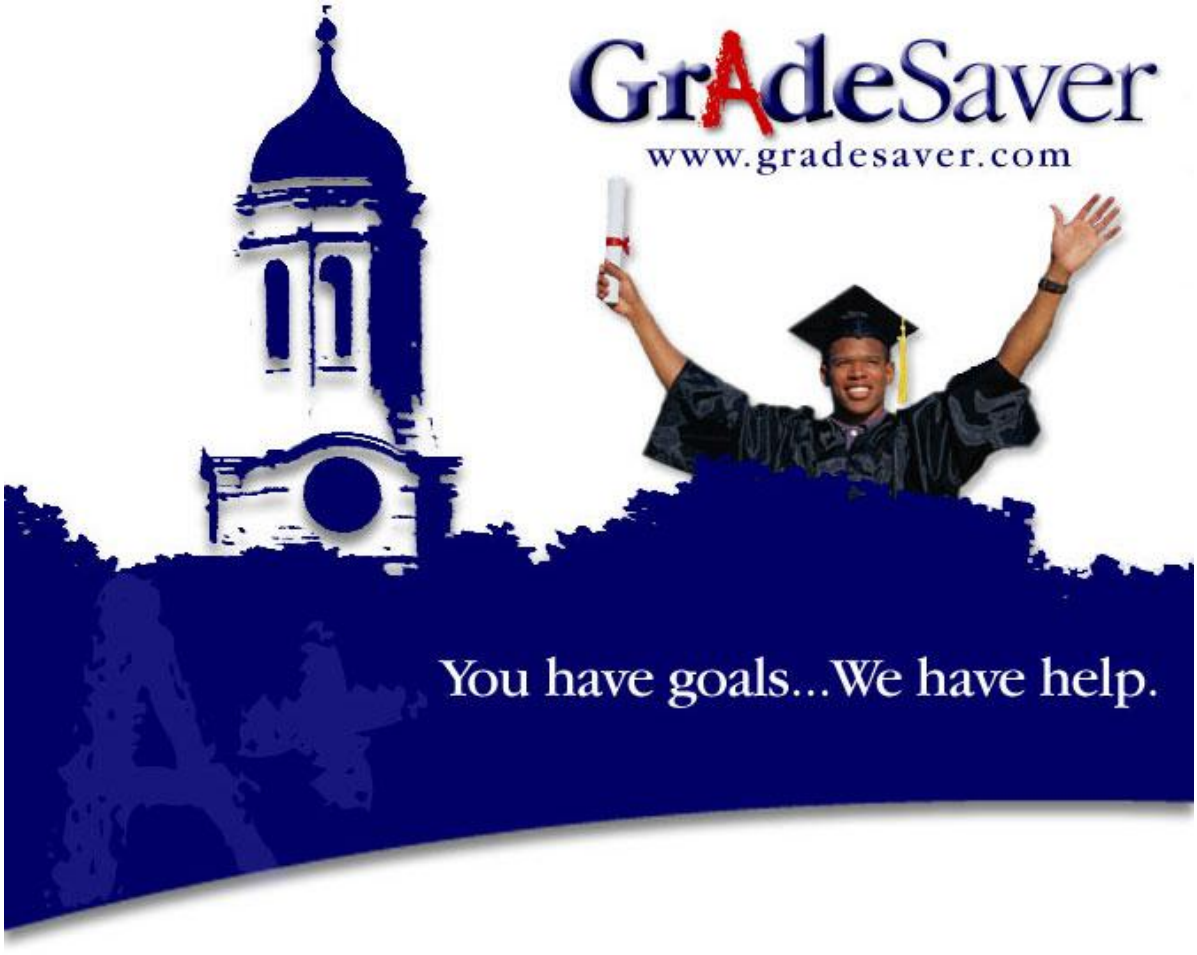

ClassicNote on The Canterbury Tales

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Biography of Chaucer, Geoffrey (1340–1400)

Before William Shakespeare, Geoffrey Chaucer was the preeminent English poet, and still retains the position as the most significant poet to write in Middle English. Chaucer was born in the early 1340s to a middle–class family. His father, John Chaucer, was a vintner and deputy to the king's butler. His family's financial success came from work in the wine and leather businesses. Little information exists about Chaucer's education, but his writings demonstrate a close familiarity with a number of important books of his contemporaries and of earlier times. Chaucer was likely fluent in several languages, including French, Italian and Latin.

Chaucer first appears in public records in 1357 as a member of the house of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster. This was a conventional arrangement in which sons of middle–class households were placed in royal service so that they may obtain a courtly education. Two years later Chaucer served in the army under Edward III and was captured during an unsuccessful offensive at Reims, although he was later ransomed. Chaucer served under a number of diplomatic missions. By 1366 Chaucer had married Philippa Pan, who had been in service with the Countess of Ulster. Chaucer married well for his position, for Philippa Chaucer received an annuity from the queen consort of Edward III. Chaucer himself secured an annuity as yeoman of the king and was listed as one of the king's esquires.

Chaucer's first published work was The Book of the Duchess, a poem of over 1,300 lines that is an elegy for the Duchess of Lancaster. For this first of his important poems, which was published in 1370, Chaucer used the dream–vision form, a genre made popular by the highly influential 13th–century French poem of courtly love, the Roman de la Rose, which Chaucer translated into English. Throughout the following decade, Chaucer continued with his diplomatic career, traveling to Italy for negotiations to open a Genoa port to Britain as well as military negotiations with Milan. During his missions to Italy, Chaucer encountered the work of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio, which were later to have profound influence upon his own writing. In 1374 Chaucer was appointed comptroller of the customs and subsidy of wool, skins, and tanned hides for the Port of London, his first position away from the British court. Chaucer's only major work during this period was Hous of Fame, a poem of around 2,000 lines in dream–vision form, but this was not completed.

In a deed of May 1, 1380, Cecily Chaumpaigne charged Chaucer with rape. Rape (raptus) could at the time mean either sexual assault or abduction; scholars have not been able to establish which meaning applies here, but, in either case, the release suggests that Chaucer was not guilty as charged. This charge had little effect on Chaucer's political career. In October 1385, he was appointed a justice of the peace for Kent, and in August 1386 he became knight of the shire for Kent. Around the time of his wife's death in 1387, Chaucer moved to Greenwich and later to Kent. Changing political circumstances eventually led to Chaucer falling out of favor with the royal court and leaving Parliament, but when Richard II became King of England, Chaucer regained royal favor. During this period Chaucer used writing primarily as an escape from public life. His works included Parlement of Foules, a poem of 699 lines. This work is a dream–vision for St. Valentine's Day that makes use of the myth that each year on that day the birds gathered before the goddess Nature to choose their mates. This

work was heavily influenced by Boccaccio and Dante.

Chaucer's next work was Troilus and Criseyde, which was influenced by The Consolation of Philosophy, written by the Roman philosopher Boethius in the early sixth century and translated into English by Chaucer. Chaucer took the plot of Troilus from Boccaccio's Filostrato. This eight thousand line poem recounts the love story of Troilus, son of the Trojan king Priam, and Criseyde, widowed daughter of the deserter priest Calkas, against the background of the Trojan War.

The Canterbury Tales secured Chaucer's literary reputation. It is his great literary accomplishment, a compendium of stories by pilgrims traveling to the shrine of Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. Chaucer introduces each of these pilgrims in vivid brief sketches in the General Prologue and intersperses the twenty−four tales with short dramatic scenes with lively exchanges. Chaucer did not complete the full plan for the tales, and surviving manuscripts leave some doubt as to the exact order of the tales that remain. However, the work is sufficiently complete to be considered a unified book rather than a collection of unfinished fragments. The Canterbury Tales is a lively mix of a variety of genres told by travelers from all aspects of society. Among the genres included are courtly romance, fabliau, saint's biography, allegorical tale, beast fable and medieval sermon.

Information concerning Chaucer's descendants is not fully clear. It is likely that he and Philippa had two sons and two daughters. Thomas Chaucer died in 1400; he was a large landowner and political officeholder, and his daughter, Alice, became duchess of Suffolk. Little is known about Lewis Chaucer, Geoffrey Chaucer's youngest son. Of Chaucer's two daughters, Elizabeth became a nun, while Agnes was a lady−in−waiting for the coronation of Henry IV in 1399. Public records indicate that Chaucer had no descendants living after the fifteenth century.

About The Canterbury Tales

The Canterbury Tales is one of the landmarks of English literature, perhaps the greatest work produced in Middle English and certainly among the most ambitious. It is one of the few works of the English Middle Ages that has had a continuous history of publication. It was the last of Geoffrey Chaucer's works, written after Troilus and Creseyde during the final years of Chaucer's life. Chaucer did not complete the entire Canterbury Tales as he designed it. He structured the tales so that each pilgrim would tell four tales, leading to a total of over one hundred tales. However, Chaucer only completed twenty−four tales, not even completing one tale for each pilgrim.

