One day, when looking out into the garden window, Palamon sees Hippolyta's sister, Emily. He immediately becomes enamored of her, and when Arcita notices Palamon's strange state and discovers its cause, he too falls in love with Emily. The two knights argue over who has the greater right to woo her, but they are unable to reach an agreement.

Later, Pirithous, a friend of Theseus, visits Athens. Coincidentally, Pirithous knows and recognizes Arcita, and he asks that Theseus release him from prison. Theseus consents, but only on the condition that Arcita never return to Athens. Granted his freedom, but exiled and prohibited from seeing Emily again, Arcita returns to Thebes. Palamon envies Arcita, believing that his friend's release will allow him to marry Emily. Arcita, on the other hand, is jealous of Palamon for being able to see Emily every day.

The Knight's Tale, Part Two

In Thebes, Arcita is so lovesick that he can neither eat nor sleep. His suffering makes him almost unrecognizable. One night, Mercury comes to Arcita and commands him to return to Athens. Arcita looks at himself in the mirror and realizes that if he were to return, no one would be able to identify him as the exiled knight. He dresses in the clothes of a page, assumes the name Philostrates, and returns to Athens, where he secures a position in Emily's household. Over time, he wins Emily and Theseus's favor and becomes a squire.

Meanwhile, a friend of Palamon helps him drug the guards and escape from prison. Once free, the knight hides in the grove, planning to travel back to Thebes under cover of night and return to Athens with an army.

By simple coincidence, Arcita goes to the same grove and expresses his love for Emily aloud. He also laments that, as a humble squire, he cannot win her affection, nor can he reveal his true identity without being punished by Theseus. Palamon overhears the speech, surprises Arcita and challenges him to a duel. Rather than take advantage of Palamon's unarmed state, Arcita suggests that they return to the grove the following day. In the meantime, Arcita plans to steal two suits of armor, return with them, and give Palamon the first choice. Palamon consents to the arrangement, and they part.

The next day, Arcita fulfills his promise and meets Palamon in the grove. The two knights duel but are interrupted by Theseus and his court. Both Palamon and Arcita reveal their identities, and the duke condemns them to death. The women of Athens, including Hippolyta and Emily, implore the duke to spare the lives of the knights, stating that love is to blame for their suffering and their return to Athens. Theseus revokes the sentence, proposing instead an alternative: Arcita and Palamon will each recruit one hundred knights and return to Athens in fifty weeks for a tournament. The knights' retainers will fight each other, and whichever knight wins (and survives) the tournament will also win Emily. Everyone agrees to this plan, and Arcita and Palamon leave the city.

The Knight's Tale, Part Three

In preparation for the tournament, Theseus builds an amphitheatre. The eastern part of the amphitheatre holds a temple dedicated to Venus. The western part contains a temple to Mars, and the northern part a temple to Diana.

On the day of the battle, Arcita and Palamon return with their knights. Lycurgus, the king of Thrace, accompanies Palamon, and Emetreus, a king of India, comes with Arcita. That morning, Palamon prays to Venus to win Emily's love. Arcita prays to Mars to be victorious in battle. Emily prays to Diana to allow her to remain a virgin forever. All of the deities answer the characters' prayers in some way, but Diana is the only goddess who actually manifests herself. She tells Emily that she must marry one of the knights, for it is predestined that she will become a wife.

After the three characters pray to their chosen god, Venus and Mars quarrel in the heavens, for they have both promised their knights victory. Saturn, the grandfather of the gods, intervenes; he promises Venus that Palamon will win Emily and Mars that Arcita will win the battle.

The Knight's Tale, Part Four

On the day of the tournament, the city of Athens is in great celebration. The Theban knights and their men gather in the amphitheater, and Theseus's herald announces an amendment to the rules: Theseus does not want to lose any good knights in the tournament, so he commands that no one be killed. No sharpened weapons are to be used in the battle, and instead of killing an opponent, a knight should bring him to the stake on the opposing faction's side. The tournament is to continue until either Arcita or Palamon is captured. After this announcement, the tournament begins.

The battle rages until King Lycurgus captures Palamon. Arcita is proclaimed the victor, but before he can celebrate, Pluto, under Saturn's command, creates an earthquake. Arcita's horse becomes frightened, jumps into the air, throws Arcita, and falls on top of him. The knight is mortally wounded and carried off the battlefield. As Arcita lies on his deathbed, he asks Palamon to marry Emily when he dies. Arcita passes away, and all of Athens, including Theseus, mourns his death. Aegeus, Theseus's father, gives him words of wisdom, reminding him that all men must die. Death is not something to be dreaded and feared but something to be welcomed. Life is full of suffering, and death is the ultimate release from torment. Theseus commands that the knight's funeral pyre be set in the grove where he professed his love for Emily and fought his first battle with Palamon.

A few years later, Theseus holds a meeting and invites both Emily and Palamon. He gives a speech to the party and says, in essence, that God created a world that is perfect and good. However, no being or object is everlasting, and all things are destined to death or destruction. Even things that seem strong, like rivers and oak trees, are not enduring. Furthermore, Theseus says that it is better for a man to die in his prime and be remembered as a hero than die in old age and be forgotten. Theseus then asks Emily to marry Palamon, who has always loved her. The two marry, and they live the rest of their lives in perfect happiness.

The Miller's Tale

An elderly carpenter named John lives in the town of Oxford, with his young, beautiful wife Alison and a clerk named Nicholas. John loves his wife very much, but acknowledging the disparity of age between them, fears that she will be unfaithful to him and keeps her under lock and key. Nicholas, however, secretly loves Alison and tries to entice her to have an affair with him. Reluctant at first, Alison tells Nicholas that if they can keep their love secret from John, she will consent. As a result, Nicholas starts to plot the perfect plan to deceive John.

In the meantime, Absalom, the parish clerk, starts to woo Alison. Unlike Nicholas, however, he expresses his love for her openly and without discretion; he stands outside Alison and John's window at night and sings. Alison is annoyed rather than impressed by Absalom's song, and John is not concerned with Absalom's advances.

The following day, Nicholas locks himself in his bedroom and does not join John and Alison for meals. Worried that Nicholas may be ill or even dead, John sends one of his servants to check on him. The servant spies on Nicholas through the keyhole and reports that the clerk is sitting in a chair, staring blankly at the ceiling. John breaks down the door to the clerk's bedroom to find Nicholas in a trance-like state. John attributes Nicholas's disorder to his heretical obsession with astrology, and he tries to wake him. Nicholas finally wakes up, and he tells John that he received a message from the Lord. On Monday, God will flood the Earth again. Nicholas tells John to go into town, procure three tubs, hang them from the rafters of the house, stock them with enough provisions for a single day, and then cut a hole in the roof through which they can escape. On the night of the flood, John, Nicholas, and Alison will each climb into a separate tub, remaining perfectly quiet out of reverence for God. When the flood comes, the tubs will float, and the three of them will be saved.

John believes Nicholas's tale, and he does as he was commanded. On the night of the flood, John, Alison, and Nicholas climb up rope ladders into their individual tubs and remain completely silent. John falls asleep, and Alison and Nicholas sneak out of their boats and go into the bedroom to make love.

Absalom hears a rumor that John is away and dresses up in his finest attire. In the morning, he goes to sing to Alison. He wakes her and Nicholas and begs Alison to let him kiss her. Since it is dark and impossible for Absalom to see, Alison decides to play a trick on him. When the clerk goes to the window, she presents her rear end, and he kisses it.

Absalom quickly discovers the trick and vows to get revenge. He goes to the blacksmith's house and borrows a hot coulter. With the blade in hand, he returns to Alison and asks her for another kiss in exchange for a ring. This time when Absalom moves to kiss her, Nicholas puts his rear end out the window. Expecting this, Absalom puts the coulter to Nicholas's backside and burns him, prompting Nicholas to scream, "Help! Water! Water! Help!" John, thinking that the flood has come, cuts the ropes of his boat and falls to the ground. All of the people hear the commotion and go to see what has happened. When they hear about John's story and the ruse, they ridicule him for his foolishness.

The Tale of the Wife of Bath

In the days of King Arthur, a young knight rapes a woman by the riverside. The king sentences the knight to death, but the queen and the women of the court ask Arthur to spare the knight's life. Arthur relents and allows the queen to decide the knight's punishment. She sends the knight on a quest to discover what women most desire. He is to return in a year with the answer. If he presents the correct answer, she will spare his life; if he does not, he will be executed.

The knight asks all of the women in the kingdom what they most desire, and he receives a variety of answers, such as riches, flattery, and beauty. On the day that he is supposed to return to court with the answer, he resigns himself to the fact that he does not know the answer and will surely die. However, he sees a group of women dancing in the field, and when he approaches them, they disappear, leaving an old, ugly woman in their place. The woman tells him that she knows the correct answer, and she will give it to him in exchange for a promise that he will do whatever she asks. He agrees, and she reveals that the thing women most desire is sovereignty over their husbands.