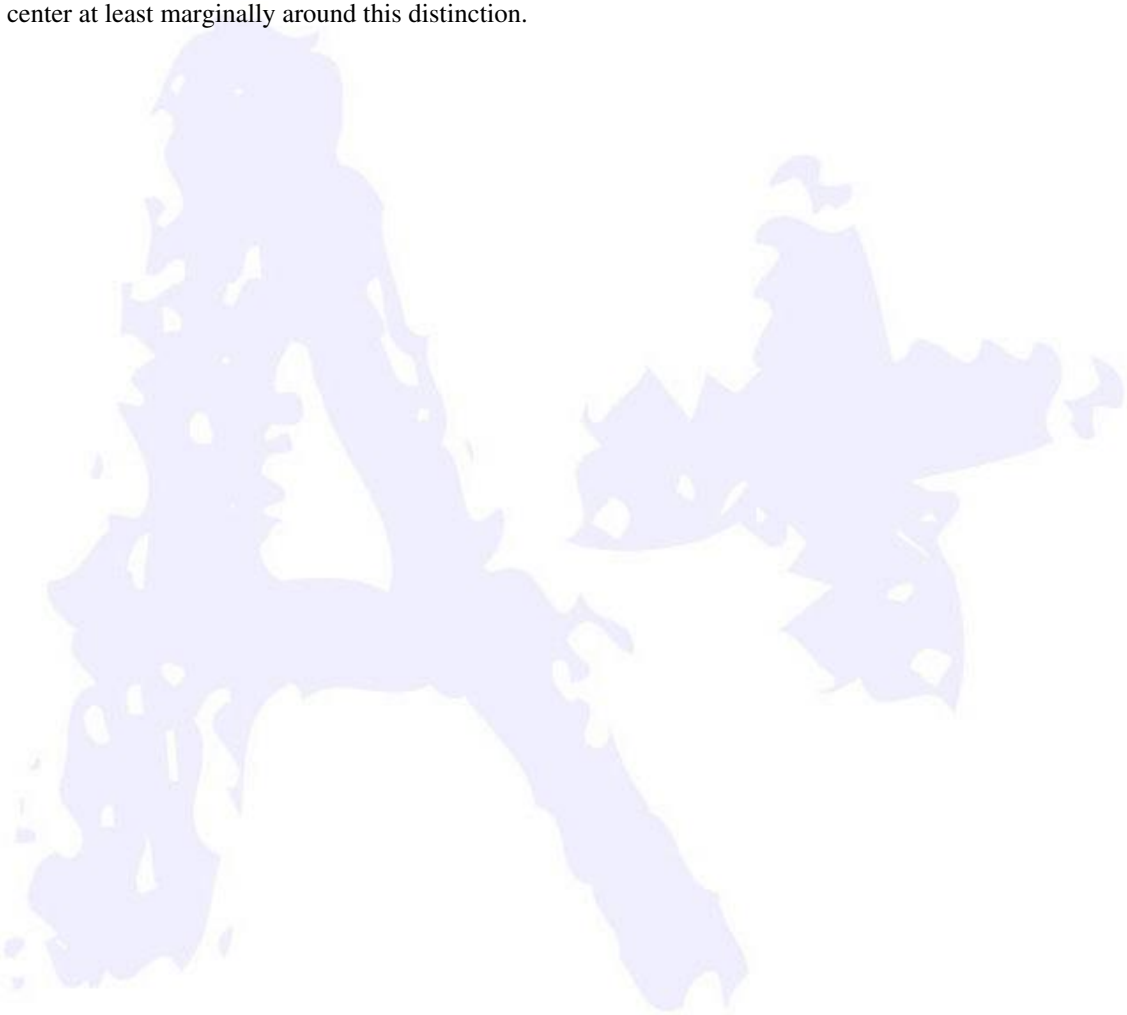
The Canterbury Tales includes a number of tales that Chaucer had written before creating the grand work itself. The Second Nun's Tale and the Knight's Tale were included as part of Chaucer's biography in the prologue to The Legend of Good Women, a poem by Chaucer that predated The Canterbury Tales, but since those stories survive only as part of The Canterbury Tales and not as independent works, it is impossible to determine whether Chaucer transferred them entirely to The Canterbury Tales or adapted them from a previous form.

The versions of The Canterbury Tales that remain in the present day come from two different Middle English manuscripts known as the Ellesmere and the Hengwrt manuscripts. The Ellesmere is the more famous of the two, containing miniature pictures of each of the pilgrims at the head of each of their respective tales, but compared to the Hengwrt manuscript the Ellesmere is heavily edited for grammatical content. The Hengwrt is thus valued as the best and most accurate manuscript of The Canterbury Tales. There are discrepancies between the two versions concerning the order and inclusion of the tales. The Hengwrt manuscript lacks the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and tale, part of the Parson's Tale, and several of the tales' prologues.

The structure of The Canterbury Tales is indebted to Boccaccio's Decameron, a work by Chaucer's contemporary in which ten nobles from Florence, to escape the plague, stay in a country villa and amuse each other by each telling tales. Boccaccio had a significant influence on Chaucer. The Knight's Tale was an English version of a tale by Boccaccio, while six of Chaucer's tales have possible sources in the Decameron: the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's, the Clerk's, the Merchant's, the Franklin's, and the Shipman's. However, Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury form a wider range of society compared to Boccaccio's elite storytellers, allowing for greater differences in tone and substance.

No single literary genre dominates The Canterbury Tales. The tales include romantic adventures, fabliaux, saint's biographies, animal fables, religious allegories and even a sermon, and range in tone from pious, moralistic tales to lewd and vulgar sexual farces. The form that Chaucer most often employs for his tale is the fabliau. These tales generally concern lower class characters; the standard form has an older husband whose younger wife has an affair with a man of flexible social status. This can be seen most accurately in the Miller's Tale, which strictly adheres to fabliau conventions. Throughout the tales, two major themes emerge: the first is the idea of the unfaithful wife that is employed not only in fabliau but other literary genres. The other is the idea

of the patient and suffering woman, who is exalted for her steadfast behavior. Chaucer exploits this division between the female saint and the whore throughout The Canterbury Tales, with few tales whose plots do not center at least marginally around this distinction.



Character List

The Host

He is the proprietor of the Tabard Inn where the pilgrims to Canterbury stay and travels with them on their journey. It is the Host who devised the scheme of the tales, proposing that each tell two tales on the way to Canterbury, and he frequently mediates arguments between pilgrims and suggests who shall tell the next story.

The Knight

A noble fighter who served in the Crusades, he travels with his son, the Squire. The Knight tells the first tale, a romantic tale of a love triangle between two knights and a woman they both love.

The Squire

A 'lusty bachelor' of twenty, the Squire is the son of the Knight. He tells an incomplete tale concerning the gifts that a mysterious knight brings to the court of Tartary.

The Knight's Yeoman

The Yeoman is the second servant who travels with the Knight. He does not tell a tale.

The Prioress

A delicate, sentimental woman, the Prioress weeps over any small tragedy such as the death of a mouse. She attempts to appear refined, but her refinement is superficial. Her tale concerns the murder of a small child at the hands of Jews who loathe the child for singing about the Virgin Mary.

The Second Nun

The secretary to the Prioress, the Second Nun tells as her tale the biography of Saint Cecilia.

The Monk

A robust and masculine man, the Monk travels with the Prioress and Second Nun. He tells the tale of a hen and her 'husband,' a rooster who prophesies misfortune.

The Friar (Hubert)

He is an immoral man concerned largely with profit rather than turning men away from sin. His tale is an attack on the wickedness of summoners.

The Merchant

He is an arrogant man obsessed with profit margins. His story is a comic tale concerning an elderly blind man who takes a young wife who proves unfaithful.

The Clerk

The Clerk is a student at Oxford, and his lack of an actual profession leaves him impoverished. Although educated, his intellectual pursuits have left him virtually unemployable. He tells a tale of the humble Griselde, who marries a man of high status who cruelly tests her devotion to him.

The Man of Law

The lawyer tells a religiously inspired tale concerning Constance, a woman who suffers a number of tragedies but is at each turn saved by her devotion to her Christian beliefs.

The Franklin

He travels with the Man of Law. The Franklin is a man who takes delight in all simple pleasures, most prominently culinary ones. His story is that of a woman who promises to have an affair with a man if he can do something she deems impossible that would nevertheless save her husband.

The Weaver

One of the five guildsmen who travel with the pilgrims to Canterbury, he does not tell a tale.

The Dyer

One of the five guildsmen who travel with the pilgrims to Canterbury, he does not tell a tale.

The Carpenter

One of the five guildsmen who travel with the pilgrims to Canterbury, he does not tell a tale.

The Tapestry–Maker

One of the five guildsmen who travel with the pilgrims to Canterbury, he does not tell a tale.

The Haberdasher

One of the five guildsmen who travel with the pilgrims to Canterbury, he does not tell a tale.

The Cook

A lewd and vulgar man, the Cook often engages in violent and contentious behavior. He tells a tale that appears to be a fabliau. However, this tale does not exist in a completed form.

The Shipman

He tells the tale of a woman who agrees to have an affair with a monk who will pay her so that she can repay a debt to her husband, but this monk borrows this money from the husband himself.

The Physician

The Physician tells a tale about a father who, in order to protect his daughter from scoundrels who contrive to rape her, murders his daughter.

The Wife of Bath

The most ostentatious of the travelers, the Wife of Bath has been married five times and is currently searching for another man to marry. The Wife of Bath is opinionated and boisterous, and her tale, which centers around the question "what do women want?," promotes her view that women wish to have authority over men.

The Parson

The Parson is a man devoted to his congregation, decent and principled. His tale is a long dissertation on the

definition of sin and its various forms.

The Miller

A large man with an imposing physique, the Miller is rude and contemptuous of his fellow travelers. His tale is a comic story of a devious student who contrives to have an affair with the wife of a dimwitted carpenter.

The Manciple

Also trained in the law, the Manciple tells a fable that attributes the dark appearance and unpleasant sound of crows to the actions of a white crow who told the god Phoebus of his wife's infidelity.

The Reeve

A slender man with a fiery temper, he tells a tale in response to the Miller's Tale. His tale concerns a villainous Miller who is humiliated by two Oxford students.

The Summoner

The profession of the summoner is to issue summons for people to appear in front of the Church court, and in this the Summoner is quite unfair. He tells a tale in response to the Friar's diatribe against summoners that parodies the Friar's profession.

The Pardoner

An effeminate and shamelessly immoral man, the Pardoner is intensely self–loathing yet devoted to his task of defrauding people of their money by making them believe that they have sinned and need to buy pardons. His tale is an allegory about three rioters who find death through their avarice. The Pardoner uses this tale as an attempt to sell false relics to the travelers.

The Canon

A mysterious and threatening figure, he and his Yeoman are not original travelers with the pilgrims to Canterbury. They seek out the party when they learn about the tales that they have been telling. When the Canon's Yeoman reveals too much about his master's profession, the Canon suddenly disappears.

The Canon's Yeoman

The assistant to the Canon, he speaks openly about his master's tricks as an alchemist, prompting the Canon to leave the pilgrims. The Yeoman then admits that he regrets the deceptions of his master, and tells a tale that details the methods of a canon's fraud.

Arcite

Theban knight who is imprisoned in Athens but released on the intervention of his friend Pirithous, he and his friend Palamon both fall in love with Emelye. He prays to Mars for aid in his duel with Palamon for Emelye, and although he wins the battle, he suddenly is killed in an earthquake upon his victory.

Palamon

Theban knight who is imprisoned in Athens. Both he and Arcite fall in love with Emelye. Before the duel for her hand in marriage, Palamon prays to Venus, the goddess of love, to win Emelye as a wife. Although he loses the battle, he wins Emelye as a wife when Arcite dies.

Emelye

The sister of Hippolyta, she is a pawn within the struggle between Arcite and Palamon, both who have fallen in love with her. Although she wishes to remain chaste in honor of the goddess, Diana, she accepts that she must marry one of the two knights.

Theseus

The King of Athens, he wages war upon Thebes in response to the injustice of the Theban king, and imprisons Arcite and Palamon. He sets the rules and regulations of their duel for Emelye.

Hippolyta

The Queen of Scythia, she is the husband of Theseus, King of Athens, and the sister of Emelye.

Pirithous

A prince and childhood friend of Theseus, he intervenes to have Arcite released from prison on the condition that he never return to Athens.

Lycurgus

The king of Thrace, he fights with Palamon during his duel with Arcite.

Emetreus

The king of India, he fights with Arcite during his duel with Palamon.

John

An oafish carpenter, he is an older man who marries the much younger Alison. He foolishly believes Nicholas' prediction that a second great flood is coming, and hides in a kneading bucket on his roof in preparation for it.

Alison

The crafty wife of John the carpenter, Alison is much younger than her husband. She has an affair with Nicholas, a boarder who stays with her and her husband.

Nicholas

An Oxford student who boards with John and Alison, Nicholas claims to study astronomy. He has an affair with Alison and conspires to have a day of privacy with her, but proves himself less crafty than he believes when he falls prey to Absolon's prank.

Absolon

A delicate, courtly lover who pursues Alison, he is a skilled musician and an unabashed romantic. He suffers humiliation at the hands of Alison, but gets revenge on Nicholas.

Symkyn

A vulgar, dishonest and foolish miller, Symkyn repeatedly cheats his customers out of grain. He receives his comeuppance when two Cambridge students that he has cheated seduce his wife and daughter then steal their grain back from him.

Aleyn

A Cambridge student who seduces the miller's daughter, Molly, when he and John stay at the miller's house.

John (2)

A Cambridge student who seduces the miller's wife when he and Aleyn stay at the Miller's house.

Molly

The daughter of the Miller, she is a somewhat unattractive young woman, yet Aleyn nevertheless seduces her when the two students stay at the miller's home.

Constance

The daughter of the Roman emperor, she is given to be married to the Sultan of Syria after he agrees to convert to Christianity, but when his mother opposes this, she narrowly escapes an assassination attempt and ends up in England, where she marries King Alla and, escaping treachery once more, is sent back to Rome. She is a devoted Christian whose faith aids her throughout all of her travails.

The Sultan

The King of Syria, he agrees to convert to Christianity to marry Constance, but his actions infuriate his mother, who has him assassinated.

The Sultana

Villainous mother of the Sultan, she refuses to convert from Islam on the orders of her son and plots his assassination.

Dame Hermengild

The wife of the Warden of the Northumberland region where Constance lands in England, she converts to Christianity through the influence of Constance. A devious knight murders her in an attempt to frame Constance.

The Warden

The husband of Dame Hermengild, he watches over the castle of Northumberland while King Alla is at war. He converts to Christianity along with his wife.

King Alla

The English king of Northumberland, he marries Constance but is separated from her because of the machinations of his mother, Lady Donegild.

Lady Donegild

The treacherous mother of King Alla, she contrives to have Constance and her child banished from England. King Alla murders her for her evil actions.

Mauritius

The son of King Alla and Constance, he becomes the emperor of Rome when Constance's father realizes his royal lineage.

Jankin

The fifth husband of the Wife of Bath, he was much younger than she and prone to reading misogynist religious texts that offended his wife. When he hurt her out of anger, he realized his error and submitted to her authority, after which he and his wife had a perfectly happy marriage.

The Knight (2)

After raping a young woman, the knight is sentenced to death, but spared by the queen, who decides that the knight will receive mercy if he can answer the question "what do women want?"

The Old Woman

This elderly woman tells the Knight what women really desire on the condition that he will marry her. When he grants her the authority in marriage, the old woman transforms into a beautiful young woman.

The Summoner (2)

The summoner, who is given no proper name, is a typical representation of his profession, according to the Friar. He meets the devil and shares trade secrets, and is cast into hell for his sinful behavior.

Satan

Introducing himself as a yeoman, he and the summoner become compatriots until he finally casts the summoner into hell.

The Friar

This boorish friar is rude and presumptuous, oblivious to the conditions of Thomas and his wife, who take him in as a boarder. Although ostensibly polite and refined, the friar callously begs Thomas for money.

Thomas

Owner of a home where the Friar stays, his infant child had recently died and he himself has taken ill. When the Friar begs him for money, Thomas pays him with the 'gift' of a fart.

Griselde

A woman of low status, she marries Walter, the marquis of Saluzzo, but is subjected to a number of trials that her husband devises to prove her worth. She handles each of these trials honorably, proving herself dedicated and steadfast in the face of any tragedy.

Walter

The marquis of Saluzzo, he is a dedicated bachelor until the people of his region insist that he takes a wife. When he marries Griselde, he subjects her to a number of trials meant to prove her worth, each of them cruel and heartless.

Janicula

The father of Griselde. She returns to him after she has been cast out of her home by Walter.

January

A wealthy knight and perpetual bachelor, at the age of sixty this blind man decides to take a young wife. When he marries May, he bores her with his insistent sexual desire, leading her to have an affair. He regains his sight when Pluto and Proserpina find May having sex with Damian in his presence.

May

The young wife of January, she soon tires of his persistent and monotonous sexual desire and has an affair with January's squire, Damian. When January regains his sight and sees her engaged in a tryst with Damian, she insists that he should not believe his eyes.

Damian

January's squire, he has an affair with May.

Placebo

The brother of January, he argues with his brother against the merits of marrying a young woman at such an elderly age, yet finally relents to his brother's wishes when January insists on finding a bride.

Pluto

The king of the fairies, he and his wife stumble upon January, May and Damian when the latter two have a sexual encounter. He restores January's sight.

Proserpina

She is the wife of Pluto.

Canacee

The daughter of the King of Tartary, she receives the gift of knowing the language of animals and the healing properties of every herb.

Cambyuskan

The King of Tartary. A mysterious knight brings him a mechanical horse that can transport him anywhere across the globe.

Arviragus

A devoted knight and husband to Dorigen, he travels to Britain to engage in war, causing great grief to his wife. He gives up his wife so that she may preserve her honor.

Dorigen

The wife of Arviragus, she becomes intensely depressed when he leaves for Britain, fearing for his life. She promises to have an affair with Aurelius if he can make the rocks that obstruct the shore on which Arviragus will land disappear.

Aurelius

A young squire who falls in love with Dorigen, he pays the Orleans student to make the rocks off of the Brittany shore disappear so that Dorigen will have an affair with him, but gives her up when he realizes the pain that it would cause her.

The Orleans Student

A law student skilled in creating apparitions, he contrives to have the rocks off of the Brittany shore disappear, but when Aurelius does not engage in an affair with Dorigen, he forgives Aurelius of his debt for creating the apparition.

Virginius

An honorable and well−loved knight, he murders his daughter when Appius and Claudius scheme to have her raped.

Virginia

The daughter of Virginius, her incomparable beauty leads Appius to lust after her and scheme to have her raped.

Appius

A corrupt judge who governs the town where Virginius resides, he contrives to have Claudius claim that Virginius had stolen his slave from him, and claims that that slave is Virginia. When his scheme is revealed, he is taken to jail where he commits suicide.

Claudius

A churl who schemes with Appius, he claims that Virginia is his slave and that Virginius stole her from him. When his treachery is revealed, he is banished.

The Three Rioters

Three indistinguishable troublemakers who engage in all sorts of lewd behavior, they go on a search for Death and end up finding it in the form of gold coins.

The Old Man

An aged man who cannot die, he wishes to trade his body with a younger man. He tells the three rioters where they may find Death.

The Merchant (2)

A devoted entrepreneur, he is somewhat stingy but dedicated to his business and to thrifty behavior. He insists that his wife repay one hundred francs that he lent her, leading her to seek the sum from Dan John.

Dan John

This monk claims to be a cousin of the merchant. He agrees to lend the merchant's life one hundred francs if she has an affair with him, then borrows the sum from the husband that she intends to repay.

The Wife

A dissatisfied wife, she claims that her husband, the merchant, is a stingy man who does not satisfy her. Displeased that her husband wants her to repay a one hundred franc debt, she agrees to an affair with Dan John for that sum. When the merchant offers that he has been repaid in his own money, she tells him that she will repay him through sex.

Melibee

A mighty and rich ruler, his enemies rape his wife and attack his daughter, leading him to strive for a war of retribution, yet his wife implores him to be merciful.

Prudence

The wife of Melibee, she is raped by his enemies, but wishes to grant them mercy.

Sophie

The young daughter of Melibee, she is left for dead by his enemies when they wound her in five places, but nevertheless barely survives.

Chanticleer

This rooster, peerless in his crowing, has seven companions, the most honored of which is Pertelote. He dreams that he will be chased by a fox, a prophesy that comes true, and is a strong believer in this prophetic power of dreams.

Pertelote

The most favored of Chanticleer's companions, this hen is essential his 'wife.' She dismisses his idea that dreams predict future events, claiming that his ill temper stems from stomach maladies, but her advice to find healing herbs leads to the fulfillment of his prophecy.

Cecilia

Devout elite Roman woman who dies for her adherence to Christianity.

Valerian

Eventual husband of Cecilia who converts to Christianity upon the influence of Pope Urban. He is executed for his beliefs.