The knight returns to court, where the queen and women of all ages and social rank are gathered. He gives them his answer, and all of the ladies agree that it is correct. Being spared from execution, the knight must now fulfill his promise and do whatever the old woman asks. She asks the knight to marry her.

The knight is repulsed; nevertheless, unable to renege on his vow, he marries her. On their wedding night, he refuses to consummate the marriage, believing his wife loathsome and inferior. The wife lectures him, telling him that while she is beneath him in social status, true nobility comes from living virtuously. Furthermore, Christ himself was poor, so poverty must be a virtue. She also assures him that an ugly woman is a faithful wife, for beautiful women are coveted by all men and tempted into adultery. Finally, she asks whether he would rather she be beautiful and potentially unfaithful, or ugly and a good wife. The knight cannot decide, so he allows his wife to choose, in effect granting her sovereignty. The old woman rewards her husband by transforming into a beautiful maiden, and the two live happily ever after.

The Pardoner's Tale

The Pardoner begins the tale by warning the listeners to avoid the sins of gluttony, drunkenness, lechery, and swearing. He introduces three revelers, men who delight in all of the sins that the Pardoner has condemned. One day, while in a tavern, they see a funeral procession passing by in the street. They learn that it is a young friend who has passed away. In fact, someone by the name of Death has been killing all of the people in town. The three men decide that they are going to find Death and kill him.

In a drunken rage, the revelers go out in search of Death. On the road, they encounter an old man. They openly harass him for being elderly, and they learn that he, too, is searching for Death. He is in so much pain that he wants to die, but Death refuses to take him. When the men ask whether he has seen Death, the old man tells them that if they continue down the "crooked way," they will find Death sitting under a tree.

The revelers eagerly follow the path to the tree, but instead of finding Death, they discover eight bushels of gold coins. They are overjoyed but hesitate to return to town during the day, fearing that the townspeople will think they stole the gold. They decide to wait until night, and the two older men send the younger one to fetch them food and drink. While he is gone, the two remaining revelers decide to kill the younger one when he returns. That way, they have to split the gold only two ways instead of three. At the same time, the younger man decides to poison the other two, and he goes to the apothecary to buy rat poison. He puts poison into two of the bottles of wine, keeping the third one pure for him to drink.

When the young man returns to the tree, the others stab him to death. They then drink the poisoned wine and die. As the old man promised, the revelers have found Death.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

The tale focuses on a widow's prize rooster, Chanticleer, and his wife, Pertelote. Chanticleer is the only rooster on the farm. He has beautiful feathers, and he crows beautifully and at the correct time every morning. One night, he wakes from a nightmare and tells his wife that he dreamt he was eaten by a dog-like creature, orange in color, with black-tipped ears and tail. Pertelote insults him, calling him a coward. She tells him that his dream is not an omen, but an indication that he is ill. She says his humors are out of balance: in order to stop the nightmares, he must eat some particular herbs and plants in the garden. Chanticleer, however, still argues that his dream was a premonition, and he cites several tales of people who were warned of danger in their sleep. However, as time passes and nothing bad happens, he eventually forgets his dream.

A few months later, Chanticleer encounters a fox, Russel, on the farm. Russel convinces him that he means the rooster no harm, and is actually an admirer. He flatters Chanticleer, citing a rumor that no other cock could crow as well as he. Russel also claims to have known Chanticleer's father, who was also a good singer. The fox says that Chanticleer's father sang so forcefully he had to close his eyes and stick out his neck. Russel asks Chanticleer to sing, imitating his father's style. Chanticleer does as the fox asks, and when he does, Russel grabs him around his neck and runs away with him.

The old widow and the people in the village chase after Russel, and Chanticleer tells the fox to turn to them and make a speech asserting that they cannot stop him and that he will eat the rooster. Russel does, and when he opens his mouth to speak, Chanticleer escapes. Chanticleer learns to be more humble and not give in to flattery, and Russel learns that there are some occasions when it is best to remain silent. ■

List of Potential Themes

- Human action is controlled by fate and predestination.
- Chivalry and courtly love make a civilization sophisticated.
- A married couple should be similar in age.
- The only power women have is deceit and manipulation.
- Individuals should avoid the sins of gluttony, lechery, and pride.
- The clergy is as corrupt as the laity.

Theories to be Applied

- Formalism
- Marxism
- Feminism

Formalist Approach Applied to *The Canterbury Tales*



Notes on the Formalist Approach

The formalist approach to literature was developed at the beginning of the 20th century and remained popular until the 1970s, when other literary theories began to gain popularity. Today, formalism is sometimes dismissed as rigid and inaccessible, held as the subject of scorn in rebellious coming-of-age films. It is an approach that is concerned primarily with *form*, as its name suggests, and thus places the greatest emphasis on *how* something is said, rather than *what* is said. Formalists believe that a work is a separate entity—not at all dependent upon the author's life or the culture in which the work is created. No paraphrase is used in a formalist examination, and no reader reaction is discussed.

Originally, formalism was a new and unique idea. The formalists were called “New Critics,” and their approach to literature became the standard academic approach. Like classical artists such as da Vinci and Michelangelo, the formalists concentrated more on the form of the art rather than the content. They studied the recurrences, the repetitions, the relationships, and the motifs in a work in order to understand what the work was about. The formalists viewed the tiny details of a work as nothing more than parts of the whole. In the formalist approach, even a lack of form indicates something. Absurdity is in itself a form—one used to convey a specific meaning (even if the meaning is a lack of meaning).

The formalists also looked at smaller parts of a work to understand the meaning. Details like diction, punctuation, and syntax all give clues.

Three main areas of study:

- form
- diction
- unity

1. Form

- Cadence—how the words sound. When a character or a narrator is speaking, the sound of what he or she is saying, or how he or she is saying it, can give clues to who the character is and why he or she is in the work.
- Repetition—saying the same word, phrase, or concept over and over. Obviously, when something is repeated several times, it must be important.
- Recurrences—when an event or a theme happens more than once. Like repetition, when something is repeated, it is for a reason.
- Relationships—the connections between the characters. By looking carefully at the connections among the people in the story, one can understand the meaning of a work. Every character is put into the story for a reason. The reader's job is to find that reason.

2. Diction

- Denotation—the dictionary definition of a word. Obviously, understanding the meaning of the words used is vital to understanding a text. If a reader does not know what the words mean, he or she can have no idea what is being said.
- Connotation—the subtle, commonly accepted meanings of words. Even though a word may technically mean one thing, the way it is used in society will often place a slightly different spin on the word. Take for instance the word “condescension.” Though it literally means “the act of coming down voluntarily to equal terms with a supposed inferior to do something,” modern use of the word gives it a negative cast—when someone “condescends” now, he or she is acting superior to someone else.
- Etymology—the study of the evolution of a word's meaning and use. Etymology is especially helpful when one is studying an old text in which the words might literally mean something different from what they mean today. A close study of words also helps a reader understand why the author uses a particular word rather than a synonym.



- Allusions—links from the text at hand to other works. Though this area is less formalist than the others (because it reaches outside of a text for meaning), it is still valuable to consider all of the “connotations” of the word used. There is a reason the author wanted to link his or her text to that of another author, and studying the allusion is the only way to reveal that reason.
- Ambiguity—the use of an open-ended word or phrase that has multiple meanings. Just as the formalist asserts that a lack of form *is* a form, ambiguity can be used to connect several loose ends in a work. The author can use ambiguity to help reveal his or her meaning.
- Symbol—a concrete word or image used mainly to represent an abstract concept. Understanding the use of a word or image to suggest deeper meanings can help a reader gain more from the text. The meaning of the text can be found in the many facets of a symbol.

3. Unity

- The use of one symbol, image, figure of speech, etc. throughout a work serves as a thread to connect one particular instance with every other occurrence of that symbol. Unity helps remind the reader of what has already happened and shows him or her how what is happening currently relates to earlier events or forthcoming events.
- Formalist critics do not look for perfect unity. They look for tension and conflict. Irony and paradox are very important—irony being the use of a word or a statement that is the opposite of what is intended or expected, and paradox being the existence of two contradictory truths. This tension is what drives the work. ■

Essential Questions for A Formalist Reading

1. Does the work exhibit the characteristics of a particular form, or does it have a unique form?
2. In what manner is this story told? Chronologically? Via flashbacks?
3. Is there closure in the narrative? Or is the reader left guessing?
4. What is the point of view of the narrator? How does this point of view affect the story being told?
5. Is the author using a meter? What effect is achieved?
6. Is there any sound that keeps recurring throughout the work? What is it? What does it mean? How does it affect the work?
7. How does any rhythm in the words affect the work?
8. Where are examples of foreshadowing?
9. Are there any visual patterns in the work? What do they do for the work?
10. What details of the setting seem to indicate meaning (time of day, season, physical location, weather)?
11. What would a diagram of the plot look like?
12. Are there any unfamiliar words? Look them up.
13. Are there any paradoxes in the work? Any ironies? What are they? What effect do they have on the tone or plot of the work?

Focus of Study

- How the frame narrative unifies the tales
- The tension between the presentation of each pilgrim in the General Prologue and the voice of that pilgrim within his or her tale
- The ways in which the tales conform to specific medieval genres
- How motifs recur in the diverse tales and what central message they reveal
- The reasons why a modern English translation of *The Canterbury Tales* diminishes the author's intent



Activity One

Analyzing Genre in *The Canterbury Tales*

1. Copy and distribute the handout: Genres in *The Canterbury Tales*.
2. Divide the students into at least five groups and assign each group one of the following tales:
 - The Knight's Tale
 - The Miller's Tale
 - The Tale of the Wife of Bath
 - The Pardoner's Tale
 - The Nun's Priest's Tale
3. Have each group read the description of each literary genre and decide to which genre their assigned tale belongs.
4. Have each group answer the following questions:
 - What is your tale's genre?
 - How does the tale meet the qualifications of that genre?
 - Does the tale deviate from its genre in any way? If so, how, and what do you think is Chaucer's intent for that deviation?
 - What is the central message of the tale?
 - How does the specific genre enhance the tale's meaning?
 - What relationship is apparent between the tale, its genre, and its teller? How does this relationship enhance the tale's meaning?
5. Bring the class back together and have each group present its findings.

Optional Assignment: Ask each group to choose another genre from the list. Then, have the students discuss how the same message of their tale could have been presented in another form. (For example: How would "The Nun's Priest's Tale" be re-written as a fable?)

The Canterbury Tales: Formalist Activity One**Genres in *The Canterbury Tales*****Fabliau**

- The story has a theme that is obscene, bawdy, or sexual in nature.
- The events in the story take place in the present day (at the time the text was written).
- The characters in the story and the setting are common and familiar to the reader.
- One character takes advantage of another character, who is gullible and naïve, and the plot of the story centers on a ruse or trick.
- The story has an element of justice, and characters who are greedy, arrogant, or foolish are punished for their actions.

Medieval Romance

- The central characters of the work are members of the aristocracy.
- The two focuses of the story are chivalry and courtly love.
- chivalry—a moral and ethical code that required men, particularly knights, to be honorable, truthful, and generous. The strong must defend the weak. Sworn oaths must be fulfilled. Justice was valued as highly as courage and strength.
- courtly love—the type of romance in which a man (the lover) reveres a woman (the love object) as if she were his king, lord, or deity. The man frequently must go on a quest to win her love—but the woman is almost always inaccessible, either because she is married, of higher birth, or for some other apparently insurmountable reason.

Beast Fable

- The story features anthropomorphic animals as its main characters; they walk, talk, and behave like humans.
- The animals embody particular virtues and vices common to men and women.
- The fable uses allegory to teach a moral lesson.
- At the end of the story, the good are rewarded and the wicked are punished.

Exemplum

- The story is preceded by a sermon.
- The plot of the tale teaches a moral lesson through example. (For instance, if the sermon preaches against pride, the main character of the story may be hurt because of his arrogance).

Activity Two**Examining the Purpose of the Frame Narrative**

1. Copy and distribute the handout: Examining Frame Narratives.
2. Divide the students into five groups, and assign each group one of the tales:
 - The Knight's Tale
 - The Miller's Tale
 - The Tale of the Wife of Bath
 - The Pardoner's Tale
 - The Nun's Priest's Tale
3. Have students answer the questions on the worksheet in their small groups.
4. When all groups have completed the worksheet, reconvene the class and ask each group to share its answers.
5. As a class, answer the the following questions: What does the frame narrative contribute to the tale, and how would the tale be different if the description of the pilgrims on the journey to Canterbury were excluded? In what ways does the frame narrative enhance the *Tales*? In what ways does it detract from them?

The Canterbury Tales: Formalist Activity Two

Examining the Frame Narrative

1. Who is the narrator of the tale?

2. What are some prominent characteristics of the tale's narrator that are presented in The General Prologue?

3. How do some of the pilgrim's characteristics surface in the tale's narration?

4. What is the relationship between the tale and its prologue? What makes the prologue important? (For the Knight's Tale, study the end of The General Prologue.)

5. Do the other characters inspire or respond to the tale? If so, how?



6. Does this tale have anything in common with the others (types of characters, plot similarities, unifying themes)?

7. What, if anything, do we learn about the pilgrim from the frame narrative that we cannot infer from his or her tale(s)?

8. In what ways does the frame narrative set out expectations for each tale?

9. In what ways does each tale fulfill the expectations set by the frame narrative?

10. In what ways does each tale fail to fulfill the expectations set by the frame narrative?



Activity Three

Analyzing Adherence to Genre in Selected Tales

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Canterbury Tales* Formalism Activity Three Excerpts.
2. If you have not already done so, copy and distribute the handout: Genres in *The Canterbury Tales*.
3. Review with the class the basic elements of the Medieval Romance.
4. Divide the students into pairs or small groups.
5. Have each pair or group examine the selections from the Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale, looking especially for elements of Courtly Love and how they are employed in each tale.

Students should especially note:

- Who is (who are) the lover(s) in each tale? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
 - Who is (who are) the love object(s) in each tale? In what ways are they similar? In what ways are they different?
 - How does the element of the lover's quest play out in each tale?
 - How does the element of the love object's inaccessibility play out in each tale?
 - What is the outcome of each tale? Is the lover successful in his quest? Is there a "happy ending"?
6. As a class, discuss the following questions:
 - Which of the tales is a serious example of the genre and which is a parody of the genre?
 - What in the treatment of the subject matter and/or the use of the genre's elements suggests that this tale is a parody of the genre?
 - Which details in the serious example of the genre seem to be clichéd examples of the genre's elements? Which seem original?

- What does the one tale's adherence to the elements of its genre suggest about the teller of that tale?
- What does the other tale's mockery of the elements of its genre suggest about the teller of that tale?

*NOTE: If **parody** is a new term for your students, explain to them that a **parody** or **spoof** is a humorous imitation of a work, body of works, or genre. Parody often mocks its target by highlighting and exaggerating the target's most ridiculous or clichéd elements. Possibly the best examples of parody that would be familiar to your students would be the Scary Movie, Epic Movie, Not Another Teen Movie, etc., series. Each film imitates and mocks the film genre referenced in its title.*

**The Canterbury Tales: Formalist Activity Three****Excerpts**

From The Knight's Tale

Thus passed by year by year and day by day,
Till it fell out, upon a morn in May,
That Emily, far fairer to be seen
Than is the lily on its stalk of green,
And fresher than is May with flowers new
(For with the rose's colour strove her hue,
I know not which was fairer of the two),
Before the dawn, as was her wont to do,
She rose and dressed her body for delight;
For May will have no sluggards of the night.
That season rouses every gentle heart
And forces it from winter's sleep to start,
Saying: "Arise and show thy reverence."
So Emily remembered to go thence
In honour of the May, and so she rose.
Clothed, she was sweeter than any flower that blows;
Her yellow hair was braided in one tress
Behind her back, a full yard long, I guess.
And in the garden, as the sun up-rose,
She sauntered back and forth and through each close,
Gathering many a flower, white and red,
To weave a delicate garland for her head;
And like a heavenly angel's was her song.

* * *

[Arcita looks out from his prison and sees Emily walking in the garden]

And on that word Arcita looked to see
This lady who went roving to and fro.
And in that look her beauty struck him so
That, if poor Palamon is wounded sore,
Arcita is as deeply hurt, and more.
And with a sigh he said then, piteously:
“The virgin beauty slays me suddenly
Of her that wanders yonder in that place;
And save I have her pity and her grace,
That I at least may see her day by day,
I am but dead; there is no more to say.”

From The Miller's Tale

Fair was this youthful wife, and therewithal
As weasel's was her body slim and small.
A girdle wore she, barred and striped, of silk.
An apron, too, as white as morning milk
About her loins, and full of many a gore;
White was her smock, embroidered all before
And even behind, her collar round about,
Of coal-black silk, on both sides, in and out;
The strings of the white cap upon her head
Were, like her collar, black silk worked with thread;
Her fillet was of wide silk worn full high:
And certainly she had a lickerish eye.
She'd thinned out carefully her eyebrows two,
And they were arched and black as any sloe.
She was a far more pleasant thing to see
Than is the newly budded young pear-tree;
And softer than the wool is on a wether.
Down from her girdle hung a purse of leather,
Tasselled with silk, with latten beading sown.
In all this world, searching it up and down,
So gay a little doll, I well believe,
Or such a wench, there's no man can conceive.
Far brighter was the brilliance of her hue



Than in the Tower the gold coins minted new.
And songs came shrilling from her pretty head
As from a swallow's sitting on a shed.
Therewith she'd dance too, and could play and sham
Like any kid or calf about its dam.
Her mouth was sweet as bragget or as mead
Or hoard of apples laid in hay or weed.
Skittish she was as is a pretty colt,
Tall as a staff and straight as cross-bow bolt.
A brooch she wore upon her collar low,
As broad as boss of buckler did it show;
Her shoes laced up to where a girl's legs thicken.
She was a primrose, and a tender chicken
For any lord to lay upon his bed,
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.