Pope Urban

Christian leader who baptizes Valerian and Tibertius and claims that Cecilia is a saint.

Tibertius

The brother of Cecilia, he converts to Christianity, but is executed with Valerian for his Christian beliefs.

Almachius

Roman prefect who ordered the deaths of Cecilia, Valerian and Tibertius for their Christian beliefs.

Maximus

Roman sergeant who claimed to see the spirits of Valerian and Tibertius ascending to heaven when they are executed, prompting many to convert to Christianity.

Phoebus

Deity who, when he lived on earth, took a wife who was unfaithful to him, despite his insistence on watching her. He teaches his prized white crow to speak the language of humans.

The Crow

This beautiful white crow can speak the language of humans, having been taught by Phoebus, but when he tells Phoebus that his wife had an affair, Phoebus plucks him and curses him, condemning all crows to be forever black and harsh of voice.

Short Summary

The Canterbury Tales begins with the introduction of each of the pilgrims making their journey to Canterbury to the shrine of Thomas a Becket. These pilgrims 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. These travelers, who stop at the Tabard Inn, decide to tell stories to pass their time on the way to Canterbury. The Host of the Tabard Inn sets the rules for the tales. Each of the pilgrims will tell two stories on the way to Canterbury, and two stories on the return trip. The Host will decide the best of the tales. They decide to draw lots to see who will tell the first tale, and the Knight receives the honor.

The Knight's Tale is a tale about two knights, Arcite and Palamon, who are captured in battle and imprisoned in Athens under the order of King Theseus. While imprisoned in a tower, both see Emelye, the sister of Queen Hippolyta, and fall instantly in love with her. Both knights eventually leave prison separately: a friend of Arcite begs Theseus to release him, while Palamon later escapes. Arcite returns to the Athenian court disguised as a servant, and when Palamon escapes he suddenly finds Arcite. They fight over Emelye, but their fight is stopped when Theseus finds them. Theseus sets the rules for a duel between the two knights for Emelye's affection, and each raise an army for a battle a year from that date. Before the battle, Arcite prays to Mars for victory in battle, Emelye prays to Diana that she may marry happily, and Palamon prays to Venus to have Emelye as his wife. All three gods hear their prayers and argue over whose should get precedence, but Saturn decides to mediate. During their battle, Arcite indeed is victorious, but as soon as he is crowned victor, an earthquake occurs that kills him. Before he dies, he reconciles with Palamon and tells him that he deserves to marry Emelye. Palamon and Emelye marry.

When the Knight finishes his tale, everybody is pleased with its honorable qualities, but the drunken Miller insists that he shall tell the next tale. The Miller's Tale is a comic table in which Nicholas, a student who lives with John the carpenter and his much younger wife, Alison, begins an affair with Alison. Another man, the courtly romantic Absolon, also falls in love with Alison. Nicholas contrives to spend a day with Alison by telling John that a flood equal to Noah's flood will come soon, and the only way that he, Nicholas and Alison will survive is by staying in separate kneading tubs placed on the roof of houses, out of sight of all. While John remained in this kneading tub, Nicholas and Alison left to have sex, but were interrupted by Absolon, who demanded a kiss from Alison. She told him to close his eyes and he would receive a kiss. He did so, and she pulled down her pants so that he could kiss her nether region. The humiliated Absolon got a hot iron from a blacksmith and returned to Alison. This time, Nicholas tried the same trick, and Absolon burned him on the ass. Nicholas shouted for water, awakening John, who was asleep on the roof. He fell off the roof, hurting himself, and all were humiliated.

The pilgrims laughed heartily at this tale, but Oswald the Reeve took offense, thinking that the Miller meant to disparage older men. In response, The Reeve's Tale told the story of a dishonest Miller, Symkyn, who repeatedly cheated his clients, which included the college at Cambridge. Two Cambridge students, Aleyn and John, went to the miller to buy meal and corn, but while they were occupied Symkyn let their horses run free and stole their corn. They were forced to stay with Symkyn for the night. That night, Aleyn seduced the miller's daughter, Molly, while John seduced the miller's wife. When Aleyn told John of his exploits, Symkyn overheard and fought with him. The miller's wife hit Symkyn over the head with a staff, knocking him unconscious, and the two students escaped with the corn that Symkyn had stolen.

The Cook's Tale was intended to follow the Reeve's Tale, but this tale only exists as an incomplete fragment of no more than fifty lines. Following this tale is the Man of Law's Tale. The Man of Law's Tale tells the story of Constance, the daughter of a Roman emperor who becomes engaged to the Sultan of Syria on the condition that he converts to Christianity. Angered by his order to convert his country from Islam, the mother of the Sultan assassinates her son and Constance barely escapes. She is sent on a ship that lands in Britain, where she is taken in by the warden of a nearby castle and his wife, Dame Hermengild. Both of them soon convert to Christianity upon meeting her. A young knight fell in love with Constance, but when she refused him, he murdered Dame Hermengild and attempted to frame Constance. However, when King Alla made the knight swear on the Bible that Constance murdered Hermengild, his eyes burst. Constance marries King Alla and they have a son, Mauritius, who is born when Alla is at war in Scotland. Lady Donegild contrives to have Constance banished by intercepting the letters between Alla and Constance and replacing them with false ones. Constance is thus sent away again, and on her voyage her ship comes across a Roman ship. A senator returns her to Rome, where nobody realizes that she is the daughter of the emperor. Eventually, King Alla makes a pilgrimage to Rome, where he meets Constance once more, and the Roman emperor realizes that Mauritius is his grandson and names him heir to the throne.

The Wife of Bath begins her tale with a long dissertation on marriage in which she recounts each of her five husbands. Her first several husbands were old men whom she would hector into providing for her, using guilt and refusal of sexual favors. However, the final two husbands were younger men, more difficult to handle. The final husband, Jankin, was a twenty−year−old, half the Wife of Bath's age. He was more difficult to handle, for he refused to let the Wife of Bath dominate him and read literature that proposed that women be submissive. When she tore a page out of one of his books, Jankin struck her, causing her to be deaf in one ear. However, he felt so guilty at his actions that from that point in the marriage, he was totally submissive to her and the two remained happy. The Wife of Bath's Tale is itself a story of marriage dynamic. It tells the tale of a knight who, as punishment for raping a young woman, is sentenced to death. However, he is spared by the queen, who will grant him freedom if he can answer the question "what do women want?" The knight cannot find a satisfactory answer until he meets an old crone, who promises to tell him the answer if he marries her. He agrees, and receives his freedom when he tells the queen that women want sovereignty over their husbands. However, the knight is dissatisfied that he must marry the old, low−born hag. She therefore tells him that he can have her as a wife either old and ugly yet submissive, or young and beautiful yet dominant. He chooses to have her as a young woman, and although she had authority in marriage the two were completely happy from that point.

The Friar asks to tell the next tale, and asks for pardon from the Summoner, for he will tell a tale that exposes the fraud of that profession. The Friar's Tale tells about a wicked summoner who, while delivering summons for the church court, comes across a traveling yeoman who eventually reveals himself to be the devil himself. The two share trade secrets, and the devil tells him that they will meet again in hell if the summoner continues to pursue his trade. The summoner visits an old woman and issues her a summons, then offers to accept a bribe as a payment to prevent her excommunication. The old woman believes that she is without sin and curses the summoner. The devil then appears and casts the summoner into hell.

The Summoner was enraged by the Friar's Tale. Before he begins his tale, he tells a short anecdote: a friar visited hell and was surprised to see that there were no other friars. The angel who was with him then lifted up Satan's tail and thousands of friars swarmed out from his ass. The Summoner's Tale is an equally vitriolic attack on friars. It tells of a friar who stays with an innkeeper and his wife and bothers them about not contributing enough to the church and not attending recently. When the innkeeper tells him that he was not recently in church because he has been ill and his infant daughter recently died, the friar attempted to placate him and then asked for donations once more. Thomas the innkeeper promised to give the friar a 'gift,' and gives him a loud fart.

The Clerk, an Oxford student who has remained quiet throughout the journey, tells the next tale on the orders of the Host. The Clerk's Tale tells about Walter, an Italian marquis who finally decides to take a wife after the people of his province object to his longtime status as a bachelor. Walter marries Griselde, a low–born but amazingly virtuous woman whom everybody loves. However, Walter decides to test her devotion. When their first child, a daughter, is born, Walter tells her that his people are unhappy and wish for the child's death. He takes away the child, presumably to be murdered, but instead sends it to his sister to be raised. He does the same with their next child, a son. Finally, Walter tells Griselde that the pope demands that he divorce her. He sends her away from his home completely naked, for she had no belongings when she entered his house. Each of these tragedies Griselde accepts with great patience. Walter soon decides to make amends, and sends for his two children. He tells Griselde that he will marry again, and introduces her to the presumed bride, whom he then reveals is their daughter. The family is reunited once more. The Clerk ends with the advice that women should strive to be as steadfast as Griselde, even if facing such adversity is unlikely and perhaps impossible.

The Merchant praises Griselde for her steadfast character, but claims that his wife is far different from the virtuous woman of the Clerk's story. He instead tells a tale of an unfaithful wife. The Merchant's Tale tells a story of January, an elderly blind knight who decides to marry a young woman, despite the objections of his brother, Placebo. January marries the young and beautiful May, who soon becomes dissatisfied with his constant sexual attention to her and decides to have an affair with his squire, Damian. When January and May are in their garden, May sneaks away to have sex with Damian. The gods Pluto and Proserpina come upon Damian and May and restore January's sight so that he may see what his wife is doing. When January sees what is occurring, May tells him not to believe his eyes, and he believes her.

The Squire tells the next tale, which is incomplete. The Squire's Tale begins with a mysterious knight arriving at the court of Tartary. This knight gives King Cambyuskan a mechanical horse that can transport him anywhere around the globe and return him within a day and gives Canacee, the daughter of Cambyuskan, a mirror that can discern honesty and a ring that allows the wearer to know the language of animals and the healing properties of all herbs. Canacee uses this ring to aid a bird who has been rejected in love, but the abruptly ends.

The Franklin's Tale that follows tells of the marriage between the knight Arviragus and his wife, Dorigen. When Arviragus travels on a military expedition, Dorigen laments his absence and fears that, when he returns, his ship will be wrecked upon the rocks off the shore. A young man, Aurelius, falls in love with her, but she refuses to return his favors. She agrees to have an affair with Aurelius only on the condition that he find a way to remove the rocks from the shore, a task she believes impossible. Aurelius pays a scholar who creates the illusion that the rocks have disappeared, while Arviragus returns. Dorigen admits to her husband the promise that she has made, and Arviragus tells her that she must fulfill that promise. He sends her to have an affair with Aurelius, but he realizes the pain that it would cause Dorigen and does not make her fulfill the promise. The student in turn absolves Aurelius of his debt. The tale ends with the question: which of these men behaved most honorably?

The Physician's Tale that follows tells of Virginius, a respected Roman knight whose daughter, Virginia, was an incomparable beauty. Appius, the judge who governed his town, lusted after Virginia and collaborated with Claudius, who claimed in court that Virginia was his slave and Virginius had stolen her. Appius orders that Virginia be handed over to him. Virginius, knowing that Appius and Claudius did this in order to rape his daughter, instead gave her a choice between death or dishonor. She chooses death, and Virginius chops off his daughter's head, which he brings to Appius and Claudius. The people were so shocked by this that they realized that Appius and Claudius were frauds. Appius was jailed and committed suicide, while Claudius was banished.

The Pardoner prefaces his tale with an elaborate confession about the nature of his profession. He tells the secrets of his trade, including the sale of useless items as saints' relics, and admits that his job is not to turn people away from sin, but rather to frighten them to such a degree that they pay for pardons. The Pardoner's Tale concerns three rioters who search for Death to vanquish him. They find an old man who tells them that they may find Death under a nearby tree, but under this tree they only find a large fortune. Two of the rioters send the third into town to purchase food and drink for the night, for they intend to escape with their fortune, and while he is gone they plan to murder him. The third rioter poisons the drink, intending to take all of the money for himself. When he returns, the two rioters stab him, then drink the poisoned wine and die themselves. The three rioters thus find Death in the form of avarice. The Pardoner ends his tale with a diatribe against sin, imploring the travelers to pay him for pardons, but the Host confronts him.

The next story, The Shipman's Tale, is the story of a thrifty merchant who demands that his wife repay a one hundred franc debt that she owed him. The dissatisfied wife complained about this to Dan John, a monk who stayed with him, and he agrees to pay her the sum if she has an affair with him. She consents to this, and Dan John procures the one hundred francs by borrowing it from the merchant himself. However, the merchant realizes that he has been paid with money that he had lent to the monk. The wife therefore tells him that she can

repay the debt to her husband in bed.

The Prioress' Tale tells the story of a young Christian child who lived in a town in Asia that was dominated by a vicious Jewish population. When the child learned Alma redemptoris, a song praising the Virgin Mary, he traveled home from school singing this. The Jews, angry at his behavior, took the child and slit his throat, leaving him in a cesspool to die. The boy's mother searched frantically for her son. When she found him, he was not yet dead, for the Virgin Mary had placed a grain on his tongue that would allow him to speak until it was removed. When this was removed, the boy passed on to heaven. The story ends with a lament for the young boy and a curse for the Jews who perpetrated the heinous crime.

Chaucer himself tells the next tape, The Tale of Sir Thopas, a florid and fantastical poem in rhyming couplets that serves only to annoy the other pilgrims. The Host interrupts Chaucer shortly into this tale, and tells him to tell another. Chaucer then tells The Tale of Melibee, one of the few tales that is in prose format. This tale tells about Melibee, a powerful ruler whose enemies rape his wife, Prudence, and nearly murder his daughter, Sophie. When deciding whether to declare war on his enemies, Prudence advises him to remain merciful, and they engage in a long debate over the appropriate course of action. Melibee finally gives his enemies the option: they can receive a sentence either from him or from his wife. They submit to Melibee's judgment, and he intends to disinherit and banish the perpetrators. However, he submits to his wife's plea for mercy.

The Monk's Tale is not a narrative tale at all, but instead an account of various historical and literary figures who experience a fall from grace. These include Adam, Samson, Hercules, King Pedro of Spain, Bernabo Visconti, Nero, Julius Caesar, and Croesus. The Knights interrupts the Monk's Tale, finding his listing of historical tragedies monotonous and depressing.

The Nun's Priest's Tale tells the story of the rooster Chanticleer and the hen Pertelote. Chanticleer was ill one night and had a disturbing dream that he was chased by a fox. He feared this dream was prophetic, but Pertelote assured him that his dream merely stemmed from his illness and that he should find herbs to cure himself. Chanticleer insists that dreams are signifiers, but finally agrees with his wife. When he searches for herbs, Chanticleer is indeed chased by a fox, but is saved when Pertelote squawks, alerting the woman who owns the farm where the two fowl live and causing her to chase the fox away.

Chaucer follows this with The Second Nun's Tale. This tale is a biography of Saint Cecilia, who converts her husband and brother to Christianity during the time of the Roman empire, when Christian beliefs were illegal. Her brother and husband are executed for their beliefs, and she herself is cut three times with a sword during her execution, but does not immediately die. Rather, she lingers on for several more days, during which time she orders that her property be distributed to the poor. Upon her death Pope Urban declared her a saint.

After the Second Nun finishes her tale, a Canon (alchemist) and his Yeoman join the band of travelers. The Canon had heard how they were telling tales, and wished to join them. The Yeoman speaks incessantly about the Canon, telling fantastical stories about his work, but this annoys the Canon, who suddenly departs. The

Yeoman therefore decides to tell a tale himself. The Canon's Yeoman's Tale is a story of the work of a canon and the means by which they defraud people by making them think that they can duplicate money.

The Host tells the Cook to tell the next tale, but he is too drunk to coherently tell one. The Manciple therefore tells his story. The Manciple's Tale is the story of how Phoebus, when he assumed mortal form, was a jealous husband. He monitored his wife closely, fearing that she would be unfaithful. Phoebus had a white crow that could speak the language of humans and could sing beautiful. When the white crow learns that Phoebus' wife was unfaithful, Phoebus plucks him and curses the crow. According to the Manciple, this explains why crows are black and can only sing in an unpleasant tone.

The Parson tells the final tale. The Parson's Tale is not a narrative tale at all, however, but rather an extended sermon on the nature of sin and the three parts necessary for forgiveness: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The tale gives examples of the seven deadly sins and explains them, and also details what is necessary for redemption. Chaucer ends the tales with a retraction, asking those who were offended by the tales to blame his rough manner and lack of education, for his intentions were not immoral, while asking those who found something redeemable in the tales to give credit to Christ.

Summary and Analysis of General Prologue

Fragment I

The General Prologue:

As April comes, the narrator begins a pilgrimage to Canterbury from the Tabard Inn at Southwerk. Twenty−nine people make the pilgrimage toward Canterbury and the narrator describes them in turn. The pilgrims are listed in relative order of status, thus the first character is the Knight. Chaucer describes the knight as a worthy man who had fought in the Crusades. With him is a Squire, the son of the Knight and a 'lusty bachelor' of twenty. The Knight has a second servant, a Yeoman. There is also a Prioress, shy and polite. She is prim and proper, sympathetic and well−mannered. The Prioress wears a broach with the inscription "All things are subject unto love." With the Prioress is her secretary (the Second Nun) and a Monk. The monk is a robust and masculine man who loves to hunt. The Friar, Hubert, is an immoral man more concerned with making profit than converting men from sin. The Merchant from Flanders is a pompous man who speaks endlessly on how profits may be increased. He seems grave, yet there is no better man, according to the narrator. The Clerk follows the Merchant. As an Oxford student without employment, he is impoverished and wears threadbare clothes. The Man of Law is a man who deserves to be held in awe. He knows the law to the letter and gives the impression that he is far busier than he actually is. A Franklin travels with him. He is a man who lives in comfort and is interested simply in pleasure, particularly culinary delight. There are also five guildsmen: a Weaver, a Dyer, a Carpenter, a Tapestry−maker and a Haberdasher. With them they bring a Cook. A Shipman is the next traveler, who comes from the port of Dartmouth, and with him a Physician. The Wife of Bath is next; she is a weaver who wears bright red clothing. She has been married five times (and had several companions as a youth). The Parson is an honorable, decent man who cares for his congregation and adheres to the teachings of Christ. With him is his brother, a Plowman, who is equally kind. The final travelers are a Miller, a Manciple, a Reeve, a Summoner and a Pardoner. The Miller is a large man with an imposing physique. The Manciple is from a lawyers' college and knows every legal maneuver. The Reeve is a slender man with a fiery temper. The Summoner is quite unfair in his job (he is responsible for serving summons to court for church crimes). If he likes a scoundrel, he can ignore the man's sins. The Pardoner is an effeminate man. Each of these travelers finds themselves in the Tabard Inn, where the Host, a bold and merry man, suggests that on their way to Canterbury each traveler tell two tales, and on the way back each traveler tell two more. They draw lots to decide who will tell the first tale, and it is the Knight who has the honor.

Analysis:

In the General Prologue, Chaucer sets up the general structure of the tales and introduces each of the characters who will tell the tales. The characters who tell each of the tales are as important as the characters in the tales that they tell; a significant portion of the action of the Canterbury Tales takes place within the prologues to each of the tales. The General Prologue in essence serves as a guide for the tales, giving some explanation for the

motivation behind each of the tales each character tells.

The introductory imagery of the General Prologue mixes the spiritual with the secular and moves between each form with relative ease. The Canterbury Tales begins with the famous lines "Whanne that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote," setting up imagery of spring and regeneration. Yet he does not continue with the logical outcome of this springtime imagery. Instead of conforming to the cliché "in springtime a young man's fancy turns to love," Chaucer veers into more spiritual territory. In springtime these travelers make a religious pilgrimage to Canterbury. Yet Chaucer is equally uninterested in the religious details of this journey, and keeps the beginning passages of the General Prologue focused on nature and not on the human society with which the travelers will deal.