* * *

And so when time of first cock-crow was come,
Up rose this merry lover, Absalom,
And dressed him gay and all at point-device,
But first he chewed some licorice and spice
So he'd smell sweet, ere he had combed his hair.
Under his tongue some bits of true-love rare,
For thereby thought he to be more gracious.
He went, then, to the carpenter's dark house.
And silent stood beneath the shot-window;
Unto his breast it reached, it was so low;
And he coughed softly, in a low half tone:
"What do you, honeycomb, sweet Alison?
My cinnamon, my fair bird, my sweetie,
Awake, O darling mine, and speak to me!
It's little thought you give me and my woe,
Who for your love do sweat where'er I go.
Yet it's no wonder that I faint and sweat;
I long as does the lamb for mother's teat.
Truly, sweetheart, I have such love-longing
That like a turtle-dove's my true yearning;
And I can eat no more than can a maid."
"Go from the window, jack-a-napes," she said,
"For, s'help me God, it is not 'come kiss me.'
I love another, or to blame I'd be,

Better than you, by Jesus, Absalom!
Go on your way, or I'll stone you therefrom,
And let me sleep, the fiends take you away!"
"Alas," quoth Absalom, "and welaway!
That true love ever was so ill beset!
But kiss me, since you'll do no more, my pet,
For Jesus' love and for the love of me."
"And will you go, then, on your way?" asked she.
"Yes truly, darling," said this Absalom.
"Then make you ready," said she, "and I'll come!"
And unto Nicholas said she, low and still:
"Be silent now, and you shall laugh your fill."
This Absalom plumped down upon his knees,
And said: "I am a lord in all degrees;
For after this there may be better still!
Darling, my sweetest bird, I wait your will."
The window she unbarred, and that in haste.
"Have done," said she, "come on, and do it fast,
Before we're seen by any neighbour's eye."
This Absalom did wipe his mouth all dry;
Dark was the night as pitch, aye dark as coal,
And through the window she put out her hole.
And Absalom no better felt nor worse,
But with his mouth he kissed her naked arse
Right greedily, before he knew of this.
Aback he leapt—it seemed somehow amiss,
For well he knew a woman has no beard;
He'd felt a thing all rough and longish haired,
And said, "Oh fie, alas! What did I do?"

Activity Four**Evaluating the Modern English Translation**

1. Copy and distribute the handouts: The Pardoner's Prologue in Middle English and Analysis of Language in The Pardoner's Prologue.
2. Divide the class into pairs or small groups.
3. Have the students read the original Middle English version of the prologue.

NOTE: It may be easier for students to understand the text if they read the text aloud. To reduce the level of noise, you may want to read the prologue with the class, having volunteers read aloud in a round-robin fashion.

4. Discuss the following questions and have students note the answers on the *Analysis of Language* handout.

- What significant repetitions of key words or phrases appear in the passage?
- What does the repetition contribute to the text (e.g., elaboration of ideas, structure and coherence, poetic effect, etc.)?
- What sound patterns do you hear (e.g., rhyme, alliteration, consonance, etc.)? What do they contribute to the text?
- What literary or poetic devices does Chaucer use (e.g., simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, etc.)?
- What rhetorical devices does Chaucer use (e.g., parallelism, asyndeton, polysyndeton, etc.)?

NOTE: It does not matter whether students note a particular device here or in the space for question four. The point is to recognize the device.

- What historical, literary, mythological (etc.) allusions does Chaucer use?
 - What symbols emerge? What do they mean? How is their meaning suggested?
5. Have students reread the Modern English translation of the Pardoner's Prologue and answer the accompanying questions on the *Analysis of Language* handout.

6. Reconvene the class and discuss the following:

- To what extent does the translator adhere to Chaucer's diction and phraseology? What would explain any significant variances you find?
- Has the translator maintained the same tone as the original? Why or why not? What might be the reason(s) for any discrepancies you find?
- To what extent has the translator maintained the sound of Chaucer's poem? What might be the reason(s) for any changes?
- To what extent has the translator maintained Chaucer's use of language devices? What might be the reason(s) for any discrepancies you find?
- To what extent has the translator used the same allusions as Chaucer? What might be the reason(s) for any changes?
- To what extent has the translator developed the same symbols as Chaucer? What might be the reason(s) for any changes?
- Overall, how successfully has the translator maintained the integrity of the *meaning* of Chaucer's original text? If there are changes in meaning, what is their cause? For what reason(s) may the translator have wanted to alter Chaucer's meaning?
- Overall, how successfully has the translator maintained the integrity of the *art* or *poetry* of Chaucer's original text? If there are variances, what is their cause? For what reason(s) may the translator have wanted to alter the artistic/poetic aspect of Chaucer's work?

NOTE: Students do not need to agree or even come to consensus. The purpose of this activity is for the student to consider some of the issues of studying a work in translation, especially those concerned with differentiating between the formalistic qualities of the original versus the formalistic qualities of the translation.



The Canterbury Tales: Formalist Activity Four

The Pardoner's Prologue in Middle English

| | |
|---|--|
| “Lordynges,” quod he, “in chirches whan I preche, I peyne me to han an hauteyn* speche, And ryngge it out as round as gooth a belle, For I kan al by rote* that I telle. My theme is alwey oon*, and evere was— <i>Radix malorum est Cupiditas.*</i> “First I pronounce whennes that I come, And thanne my bulles shewe I, alle and some. Oure lige lordes seel on my patente, That shewe I first, my body to warente, That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk, Me to destourbe of Cristes hooly werk. And after that thanne telle I forth my tales; Bulles of popes and of cardynales, Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe, And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe, To saffron* with my predicacioun*, And for to stire hem to devocioun. Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones, Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones— Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon*. Thanne have I in latoun* a sholder-boon Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep. ‘Goode men,’ I seye, ‘taak of my wordes keep; If that this boon* be wasshe in any welle, If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxe swelle That any worm* hath ete, or worm ystonge, Taak water of that welle and wassh his tonge, And it is hool anon; and forthermoore, Of pokkes and of scabbe, and every soore Shal every sheep be hool that of this welle Drynketh a draughte. Taak kep eek* what I telle: If that the good-man that the beestes oweth Wol every wyke*, er that the cok hym croweth, | <i>fancy or impressive</i> |
| | <i>from memory</i> |
| | <i>always is</i> |
| | <i>“Greed is the root of all evils.”</i> |
| | |
| | |
| | <i>season; sermon</i> |
| | |
| | <i>as everyone believes</i> |
| | <i>brass</i> |
| | |
| | <i>treasure</i> |
| | |
| | <i>snake</i> |
| | |
| | |
| | <i>take heed of</i> |
| | |
| | <i>week</i> |

| | |
|--|---|
| Fastynge, drynken of this welle a draughte, As thilke* hooly Jewoure elders taughte, His beestes and his stoor shal multiplie. `And, sires, also it heeleth jalousie; Lat maken with this water his potage*, And nevere shal he moore his wyf mystriste*, Though he the soothe of hir defaute wiste*, Al had she taken prestes two or thre. `Heere is a miteyn eek, that ye may se. He that his hand wol putte in this mitayn, He shal have multiplieng of his grayn, Whan he hath sowen, be it whete or otes, So that he offre pens*, or elles grotes*. `Goode men and wommen, o thyng warne I yow: If any wight* be in this chirche now That hath doon synne horrible, that he Dar nat, for shame, of it yshryven* be, Or any womman, be she yong or old, That hath ymaked hir housbonde cokewold*, Swich folk shal have no power ne no grace To offren to my relikes in this place. And whoso fyndeth hym out of swich blame, He wol come up and offre a Goddes name, And I assoille* him by the auctoritee Which that by bulle ygraunted was to me.' "By this gaude* have I wonne, yeer by yeer, An hundred mark sith I was pardoner. I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet, And whan the lewed peple is down yset, I preche so as ye han herd bifoore And telle an hundred false japes moore. Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke, And est* and west upon the peple I bekke*, As dooth a dowve* sittynge on a berne. Myne handes and my tonge goon so yerne* That it is joye to se my bisynesse. Of avarice and of swich cursednesse Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free | <i>the same</i> |
| | <i>soup</i> |
| | <i>distrust</i> |
| | <i>although he knows of her offense</i> |
| | <i>pence; groats (both are coins)</i> |
| | <i>church</i> |
| | <i>forgiven</i> |
| | <i>a cuckold</i> |
| | <i>absolve</i> |
| | <i>trick</i> |
| | <i>east; call</i> |
| | <i>quickly</i> |