Chaucer gives relatively straightforward descriptions of the characters and has some inclination to show their best qualities. Chaucer describes virtually each pilgrimage as an exemplar - a number of these pilgrims are described as 'perfect' in some way or another, most often in their craft. Furthermore, these pilgrims exist almost entirely in terms of their profession. Chaucer gives only a few of them character names, and these emerge only in terms of conversation between the characters during each tale's prologue, and not in Chaucer's description in the General Prologue.

Yet even within these descriptions he allows for subtle criticism and sly wit. The description of the Prioress in particular, is overtly flattering yet masquerades a sharp criticism of her foolish sentimentality and oppressive attention to manners. Although she strives to be polite and refined, she spoke French "after the school of Stratford−at−Bow," the vulgar rural pronunciation compared to elite Parisian French. Furthermore, she weeps at the mere sight of a dead mouse, a gross overreaction to a small tragedy.

The descriptions of the upper members of the clergy deserve special note in context of the tales. Each of the clergymen defy traditional expectations; the Monk is a rough laborer, while the Friar is resolutely immoral. Chaucer lists the various sins of the Friar: he sells pardon from sin for a price, seduces women who ask for pardons, and spends more time in bars than he does aiding the poor. His concern for profit is a stark contrast with that of the Merchant. While the Merchant merely dispenses advice on how to attain profit, it is the Friar who applies his entire existence to its pursuit. The Friar further contrasts with the later description of the Parson, a man who performs his duties honorably and cares for his congregation. In his description of the Parson, Chaucer lists the various admirable qualities, none of which are held by the Friar.

The description of the Merchant is also notable, for it shows the disparity between how the narrator overtly appraises a character and what he describes. After listing a number of unflattering qualities in the Merchant, the narrator still judges him to be a fine man; in these descriptions, the details and anecdotes are far more important in defining character than the final stated opinion of the narrator.

Chaucer indulges in comic criticism in his portrait of the Clerk. This Oxford student, however educated, is not worldly enough for any normal employment. He has studied only impractical knowledge, and even carries

among his few possessions several volumes of Aristotle.

Most of the travelers engaged in a profession receive little description; as the travelers move down the social scale Chaucer gives them less and less detailed descriptions. The Wife of Bath is the most significant of the travelers low on the social scale. Chaucer describes her as lewd and boisterous. Her clothing, all variations of bright red, is ostentatious, meant to attract attention from others. Chaucer even indicates that she is quite promiscuous - she has been married five times and had an undetermined number of lovers. The other traveler who merits a lengthy description is the Pardoner. He has a very effeminate manner, with a high voice and soft features. Chaucer even compares him to a gelding (a castrated horse) or a mare, which may be a subtle comment on his sexuality.

The prologue sets up the general design of the Canterbury Tales. Each character will tell four tales during the journey, leading to a grand total of 116 tales. Chaucer never completed all of the tales, starting only about one fourth of the possible stories, not all of which remain in their entirety. Some of the stories that remain are only fragments which have either been lost or were never completed by the author.

When the travelers draw lots to decide who will tell the first story, it is the Knight who has the first choice. Although the order is supposedly random, the Knight draws the first lot and thus randomly receives the rank appropriate to his status, which indicates that the Host may have fixed the lots in order to curry favor with the Knight.

Summary and Analysis of The Knight's Tale

The Knight's Tale, Part I:

The Knight begins his tale with the story of a prince named Theseus who married Hippolyta, the queen of Scythia, and brought her and her sister, Emelye, back to Athens with him after conquering her kingdom of Amazons. When Theseus returned home victorious, he became aware that there was a company of women clad in black who knelt at the side of the highway, shrieking. The oldest of the women asked Theseus for pity. She told him that she was once the wife of King Cappaneus who was destroyed at Thebes, and that all of the other women with her lost their husbands. Creon, the lord of the town, simply tossed the dead bodies of the soldiers in a single pile and refused to burn or bury them. Theseus swore vengeance upon Creon, and immediately ordered his armies toward Thebes. Theseus vanquished Creon, and when the soldiers were disposing of the bodies they found two young knights, Arcite and Palamon, two royal cousins, not quite dead. Theseus ordered that they be imprisoned in Athens for life. They passed their time imprisoned in a tower in Athens until they saw Emelye in a nearby garden. Both fall immediately in love with her. Palamon compares her to Venus, and he prays for escape from the prison, while Arcite claims that he would rather be dead than not have Emelye. The two bicker over her, each calling the other a traitor. This happened on a day in which Pirithous, a prince and childhood friend of Theseus, came to Athens. Pirithous had known Arcite at Thebes, and on his request Theseus set Arcite free on the promise that Arcite would never be found in Theseus' kingdom. He now had his freedom, but not the ability to pursue Emelye, and lamented the cruelty of fate. Palamon, however, envied Arcite, since he could presumably raise an army against Theseus to conquer Athens. The Knight poses this question: which has the worse case: Arcite, who has his freedom but not access to Emelye, or Palamon, who can see Emelye but remains a prisoner?

Analysis:

The Knight tells a tale of courtship and chivalry, focused on the deeds of soldiers and princes, the social milieu in which the Knight travels. Even the structure of the tale obeys the structure and hierarchy within society. The Knight does not start with the main characters of the tale, Arcite and Palamon; instead, he begins at the apex of society, describing the exploits of Theseus of Athens, working downward until he reaches the less distinguished Theban soldiers.

The Knight's Tale adheres to traditional values of honor in which there are strict codes of behavior which one must follow. This code of chivalry is not necessarily polite and decent. In the morality of the tale, Theseus' sudden decision to ransack Thebes to right a wrong is perfectly acceptable as punishment for a transgression against the honor of the dead soldiers.

The dynamics of the Knight's tale are relatively simple. The tale is instructive, positing the question of which knight - Arcite or Palamon - has a superior situation. The situation and the moral questions that it poses thus

become more important than the qualities of the individual characters. They exist to be moved by the events of the story: to be imprisoned and set free whenever the plot demands, or to fall in love at first sight when it is dramatically convenient. Even the characters acknowledge their lack of free will within the story. The two knights pray to Venus for a literal deus ex machine, for they are unable to control their own fate. The Knight's Tale even acknowledges the role of fate through the gods. Palamon leaves his fate to theology, blaming his fate on Venus, Juno and Saturn.

Arcite and Palamon are thus virtually indistinguishable from one another. There is no information on which a reader may base an opinion on their respective virtues, thus the focus shifts to their situations. Emelye is equally standard. The Knight describes her as a typical fairy−tale maiden - the only inversion of the formula is that her suitors are the ones imprisoned. She is even first seen in a garden, a pastoral symbol that balances both purity and fertility.

The Knight's Tale, Part II:

After two years in Thebes, one night Arcite dreamed that he saw Mercury stand before him, bidding him to be free of hope and care. He told Arcite to go to Athens to relieve his grief. Arcite thought that he might disguise his rank in Athens and pass unknown. He came to the court and offered his services, and fell into a post with Emelye's steward under the name of Philostratus. Arcite worked as a page in Emelye's house and was beloved, so Theseus made him soon squire of his chamber and furnished him from Thebes. Meanwhile Palamon had lived for seven years in his dungeon. It soon occurred that Palamon escaped from the tower and fled the city. He meant to hide himself and head toward Thebes. That morning Arcite went horseback riding. In the area outside of the city, he dismounted and began to speak to himself, lamenting his situation without Emelye. He did this around the area where Palamon was hiding, and he revealed himself to Arcite. Since neither has weapons, they vow to meet in the same place tomorrow and fight over Emelye. They returned the next day armed for battle. While they prepared, Theseus, Hippolyta and Emelye were hunting. They reached the area where Arcite and Palamon were fighting, and Theseus stopped the battle. Palamon admits to Theseus that Arcite is the man who was banished and returned, disguised as Philostratus, while he is the escaped prisoner. He also admits that both love Emelye. Theseus ordered the death of both, but the queen and Emelye took pity on the two men, and begged Theseus for mercy. He considers how much they loved Emelye to risk death by not escaping to Thebes. He asks them to swear that they will never make war against any realm of his. He decides that the two will wage war on each other, each with one hundred knights, in order to decide whom Emelye will marry.

Analysis:

The escape of Palamon from prison soon after Arcite is released puts a quick finish to the question posed at the end of the first part of the tale. Both soon have the autonomy to pursue Emelye and relatively equal access to her, even if both are still forbidden in Athens. Yet the schematic structure still prevails. The tale thrives on improbable coincidences. When Palamon is hiding, not only does Arcite happen to be in the same area, but he also happens to talk to himself, indirectly revealing his identity to Palamon. A similar coincidence occurs when

Arcite and Palamon stage their duel. Theseus, his wife and the knights' beloved, Emelye, happen to find themselves in the same forest at the same time that Arcite and Palamon are fighting, the first instance in which the two have direct contact with Emelye.

Emelye proves a problematic character in the scheme of the story. Arcite and Palamon are prepared to fight to the death for her love, despite the fact that neither have had significant contact with her and cannot be assured that she would love either man. Yet even Theseus accepts this code of conduct and offers the queen's sister as a prize for the two men, whom he previously had imprisoned and had threatened with death only moments before.

The Knight's Tale continues to establish rules of honor and chivalric conduct. Theseus condemns Arcite's and Palamon's actions not because they were fighting one another, but because they did not do so under the proper rules set for a duel, such as the requirement for a superior to judge fair conduct.

The Knight's Tale, Part III:

Theseus commissioned the building of a theater for the duel between Arcite and Palamon that would be a mile in circumference. This stadium was opulent, featuring carvings and portraits as well as temples honoring Mars, Diana and Venus. When the day of the duel approached, Palamon brought Lycurgus, the king of Thrace, to fight with him, while Arcite brought Emetreus, the king of India. The night before the duel, Palamon prayed to Venus to solace his pains of love. He asks Venus, the goddess of love, to let Arcite murder him if Arcite will be the one to marry Emelye. The statue of Venus shook, an omen that the goddess was listening. Emelye prayed to the shrine to Diana, the goddess of chastity. She prays that she wishes to remain a maiden all her life and to not be a man's lover nor wife. She wishes for peace and friendship between Arcite and Palamon. But if it is her destiny to marry one against her will, she asks to have the one who wants her most. The statue of Diana shed tears of blood, another omen. Then Diana herself appeared to Emelye and told her that she will marry one of the two. Arcite prayed to Mars. He prayed for victory in battle, and the statue of Mars whispered the word 'victory' to him, the third omen. Mars and Venus thus warred upon one another, but aged Saturn found a means to satisfy both of them. He tells Venus that Palamon shall have his lady, but Mars shall help his servant.

Analysis:

The battle between Arcite and Palamon assumes epic dimensions with the construction of a great arena where the two may wage war upon another under Theseus' guide. Yet the outcome of the tale of the two cousins is not in their individual hands. Both Palamon and Arcite place their respective destinies in the gods to whom they pray. It is here that the difference between the characters emerge. Palamon prays for success in love, while Arcite prays for success in war.

The role of Emelye in the battle between Palamon and Arcite finally becomes clear in this section of the tale. She does not wish to marry either of the knights, preferring a life of chastity to marriage. However, she acknowledges her role as a pawn in the situation. She accepts the destiny proscribed to her by the goddess Diana

and the mortal king Theseus.

If Emelye takes a passive role in the plot of the Knight's Tale, the same must be said for Palamon and Arcite. The outcome of the battle will not be decided by the two knights, but rather by Saturn, who will affect the proceedings in order to placate both Venus and Mars. The actual situation among the mortals is not significant compared to the struggle between the two gods.

The Knight's Tale, Part IV:

Theseus sets the rules of the battle between the two opposing factions. He orders that during the war between the two sides, nobody shall suffer a mortal blow. If an opponent is overcome, he shall leave the battle. The people raised their voices in exultation. The two armies were equal in prowess, age and nobility. Arcite pursued Palamon viciously, and Palamon returned with equal severity. But Emetreus seized Palamon and pierced him with his sword. In the attempt to rescue Palamon king Lycurgus was struck down, and then Emetreus himself was wounded. Theseus declared that Arcite had won. Venus was disappointed at the outcome, but Saturn told her that Mars was now appeased and she would receive a similar appeasement. Suddenly, as Arcite was proclaimed victorious, there was an earthquake sent by Pluto that frightened Arcite's horse, which swerved and fell, throwing off Arcite and mortally wounding him. Before he died, Arcite tells Emelye that she could have no more worthy husband than Palamon. His last word before he died was her name. Theseus orders Emelye to marry Palamon after a funeral ceremony honoring Arcite.

Analysis:

The final section of the Knight's Tale resolves all of the conflicts between both mortals and gods. Both Palamon and Arcite receive that for which they prayed before the battle: Arcite wins the battle, but Palamon wins the wife. Only Emelye does not receive that which she truly desired, for Theseus orders that she be married, despite her intent to remain a maiden. Saturn sets the situation right between the rival gods Venus and Mars, appeasing each in turn. Even in a more mortal dimension the conflicts are set right. Arcite and Palamon forgive one another for their long−standing quarrel before Arcite dies, each recognizing the other's worth. The section continues the symmetrical alignment that has marked the story. Even the two armies that battle each other are perfectly equal in rank, prowess, age and ability. The conflict therefore is not in the armies' hands, but rather Palamon's and Arcite's, and these two knights merely act as pawns for Venus and Mars.

The overall structure of the tale gives priority to certain values. Theseus, the arbiter in the conflict between Arcite and Palamon and thus the character in the tale who determines the moral significance of the characters' actions, places great emphasis on honorable codes of conduct; he sets specific rules for the battle meant to ensure justice, and even orders that no soldier shall die in the battle (which then descends from a contest among gladiators to a rough approximation of modern sports). Compounding these values is a tendency toward displays of wealth and power. Each of the final events in the story are punctuated by great pageantry. On the orders of Theseus, the simple duel between Arcite and Palamon transforms into a gala event requiring the construction of

a massive coliseum for two armies to wage war on one another, even bringing in the kings of two foreign nations.

Summary and Analysis of The Miller's Tale

Prologue to the Miller's Tale:

When the Knight had finished, everybody decided that he had told a noble story. The drunken Miller claims that he has a tale as noble as the one the Knight had told. The host tried to quiet the Miller, but he demanded to speak. He claims that he will tell the tale of a carpenter and his wife. His tale will be one of infidelity. The narrator attempts to apologize for the tale that will follow, admitting that the Miller is not well–bred and will therefore tell a bawdy tale.

Analysis:

It is in the prologues to the various tales that Chaucer comments on the tales that his characters have told. This serves as an internal critique of the tales that Chaucer has written. In this prologue, the Miller constructs the author's reaction to the Knight's Tale. The Miller mocks the noble messages of the Knight's Tale, and prepares to tell a tale that he finds equally uplifting. The tale that will follow is unreservedly bawdy and lowbrow, a necessary antidote to the oppressive sense of epic honor that permeates the stodgy Knight's tale.

The Canterbury Tales offer Chaucer an opportunity for experimentation, for he has created characters who create their own stories. Therefore the stories are not simply an extension of Geoffrey Chaucer's imagination. The story of Palamon and Arcite is a tale that a man such as the Knight might tell; the inflated pomposity of the tale is a deliberate move by Chaucer, purposely adhering to the Knight's personality even at some dramatic and narrative expense. This also affords Chaucer the opportunity to engage in forms of disreputable humor, as the Miller's Tale will demonstrate. Chaucer even separates himself from the tale that the Miller has told, claiming that it comes from the imagination of a vulgar and indecent man who is nevertheless entirely Chaucer's creation.

The Miller's Tale:

There was once an old oaf living in Oxford who took in boarders. Now living with him was a poor student who studied astrology (astronomy) named Nicholas. He was sly, demure and well–versed in love. The carpenter had wed a much younger wife and Alison. She was fair and slim, good enough for any lord to have as a mistress or any yeoman to honestly wed. While John the carpenter was away, Nicholas made a pass at Alison, then proclaimed his love for her. She warned him that her husband was jealous, but swore that she would meet him when she could do so safely. One day Alison was heading to the parish when she met Absolon, a jolly man known for singing and playing guitar. That night he came to Alison's home to serenade her, for he had fallen in love. Alison could only laugh at Absolon's attempts to woo her, for she loved Nicholas. One Saturday when John had gone to Oseney, Nicholas and Alison agreed that he should use his wit to trick the carpenter. If their ruse worked, then Alison would be free to spend the entire night with Nicholas. Nicholas spent an entire day confined alone in his room, and the carpenter wondered what was wrong. He told John that he had been

studying his astrology and found that there will be a downpour equal to Noah's flood, and in less than an hour the world shall drown. Nicholas tells John to get three kneading tubs that the three can use as boats. The tubs shall be placed on the roof so that they will remain unseen. When the rain comes, only Nicholas, John and Alison shall survive. John believed Nicholas and did as he instructed. The three went up on the roof that night, and when John fell asleep Nicholas and Alison left to have sex. The next morning right before dawn, Absolon went to serenade Alison. She tells Absolon to leave, but he persists. She agrees to one kiss, and tells him to close his eyes - then she pulls down her pants and he kisses her rear end. Nicholas and Alison mock Absolon, who leaves embarrassed. He went to a nearby blacksmith and borrowed a hot forging iron. When he returned, he asked for another kiss. This time, Nicholas strips to have Absolon kiss him, and even intends to fart in his face - but Absolon instead burns his behind with the forging iron. Nicholas cried for water, waking John, who thought that the flood had come and cut the rope holding the tub. John fell from the roof. The entire town came to see what had happened. They declared that John had gone mad and laughed over the proceedings. Each man got his punishment - John was injured and declared insane, Absolon was humiliated, and Nicholas burned.

Analysis:

The Miller's Tale takes the form of a fabliau, a familiar medieval literary genre that concerned the bourgeois and vulgar classes. The traditional form of a fabliau concerns a bourgeois husband who is duped into aiding a clever young man receive sexual favors from his wife. The young sexual intruder is typically a student or cleric and thus belongs to no definable class. These tales were not simply a middle– and lower– class diversion; elite audiences of Chaucer's time appreciated the tales for painting condescending and vulgar portraits of the lower orders. The tale even acknowledges these class differences. The Miller remarks that Alison would be acceptable as a yeoman's wife, but she could also be the lowly mistress of a lord. The elite viewpoint also is reinforced by the character of Nicholas. He is the one educated character, and it is his intelligence and scholarship that give him the advantage over the uneducated ruffian that is the carpenter.

The Miller's Tale takes the traditional form of the fabliau, but it also approximates the structure of the Knight's Tale. The Miller's Tale is a gross parody of the Knight's moralistic story, bringing the tale down to lower orders and stripping it of the honor and chivalry that marked the Knight's story. Like the story that preceded it, the Miller's Tale concerns a romantic struggle that ends with each of the parties receiving what they deserve. However, the romantic protagonists in the Miller's tale are a foolish young man, a cunning student, and a cuckolded husband, not the interchangeable and indistinguishable knights. Both tales also rely on convenient coincidences that drive the plot, such as the sudden appearance of Theseus in the Knight's Tale and the shout "water" that awakens the carpenter in the Miller's Tale.

Whereas the Knight's tale prizes morality and piety toward the gods, the Miller's Tale values different attributes. Courtly romantic love is mocked mercilessly; Absolon, the one suitor whose behavior would fit traditional romantic standards, is the victim of Alison's scorn and receives only one vulgar 'kiss' for his efforts. In the tale, Absolon's romantic affectations mark him as foolish and effeminate. The Miller sarcastically notes how Absolon combed his curly blond hair to prepare himself for Alison, a parody of courtly love and romance for which the

Miller has no use. The steadfast devotion that John the carpenter holds for his wife is equally subject to derision. It is love for his wife that causes John to be tricked by Nicholas into taking tubs onto the roof. Only Nicholas does not suffer for his romantic pursuits. He does not court Alison - rather, in his first encounter with her Nicholas grabs her crotch before even speaking. Nicholas only receives a form of punishment when he attempts to trick Absolon with a 'kiss' for the second time, and in this occasion Nicholas suffers not because he has broken any moral codes, but because he was foolish to try the same trick twice. Only Alison escapes any form of retribution, for she is the one who is consistently cunning and wily. She receives no punishment for her infidelity, while the characters who are the most overtly virtuous (John and Absolon) are the ones who suffer the most. The Miller's tale thus prizes the characters who are the most shrewd rather than those who hold more sentimental emotions or obey traditional standards of behavior.