To even hir pens*, and namely unto me.
 For myn entente is nat but for to wynne,
 And nothyng for correccioun of synne.
 I rekke nevere*, whan that they been beryed,
 Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed!
 For certes, many a predicacioun
 Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun;
 Som for plesance of folk and flaterye,
 To been avaunced by ypocrisye,
 And som for veyne glorie, and som for hate.
 For whan I dar noon oother weyes debate,
 Thanne wol I styngge hym with my tonge smerte
 In prechyng, so that he shal nat asterte
 To been defamed falsly, if that he
 Hath trespassed to my bretheren or to me.
 For though I telle noght his propre name,
 Men shal wel knowe that it is the same,
 By signes, and by othere circumstances.
 Thus quyte* I folk that doon us displesances*;
 Thus spitte I out my venym under hewe*
 Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe.
 “But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:
 I preche of no thyng but for coveityse*.
 Therefore my theme is yet, and evere was,
Radix malorum est Cupiditas.
 Thus kan I preche agayn that same vice
 Which that I use, and that is avarice.
 But though myself be guilty in that synne,
 Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne*
 From avarice and soore to repente.
 But that is nat my principal entente;
 I preche nothyng but for coveitise.
 Of this mateere it oghte ynogh suffise.
 “Thanne telle I hem ensamples* many oon
 Of olde stories longe tyme agoon.
 For lewed people loven tales olde;
 Swiche thynges kan they wel reporte and holde.
 What, trowe* ye, that whiles I may preche,

to give his pence

never concern myself

*get revenge upon; trouble
pretense*

greed

turn away

examples or stories

believe

And wyne gold and silver for I teche,
That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?
Nay, nay, I thoghte it nevere, trewely!
For I wol preche and begge in sondry* landes; *diverse*
I wol nat do no labour with myne handes,
Ne make baskettes and lyve therby,
By cause I wol nat beggen ydelly*. *in vain*
I wol noon of the apostles countrefete*; *imitate*
I wol have moneie, wolle, chese, and whete,
Al were it yeven of the povereste page,
Or of the povereste wydwe* in a village, *widow*
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne.
Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne
And have a joly wenche in every toun.
But herkneth*, lordynges, in conclusioun: *listen*
Youre likyng is that I shal telle a tale.
Now have I dronke a draughte of corny ale,
By God, I hope I shal yow telle a thyng
That shal by reson been at youre likyng.
For though myself be a ful vicious man,
A moral tale yet I yow telle kan,
Which I am wont to preche for to wynne.
Now hoold youre pees! My tale I wol bigynne.”



A few pronunciation tips:

- Pronounce the “e” sound in words like “me,” “he,” “preche” and “speke” as a long “a,” and pronounce the “e” at the end of the words. They should sound like “may,” “hay,” “*praycha*” and “*spayka*.”
- Pronounce a double “o” as you would a long “o.” The word “gooth” here rhymes with modern English “both,” not with “tooth.”
- Pronounce the “a” in “name” as short; the word should rhyme with modern English “bomb,” not with “fame.” Don’t forget to say that final “e”! (The word should sound like “*fah-muh*.”)
- Pronounce an “ou” sound as “ooh”; the word “oure” should rhyme with modern English “sewer,” not with “flower.”
- Pronounce “i” sounds as “ee.” The pronoun “I” rhymes with “flee.”
- Roll your “r”s if you are able.

The Canterbury Tales: Formalist Activity Four**The Pardoner's Prologue in Modern English**

"Masters," quoth he, "in churches, when I preach,
I am at pains that all shall hear my speech,
And ring it out as roundly as a bell,
For I know all by heart the thing I tell.

My theme is always one, and ever was:

'Radix malorum est cupiditas.'¹

Greed is the root of all evils (I Timothy: 6.10).

"First I announce the place whence I have come,

And then I show my pardons, all and some.

Our liege-lord's seal on my patent perfect,

I show that first, my safety to protect,

And then no man's so bold, no priest nor clerk,

As to disturb me in Christ's holy work;

And after that my tales I marshal all.

Indulgences of pope and cardinal,

Of patriarch and bishop, these I do

Show, and in Latin speak some words, a few,

To spice therewith a bit my sermoning

And stir men to devotion, marvelling.

Then show I forth my hollow crystal-stones,

Which are crammed full of rags, aye, and of bones;

Relics are these, as they think, every one.

Then I've in latten² box a shoulder bone

thin brass

Which came out of a holy Hebrew's sheep.

'Good men,' say I, 'my words in memory keep;

If this bone shall be washed in any well,

Then if a cow, calf, sheep, or ox should swell

That's eaten snake, or been by serpent stung,

Take water of that well and wash its tongue,

And 'twill be well anon; and furthermore,

Of pox and scab and every other sore

Shall every sheep be healed that of this well

Drinks but one draught; take heed of what I tell.

And if the man that owns the beasts, I trow,

Shall every week, and that before cock-crow,



And before breakfast, drink thereof a draught,
 As that Jew taught of yore in his priestcraft,
 His beasts and all his store shall multiply.
 And, good sirs, it's a cure for jealousy;
 For though a man be fallen in jealous rage,
 Let one make of this water his pottage³
 And nevermore shall he his wife mistrust,
 Though he may know the truth of all her lust,

soup

Even though she'd taken two priests, aye, or three.

“Here is a mitten, too, that you may see.

Who puts his hand therein, I say again,

He shall have increased harvest of his grain,

After he's sown, be it of wheat or oats,

Just so he offers pence⁴ or offers groats.⁵

pennies; silver coins worth four pence

“Good men and women, one thing I warn you.

If any man be here in church right now

That's done a sin so horrible that he

Dare not, for shame, of that sin shriven be,

Or any woman, be she young or old,

That's made her husband into a cuckold,

Such folk shall have no power and no grace

To offer to my relics in this place.

But whoso finds himself without such blame,

He will come up and offer, in God's name,

And I'll absolve him by authority

That has, by bull, been granted unto me.’

“By this fraud have I won me, year by year,

A hundred marks, since I've been pardoner.

I stand up like a scholar in pulpit,

And when the ignorant people all do sit,

I preach, as you have heard me say before,

And tell a hundred false japes, less or more.

I am at pains, then, to stretch forth my neck,

And east and west upon the folk I beck,

As does a dove that's sitting on a barn.

With hands and swift tongue, then, do I so yarn

That it's a joy to see my busyness.

Of avarice and of all such wickedness
Is all my preaching, thus to make them free
With offered pence, the which pence come to me.
For my intent is only pence to win,
And not at all for punishment of sin.
When they are dead, for all I think thereon
Their souls may well black-berrying have gone!
For, certainly, there's many a sermon grows
Ofttimes from evil purpose, as one knows;
Some for folks' pleasure and for flattery,
To be advanced by all hypocrisy,
And some for vainglory, and some for hate.

For, when I dare not otherwise debate,
Then do I sharpen well my tongue and sting
The man in sermons, and upon him fling
My lying defamations, if but he
Has wronged my brethren or—much worse—wronged me.
For though I mention not his proper name,
Men know whom I refer to, all the same,
By signs I make and other circumstances.
Thus I pay those who do us displeasances.⁶
Thus spit I out my venom under hue
Of holiness, to seem both good and true.
“But briefly my intention I'll express;
I preach no sermon, save for covetousness.
For at my theme is yet, and ever was,
'Radix malorum est cupiditas.'
Thus can I preach against that self-same vice
Which I indulge, and that is avarice.
But though myself be guilty of that sin,
Yet can I cause these other folk to win
From avarice and really to repent.
But that is not my principal intent.
I preach no sermon, save for covetousness;

who displeases us

This should suffice of that, though, as I guess.
“Then do I cite examples, many a one,



Out of old stories and of time long gone,
For vulgar people all love stories old;
Such things they can re-tell well and can hold.
What? Think you that because I'm good at preaching
And win me gold and silver by my teaching
I'll live of my free will in poverty?
No, no, that's never been my policy!
For I will preach and beg in sundry lands;
I will not work and labour with my hands,
Nor baskets weave and try to live thereby,
Because I will not beg in vain, say I.
I will none of the apostles counterfeit;
I will have money, wool, and cheese, and wheat,
Though it be given by the poorest page,
Or by the poorest widow in village,
And though her children perish of famine.
Nay! I will drink good liquor of the vine
And have a pretty wench in every town.
But hearken, masters, to conclusion shown:
Your wish is that I tell you all a tale.
Now that I've drunk a draught of musty ale,
By God, I hope that I can tell something
That shall, in reason, be to your liking.
For though I am myself a vicious man,
Yet I would tell a moral tale, and can,
The which I'm wont to preach more gold to win.
Now hold your peace! my tale I will begin."



The Canterbury Tales: Formalist Activity Four

Analysis of Language in The Pardoner's Prologue

Answer the following questions about the Middle English text of “The Pardoner’s Prologue.” Be certain that you can support and illustrate all of your assertions with direct quotations from the text.

1. Note any significant repetition of key words or phrases.

2. What does the repetition contribute to the text (e.g., elaboration of ideas, structure and coherence, poetic effect, etc.)?

3. If you are able to get a sense of tone from the passage, what is that tone? How is it achieved?

4. What sound patterns emerge (e.g., rhyme, alliteration, consonance, etc.)? What do they contribute to the text?

5. Note any literary or poetic devices you encounter (e.g., simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, etc.). Be certain to supply at least one example for each device you list. (It does not matter whether you note a particular device here or in the space for question five. The point is to recognize the device.)

6. Note any rhetorical devices you encounter (e.g., parallelism, asyndeton, polysyndeton, etc.). Be certain to supply at least one example for each device you list. (It does not matter whether you note a particular device here or in the space for question four. The point is to recognize the device.)

7. List any allusions. Label each as “historical,” “literary,” “mythological,” etc.

8. List any symbols that emerge. What do they mean? How is their meaning suggested?



Answer the following questions about the **Modern English text** of “The Pardoner’s Prologue.” Be certain that you can support and illustrate all of your assertions with direct quotations from the text.

1. Note any significant repetition of key words or phrases. To what extent does the translator adhere to Chaucer’s diction and phraseology? What would explain any significant variances you find?

2. What does the repetition contribute to the text (e.g., elaboration of ideas, structure and coherence, poetic effect, etc.)?

3. What is the tone? How is this tone achieved?

4. Has the translator maintained the same tone as the original? Why or why not? What might be the reason(s) for any discrepancies you find?

5. What sound patterns emerge (e.g., rhyme, alliteration, consonance, etc.)? What do they contribute to the text?

6. To what extent has the translator maintained the sound of Chaucer's poem? What might be the reason(s) for any changes?

7. Note any literary or poetic devices you encounter (e.g., simile, metaphor, onomatopoeia, etc.). Be certain to supply at least one example for each device you list. (It does not matter whether you note a particular device here or in the space for question five. The point is to recognize the device.)

8. Note any rhetorical devices you encounter (e.g., parallelism, asyndeton, polysyndeton, etc.). Be certain to supply at least one example for each device you list. (It does not matter whether you note a particular device here or in the space for question four. The point is to recognize the device.)

9. To what extent has the translator maintained Chaucer's use of language devices? What might be the reason(s) for any discrepancies you find?

10. List any allusions. Label each as "historical," "literary," "mythological," etc.



11. To what extent has the translator used the same allusions as Chaucer? What might be the reason(s) for any changes?

12. List any symbols that emerge. What do they mean? How is their meaning suggested?

13. To what extent has the translator developed the same symbols as Chaucer? What might be the reason(s) for any changes?



Discussion Questions

1. What does Chaucer accomplish by including himself as one of the pilgrims on the journey to Canterbury?
2. In what ways and to what effect does Chaucer use allusion in *The Canterbury Tales*?
3. What does Chaucer accomplish by structuring *The Canterbury Tales* as a frame narrative?
4. Are there any symbols that recur in the tales? If so, what ideas or messages unify the tales and contribute to the meaning of those symbols?
5. What paradoxes or ironies are at work in *The Canterbury Tales*? What effect do they have on the text as a whole?

Essays or Writing Assignments

1. Formalists evaluate a text by analyzing its diction and style—including cadence, syntax, the connotations and denotations of the words the author uses, the etymologies of the words, and the ambiguity of phrases with multiple meanings. Write a well-organized and -supported essay in which you support, refute, or qualify the Formalist's argument that a modern English translation of *The Canterbury Tales* must inevitably lose some of its literary merit.
2. *The Canterbury Tales* is, for the most part, a poem with a scannable meter and a recognizable rhyme scheme. Write a well-organized and -argued essay in which you hypothesize how the tales would be different if the frame narrative and the majority of the tales were written in prose. How critical is form to meaning and effect?



Multiple Critical Perspectives

The Canterbury Tales



Marxist Approach Applied to *The Canterbury Tales*



Notes on the Marxist Approach

The Marxist approach to literature is based on the philosophy of Karl Marx, a German philosopher and economist. His major assertion was that whoever controlled the means of production in society controlled the society—whoever owned the factories “owned” the culture. This idea is called “dialectical materialism,” and Marx felt that civilization was progressing toward a communist society. From his point of view, the means of production (i.e., the basis of power) should be placed in the hands of the masses who actually operated them, not in the hands of those few who owned them. It was a perverted version of this philosophy that was at the heart of the Soviet Union. Marxism, the power of the worker to overcome social and economic abuses, became the rallying cry of the poor and oppressed all over the world.

To read a work from a Marxist perspective, one must understand that Marxism asserts that literature is a reflection of culture, and that culture can be affected by literature (Marxists believed that literature could instigate revolution). Marxism is linked to Freudian theory by its concentration on the subconscious—Freud dealt with the individual subconscious, while Marx dealt with the political subconscious. Marx believed that oppression existed in the political subconscious of a society—social hierarchies are inherent in any group of people.

Four main areas of study:

- economic power
- materialism versus spirituality
- class conflict
- art, literature, and ideologies

1. Economic Power

- A society is shaped by its forces of production. Those who own the means of production dictate what type of society it is.
- The two main classes of society according to the Marxist framework are the **bourgeoisie** (the people who control the means of production) and the **proletariat** (the people who operate the means of production and are controlled by the bourgeoisie).
- Since the bourgeoisie own the means of production—and, therefore, control the money—they also have the power to manipulate the politics, government, education, art, and media.
- Capitalism is flawed in that it makes people want material things, making them shop due to **commodification** (a desire for possessions, not for their innate usefulness, but for their social value). One shows one's material wealth by accumulating possessions—jewelry, large houses, luxury cars, etc.
- Commodification is one means by which the bourgeoisie keep the proletariat oppressed. As soon as the proletariat manage to acquire some sort of status symbol, the bourgeoisie buy something newer and better, thus making the proletariat struggle more.

2. Materialism versus Spirituality

- The true foundation of society is not ideals or abstractions, but things.
- The material world reveals reality. The material world is the only non-subjective element in a society. Money and material possessions are the same by every measure within a society, whereas spirituality is completely subjective.
- People are not destroyed by spiritual failure, only material failure.

3. Class Conflict

- A Capitalist society will inevitably witness conflict between its social classes.
- The owners and the workers will have different ideas about the division of the wealth generated, and the owners will ultimately make the decision.
- This constant conflict, or **dialectical materialism**, is what instigates change.

- The bourgeoisie make their system seem like the only logical one, so the proletariat are trapped. They are led to have pride in their station, thus preventing them from wanting to overthrow their oppressors (the smaller and actually less-powerful group).
- The only real division in society is between the proletariat and the bourgeoisie. Divisions of race, ethnicity, gender, and religion are artificial, created by the bourgeoisie to distract the proletariat from unifying.
- Marx called on the proletariat to reject the social structure of the bourgeoisie, the rules that would keep them subservient forever, and form their own values. Such a course would be the only way to escape the oppression, for the proletariat could never defeat the bourgeoisie on its own terms. For the workers to win, they would have to establish new terms.

4. Art, Literature, and Ideologies

- Art and literature are vehicles by which the bourgeoisie impose their value system on the proletariat. The arts can make the current system look attractive and logical, thus lulling the workers into complacency.
- Works of art and literature are enjoyable to experience, so the audience is unaware of being manipulated.
- The bourgeoisie can easily take control of artistic output because they are the entity that funds it. Since the bourgeoisie are funding the writers and the painters by publishing the books and buying the art, the artist must take pains not to offend them. Anything that is offensive to the bourgeoisie will simply not be published or sold.
- Any artist who wishes to criticize the bourgeoisie must do so in a subtle way (satire, irony, etc.). ■

Essential Questions for A Marxist Reading

1. Who are the powerful people in the text? Who are the powerless? Who receives the most attention?
2. Why do the powerful have the power? Why are the powerless powerless?
3. Is there class conflict and struggle?
4. Is there alienation and fragmentation evident in any of the characters? If so, in whom? The powerful? The powerless?
5. Do the powerful in the text suppress the powerless? How? News? Media? Religion? Literature?
6. What can you infer from the setting about the distribution of wealth?
7. What does the society value? Are possessions acquired for their usefulness or their social value?
8. Is the text itself a product of the society in which it was created? How do you know?
9. Is the work consistent in its ideologies, or is there an inner conflict?
10. Do other types of criticism—feminist, psychoanalytic, or others—overlap the Marxism?
11. After reading this text, do you notice any system of oppression that you have accepted? If so, what system, and how do you think you came to accept it?

Focus of Study

- How the ideology of courtly love serves as an oppressive social convention
- Textual clues that Chaucer favors the bourgeoisie
- The way in which commodification and the materialism/spirituality dichotomy appear in the text
- The relationship between materialism and corruption in the church
- Evidence of class struggle in the text

Activity One**Studying Courtly Love as a Bourgeois Social Convention**

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Canterbury Tales: Marxism Activity One Questions in Preparation for Discussion*.
2. Have each student create a table with two columns. The first one should be labeled “The Knight’s Tale” and the second should be labeled “The Miller’s Tale.”
3. Have students, individually or in pairs, review the two stories, noting in the first column of their table all evidence of the Courtly Love motif in “The Knight’s Tale” and all evidence (however parodied) of the courtly love motif from “The Miller’s Tale” in the second.
4. Have the students answer the following questions (on handout):
 - Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Knight’s Tale” sympathetic or unsympathetic? Why or how?
 - Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Knight’s Tale” portrayed as noble or base? Why or how?
 - Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Miller’s Tale” sympathetic or unsympathetic? Why or how?
 - Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Miller’s Tale” portrayed as noble or base? Why or how?
 - From what class(es) do the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Knight’s Tale” come?
 - What evidence indicates this?
 - From what class(es) do the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Miller’s Tale” come?
 - What evidence indicates this?
 - Which tale has the more noble, inspiring, or happy ending?
 - What about this ending makes it noble, inspiring, or happy?
 - What about the ending of the other tale makes it *not* noble, inspiring, or happy?
 - Which tale is a more serious example of the Courtly Love tale? Why or how?
 - What connection is there among:
 - the nature of the tale itself,
 - the sympathetic nature of the characters,
 - the nature of the ending,
 - and the social classes of characters of the respective tales?
5. Reconvene the class and discuss what can be inferred about Courtly Love as a literary and social convention based on the comparison of the two tales. Is there evidence of Courtly Love being a convention devised by the bourgeoisie to stifle the aspirations of the proletariat?

The Canterbury Tales: Marxist Activity One**Questions in Preparation for Discussion**

1. Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Knight’s Tale” sympathetic or unsympathetic? Why or how?
2. Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Knight’s Tale” portrayed as noble or base? Why or how?
3. Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Miller’s Tale” sympathetic or unsympathetic? Why or how?
4. Are the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Miller’s Tale” portrayed as noble or base? Why or how?
5. From what class(es) do the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Knight’s Tale” come?
6. What evidence indicates this?
7. From what class(es) do the lover(s) and the love object(s) of “The Miller’s Tale” come?
8. What evidence indicates this?
9. Which tale has the more noble, inspiring, or happy ending?
10. What about this ending makes it noble, inspiring, or happy?
11. What about the ending of the other tale makes it *not* noble, inspiring, or happy?
12. Which tale is a more serious example of the Courtly Love tale? Why or how?
13. What connection is there among:
 - the nature of the tale itself,
 - the sympathetic nature of the characters,
 - the nature of the ending
 - and the social classes of characters of the respective tales?



Activity Two

Examining Class Partiality

1. Copy and distribute the handout: *The Canterbury Tales*: Marxism Activity Two Identifying Social Class Distinctions.
2. Review The General Prologue with the class and identify all of the pilgrims and the estate to which each belongs.
3. Then, ask the students to select two characters from each estate and complete the chart on the handout. If any of this information cannot be found in the profile, have the student place an “X” in the box.
4. As a class, discuss the following questions:
 - Is the description of pilgrims belonging to one estate more extensive than pilgrims belonging to others?
 - Does Chaucer make the characters of a certain estate appear more important than characters in others? How and why?
 - Does Chaucer make the characters of a certain estate appear “better” (more ethical, moral, etc.) than characters in others? How and why?



The Canterbury Tales: Marxist Activity Two

Identifying Social Class Distinctions

| Profession | Name | Interests | Appearance | Opinions/Values |
|---------------|------|-----------|------------|-----------------|
| Clergy | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Nobility | | | | |
| | | | | |
| Consumers Co. | | | | |
| | | | | |



Activity Three

Analyzing Materialism vs. Spirituality in *The Canterbury Tales*

1. Divide the class into five groups.
2. Assign each group, or allow each to choose, one of the following parts of *The Canterbury Tales*:
 - The General Prologue
 - The Knight's Tale
 - The Miller's Prologue and Tale
 - The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale
 - The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale
 - The Nun's Priest's Prologue and Tale
3. Review the idea of commodification and how Marxists view the dichotomy between materialism and spirituality.
4. Have students find and note evidence of these ideas in their assigned sections.
5. Reconvene the class and have the students share their findings.
6. As a class, discuss the extent to which Marxist sensibilities are expressed in a particular tale and/or in the Tales themselves.

NOTE: Students do not need to agree or even come to consensus. It is important for them only to consider the possibility of a Marxist reading of the Tales.

Discussion Questions

1. Which characters receive the most attention in the text? Do the Host and Chaucer (the narrator) show partiality to some characters over others?
2. To what class does the narrator belong? Does his class status influence the way he views the other pilgrims and their tales?
3. Is there evidence of class struggle and conflict in the text? If so, where?
4. In what ways does Chaucer link materialism to the corruption of the clergy?
5. Is there any evidence in the text that the bourgeoisie oppression of the proletariat is disguised as another form of conflict?

Essays or Writing Assignments

1. Many critics view Chaucer's use of the pilgrimage and the coincidental meeting at the Tabard as a means of collecting representatives of all the estates and classes so they can interact in ways they normally would not. Write a well-reasoned and -organized essay in which you analyze Chaucer's invention as a means to write a social commentary.
2. Write a well-reasoned and -supported essay in which you support, refute, or qualify the Marxist thesis that courtly love and chivalry are bourgeoisie social conventions constructed to oppress the lower classes.
3. In a well-reasoned and -supported essay, analyze Chaucer's treatment of his characters from the various estates and classes. What evidence is there of stereotyping and bias toward or against representatives of various classes? Be certain to examine diction, syntax, and the complexity of a character's language as well as the subject matter of the characters' tales.

Feminist Theory Applied to *The Canterbury Tales*



Notes on the Feminist Theory

Feminism is an evolving philosophy, and its application in literature is a relatively new area of study. The basis of the movement, both in literature and society, is that the Western world is fundamentally patriarchal (i.e., created by men, ruled by men, viewed through the eyes of men, and judged by men).

In the 1960s, the feminist movement began to form a new approach to literary criticism. Of course, women had already been writing and publishing for centuries, but the 1960s saw the rise of a feminist literary theory. Until then, the works of female writers (or works about females) were examined by the same standards as those by male writers (and about men). Women were thought to be less intelligent than men, at least in part because they generally received less formal education, and many women accepted that judgment. It was not until the feminist movement was well under way that women began examining old texts, reevaluating the portrayal of women in literature, and writing new works to fit the developing concept of the “modern woman.”

The feminist approach is based on finding and exposing suggestions of misogyny (negative attitudes toward women) in literature. Feminists are interested in exposing the undervaluing of women in literature that has long been accepted as the norm by both men and women. They have even dissected many works in Western languages that reflect a patriarchal worldview. Arguing that the past millennia in the West have been dominated by men—whether the politicians in power or the historians recording it all—feminist critics believe that Western literature reflects a masculine bias, and, consequently, represents an inaccurate and potentially harmful image of women. In order to repair this image and achieve balance, they insist that works by and about women be added to the literary canon and read from a feminist perspective.

Three main areas of study/points of criticism:

- differences between men and women
- women in positions of power and power dynamics between men and women
- the female experience

1. Differences between men and women

- The basic assumption is that gender determines everything, including values and language.
- The canon must be expanded to include the study of those genres in which women “traditionally” write: journals, diaries, and personal letters.
- Note the differences in the topics or issues about which men and women write and the perspectives from which they write about them.

2. Women in positions of power and power dynamics between men and women

- Note and confront the social, economic, and political exploitation of women. Note whether women have any power and of what variety it is.
- Society has not treated all of its constituencies fairly, and literature is a means by which inequities can be identified, protested, and possibly rectified.
- Note the division of labor and economics between men and women.
- Note how men and women interact with one another in a variety of contexts (romantic, professional, etc.). Does the woman act in any way subservient to the man? Does the man treat the woman like an adult? A political and economic equal?

3. The female experience

- A woman’s experience of life is different from a man’s on the most basic level. Examine what aspects of feminine life are included in the work. Note the point of view through which the events are told. Is it male or female? Pay attention to how the narrator, male or female, treats the events. For example, are they depicted with sensitivity, harshness, etc.?

- Reject the application of male standards to the female personality. Feminists believe that the female personality is a separate entity from the male personality, and if judged by the same measures, is judged incorrectly. The female personality must be judged independently from the male personality and vice versa.
- Examine, and possibly celebrate, the creative, life-giving role of femininity. Although women have traditionally been portrayed as dependent on men for everything, the fact is that men are dependent on women for the most basic necessity in the world—birthing children. A male’s relationship to his mother has always been portrayed as a very strong bond (whether in the Freudian theory of the Oedipal complex or modern phrases such as “Mama’s boy”).
- Explore the concept that men and women are both incomplete without each other (women cannot conceive without men, etc.) not of feminine “incompleteness” alone (Adam’s rib, Freudian theories on sexuality, etc.). ■

Essential Questions for A Feminist Reading

1. What stereotypes of women are present? Are female characters oversimplified? Weak? Foolish? Excessively naive?
2. Do the female characters play major or minor roles in the action of the work? Are they supportive or independent? Powerless or strong? Subservient or in control?
3. If the female characters have any power, what kind is it? Political? Economic? Social? Psychological?
4. How do the male characters talk about the female characters?
5. How do the male characters treat the female characters?
6. How do the female characters act toward the male characters?
7. How do the female characters act toward each other?
8. Is the work, in general, sympathetic to female characters? Too sympathetic?
9. Are the female characters and situations in which they are placed oversimplified or presented fully and in detail?
10. What are the predominant images? Are they images usually associated with women? Why or why not?
11. Do any of the work's themes touch upon any idea that could be seen as a feminist issue? Is the theme supportive or disparaging of women?
12. Overall, do you think that the female characters are believable (based on women you know)? For that matter, do you think that the male characters are believable?



Activity One

Analyzing Stereotypes about Women

1. Copy and distribute the handout: Locating Examples of Female Stereotypes in *The Canterbury Tales*. (Each student may need several copies.)
2. In general class discussion, briefly brainstorm a list of female stereotypes. List ideas on the board, generating separate lists: generally positive stereotypes and generally negative ones.
3. Review with the class the Wife of Bath's "Prologue" and "Tale" and have them record on the handout any stereotypes about women that are apparent.
4. Divide the class into three groups, or a number of groups divisible by three.
5. Assign each group, or allow each to choose, one of the following:
 - the Knight's "Prologue" and "Tale" (You may want to divide the class into enough groups so that each of the four parts of the Knight's Tale is assigned as a separate story.)
 - the Miller's "Prologue" and "Tale"
 - the Nun's Priest's "Prologue" and "Tale"
6. Have each group examine its assigned selection and complete the chart.
7. Reconvene the class and allow each group to report its findings. The other students can add the information from the other groups to their charts.
8. As a class, discuss the following questions:
 - In general, do *The Canterbury Tales* stereotypes provide a positive or negative view of women?
 - Is Chaucer's overall depiction of women accurate? Legitimate? Why or why not?
 - What seems to be the overall purpose for Chaucer's depicting women as he does (e.g., comedy, satire/criticism, parody, etc.)?
 - Does Chaucer's depiction of women suggest that masculine power oppresses women? Why or why not?
 - Would you say that, overall, Chaucer seems to be sensitive to feminist issues? Why or why not?



The Canterbury Tales: Feminist Activity One

Locating Examples of Female Stereotypes in *The Canterbury Tales*

| Stereotype | Positive or Negative? | Examples (Tale, Character, Context, Etc.) |
|------------|-----------------------|---|
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Activity Two

Examining the Wife of Bath's Gender

1. Divide the class into pairs or small groups, or have each student work on the activity individually.
2. Have students answer the following questions, using evidence from the text to support their answers:
 - What *positive* traits does Chaucer give the Wife of Bath? List some examples from the text that illustrate these traits, and explain the extent to which these traits are gender-related or based on other factors (social class, marital status, religious beliefs, etc.).
 - What *negative* traits does Chaucer give the Wife of Bath? List some examples from the text that illustrate these traits, and explain to what extent these traits are gender-related or based on other factors (social class, marital status, religious beliefs, etc.).
 - What stereotypical *female* traits does the Wife of Bath display? What passages in the text demonstrate these traits?
 - What stereotypical *male* traits does the Wife of Bath display? What passages in the text demonstrate these traits?
 - How do the *male characters* in the play (Chaucer's persona, the Host, the Pardoner, the Wife of Bath's husbands) treat her?
 - For each of the male characters listed above, is his treatment of the Wife of Bath related to gender, or is it the result of other factors? What passages in the text suggest these factors?
 - How would a female audience view the Wife of Bath?
 - If the female audience would view the Wife of Bath differently from the male audience and characters, why?
3. Reconvene the class, and have the students present their findings.

4. As a class, discuss the following:
- How does the Wife of Bath challenge traditional gender roles?
 - How do the male characters respond to the Wife of Bath's "masculine" ideas and attributes?
 - How are the conflicts in "The Wife of Bath's Prologue" and "The Tale of the Wife of Bath" related to the oppression of women and women's rebellion against the social system?

Activity Three

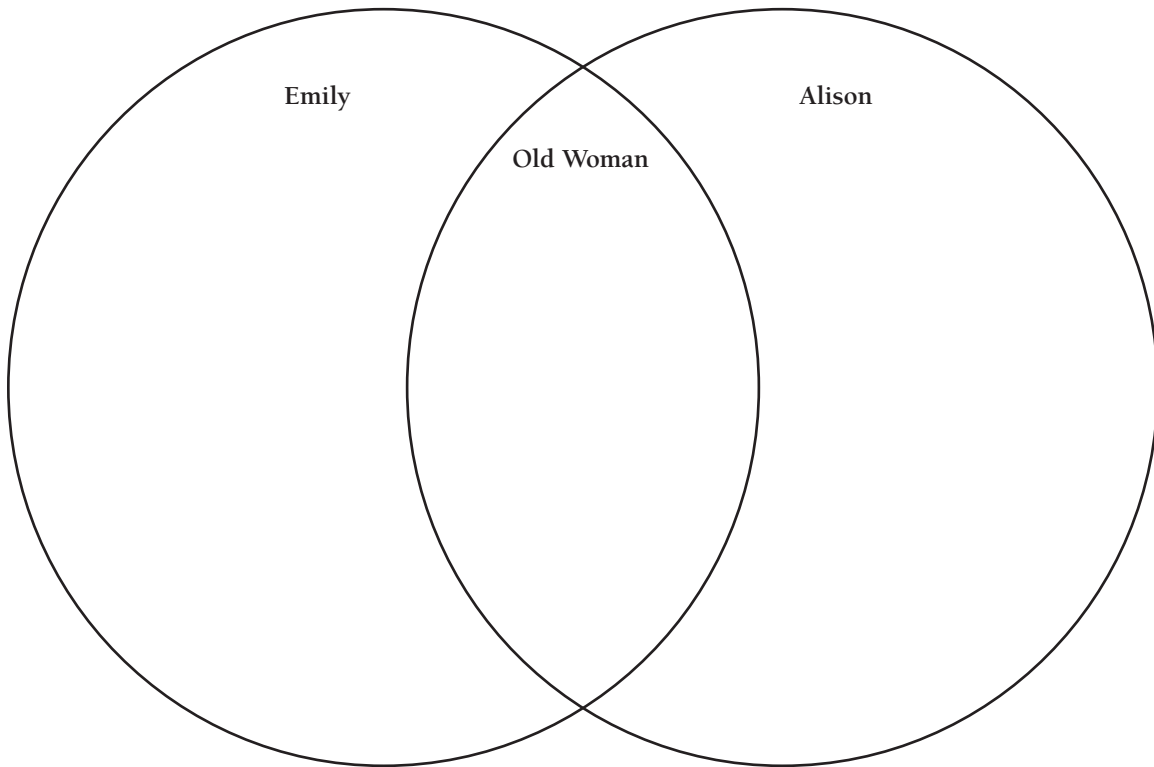
Comparing Female Characters Among Different Tales

1. Copy and distribute the handout: Comparing Female Characters.
2. Divide the class into pairs or small groups
3. Have each group complete the Venn Diagram, comparing and contrasting the characters of Emily (“The Knight’s Tale”), Alison (“The Miller’s Tale”), and the old woman (“The Tale of the Wife of Bath”).
4. Have them answer the questions on the reverse side of the worksheet.
5. Reconvene the class and have the students share their answers.



The Canterbury Tales: Feminist Activity Three

Comparing Female Characters



The Canterbury Tales: Feminist Activity Three

1. What traits do all three women have in common?

2. What are some key differences between them?

3. What are some of the major factors that account for the differences?

4. How large a role does each character have in her respective tale?

• To the plot?

• To the theme or moral?



- To the tone?

5. Are any or all of these three characters accurate representations of women? Why or why not?

Discussion Questions

1. How does the Wife of Bath's Prologue exemplify "traditional" female writing?
2. What stereotypes about women do the tales reinforce? Refute?
3. The Wife of Bath is the most important female persona in the work. Is she depicted as strong or weak? Dominant or subservient?
4. Do female characters in *Canterbury Tales* have any power? If so, what is it?
5. While "The Tale of the Wife of Bath" is told by a woman, it is retold by Chaucer's persona, a male narrator. Does the narrator's gender alter the story in any way?

Essays or Writing Assignments

1. Some critics hail "The Tale of the Wife of Bath" as the first work of feminist literature in English literature. Others criticize it as a misogynist tale by a chauvinist author who reinforces negative female stereotypes for the sake of humor. Write a well-organized and -supported essay in which you support, refute, or qualify one of these positions.
2. Write a well-organized essay in which you use evidence from "The Tale of the Wife of Bath" to infer some of the political and social restraints on women in the Middle Ages.
3. Examine the female characters in tales *other than* "The Tale of the Wife of Bath" and write a well-supported essay in which you argue whether Chaucer presents an overall favorable or negative view of women. Be certain to support all of your assertions with evidence from the tales.