Summary and Analysis of The Reeve's Tale

Prologue to the Reeve's Tale:

The reactions of the crowd to the Miller's Tale were mixed, although many laughed. Only Oswald, the elderly Reeve was offended. He claims that with age the qualities of boasting, lying, anger and covetousness fade away. He vows to repay the Miller's Tale.

Analysis:

The prologue to the Reeve's Tale continues the pattern established with the prologue to the Miller's Tale. Just as the Miller told his tale as a reaction to the Knight's tale, the Reeve vows to tell a tale as a reaction to what the Miller has told, offended by his satiric description of aged carpenter in comparison to the younger characters of the Miller's Tale. He believes that the Miller's Tale was an attack on him, and will so tell a tale that is an attack on the Miller.

The Reeve's Tale:

At Trumpington, near Cambridge, there is a brook where nearby stands a mill. There is a miller who lived there once who wore ostentatious clothing and could play the bagpipe, wrestle and fish. He always had a knife with him, and had a round face and flattened nose. His name was Simon, and nicknamed Symkyn. His wife came from a noble family; her father was the parson. Symkyn was a jealous man and his wife pretentious. They had a daughter who was now twenty and a toddler. The miller was dishonest in his business dealings. He cheated the college worst of all, and stole meal and corn from the dying steward of Cambridge. Two students, John and Aleyn, received permission from the provost to see the corn ground at the mill. Aleyn tells Symkyn that he is there to ground the corn and bring it back, since the sick steward cannot. While they ground the corn, Symkyn found the students' horse and set it loose. When the students finished, they rush after the horse, forgetting both the corn and the meal. While they were gone, the miller took part of their flour and told his wife to knead it into dough. The students returned to find their meal stolen. They begged the miller for help, and he offers them a place to stay for the night. The miller's daughter slept in the same room alone. The miller himself fell asleep and began to snore, annoying the students. Aleyn vows to seduce the daughter, Molly, as revenge for the stolen corn. John warns him that the miller is dangerous. Aleyn seduced her, while John felt humiliated that he was merely sleeping while Aleyn was having sex with the miller's daughter. John himself seduced the miller's wife. That morning, Molly told Aleyn where he could find the bread that she helped her father steal. Aleyn goes to tell John of his exploits, but Symkyn hears and grabs him by the neck. Aleyn punches him, and the two fight, until the miller tumbles backward on his wife, breaking her ribs. John sprang up quickly to find a staff. The miller's wife found one, and tried to hit Aleyn with it, but instead struck her husband. The students left him lying, got dressed and took their meal. So the proud miller got himself a beating, lost his labor, was cuckolded and had his daughter seduced. The proverb rings true: "Let him not look for good whose works are ill," for a trickster shall

himself be tricked.

Analysis:

The Reeve's Tale is a vulgar comic tale intended to humiliate the Miller. The Reeve pursues an obvious vendetta in his story, which he indicates in the story's prologue. Symkyn, the central character of the tale, is meant to represent the Miller, and consequently has no redeemable characteristics. Symkyn is a miller who has a sense of incredible vanity with regards to his high−born wife, he is violent and vulgar, and resorts to thievery. His pride in his wife is mere foolishness, for as the daughter of a parson, Symkyn's wife is, strictly speaking, illegitimate. Even his wife and daughter are subject to intense ridicule. The Reeve describes the daughter as 'thick' and 'round,' while the wife is an empty, passive character who freely submits herself to John. But even though the other characters exist only as targets for the Reeve's scorn, the force of the plot concerns heaping scorn on the Miller. The story exists primarily for the purpose of setting up and developing a situation in which Symkyn will be humiliated.

The Reeve's tale therefore lacks any degree of compassion toward any of its characters. The nominal heroes of the tale, Aleyn and John, are more sympathetic than Symkyn and his family only to the degree that they are more intelligent, yet even this distinction is minor. Although they are students, they come from the more rustic northern area of England and show little of the savvy that Nicholas displayed in the previous tale. They are cheated out of their corn and lose their horse through the miller's deception. When they seduce the miller's wife and daughter, they do so merely out of opportunity and jealousy, and their actions seem to be little better than rape. The two students even lack that measure of lust that is present in the Miller's Tale and which might make the characters more sympathetic. In the end, most of the characters suffer some physical injury, but most of all the miller. For deceiving the students he found himself cuckolded, his daughter deflowered, and himself robbed and severely wounded. Even the means by which he is wounded is comic - his wife conks him on the head with his staff.

Summary and Analysis of The Cook's Tale

The Cook's Tale:

Chaucer only completed fifty or so lines of this fragment. The tale begins by describing an apprentice who spent most of his life in the pursuit of pleasures. He secured from his master leave for the night, which he spent in drunken revelry. The tale ends here. It is likely that the tale would continue the pattern of the previous tales in telling a comic tale, possibly in the fabliau mold.

Summary and Analysis of The Man of Law's Tale

Fragment II

The Words of the Host to the Company and Prologue to the Man of Law's Tale:

The host speaks to the rest of the travelers, telling them that they can regain lost property but not lost time. The host suggests that the lawyer tell the next tale, and he agrees to do so, for he does not intend to break his promises. He says that we ought to keep the laws we give to others. He even refers to Chaucer, who works ignorantly and writes poorly, but at the very least does not write filthy tales of incest. The Man of Law tells the company that he will tell a tale by Chaucer called the tale of Cupid's Saints. The lawyer prepares for the tale he will tell about poverty, and does so in a pretentious and formal manner.

Analysis:

In the prologue to the Man of Law's Tale, Chaucer once again plays with the divergence between the actual author and the narrator of each tale with the lawyer's critical reference to Chaucer, as if he were not the actual architect of the tale's words. The lawyer's critique of Chaucer is playful, little more than a sarcastic jibe at Chaucer's own abilities and a critique of Chaucer's contemporaries not meant to be taken seriously. In fact, little that the lawyer says is momentous or significant. Chaucer portrays the lawyer as pompous and formal, addressing the motley crowd as if he were speaking to the court.

The Man of Law's Tale, Part One:

In Syria there dwelt a company of wealthy traders who made a journey to Rome. After a certain time there, they beheld Constance, the emperor's daughter, who was renowned equally for her goodness and beauty. When the merchants returned to Syria, they reported to the sultan what they had seen; he immediately was taken with lust and wonder for Constance. The sultan met with his advisors and told them of his intent, but they could conceive of no way that he could marry Constance, for no Christian emperor would allow his daughter to marry a Moslem. The sultan thus decided that he would convert to Christianity and that his baronets would follow him in his conversion. With this conversion the Roman emperor gave Constance away in marriage, but she was overcome with sorrow, for she did not wish to be sent to a foreign country. She accepts, however, thinking that women are made to be subject to men's governance. The mother of the sultan (the sultana), however, learned of his intentions to convert, and sent for her own council.

Analysis:

The Man of Law's Tale exalts the sacrifice and honor of Constance, the daughter of the Roman emperor who will suffer a number of injustices during the years over which the story takes place. It is an overtly religious tale

that does not even reach for the subtlety of allegory. Constance depends on her religious faith for her survival throughout a number of events in the story, while those characters who do not share her Christian faith are uniformly evil, whether pagan or Muslim. The tale takes a narrow view of humanity in which Christianity represents unadulterated purity and any other religious tradition is pure evil. Yet the Man of Law's Tale places a significant emphasis on fate;

Her virtue and honor stem from her devotion to Christian principles, while those who adhere to other religious beliefs are automatically suspect. This holds true for the Syrians and even their sultan. The Lawyer describes them as covetous and, in the case of the sultan, lustful. He wishes to marry Constance before he has even met her, desiring the power that comes from her status as Roman royalty. The sultan is only redeemed when he chooses to convert to Christianity, but even when this occurs Constance still faces dancer from the sultana, whose villainy is shown by her devotion to her faith and unwillingness to accept Christian principles.

The Man of Law's Tale, although the introduction claims it will be in prose form, actually is in rhyme royal.

The Man of Law's Tale, Part Two:

The sultana and her confidants agreed never to renounce the Islamic faith, and she compared Constance to Eve, tempting her son to sinful action. The mother of the sultan and her advisors will pretend to accept Christianity and host a feast for the sultan and his new wife. During this feast, the sultana had her followers massacre all of the attendants. Only Constance survived; they placed her on a rudderless boat heading back to Italy, with enough food to survive but no means of navigating to Rome. On this ship Constance remained for years. It was only through her prayer that she remained safe. The ship finally crashed on the shores of Northumberland. The warden of a nearby castle found Constance and gave her shelter, but she refused to reveal her identity. He and his wife, Dame Hermengild, were pagans, but Constance soon secretly converted the wife to Christianity in this heathen land. Christians could only practice their faith privately and secretly. While walking on the beach, Constance, Hermengild and her husband came upon a blind Christian, who identified her. Although Hermengild feared that her husband would reproach her for the conversion, he too became a Christian. The warden was not the lord of the castle. Instead, it was Alla, the king of Northumberland, who was at war against the Scots. A young knight, influenced by Satan, fell in love with Constance, but she would not return her favors. In an attempt to exact revenge upon her, he broke into the bedchamber where Constance and Dame Hermengild slept, slit Hermengeld's throat and placed the knife beside Constance. Soon after the warden came home with Alla and found his wife murdered. The knight blamed Constance for the crime, but everyone supported Constance, unable to believe that she would murder Hermengild. Still, with the knight's accusation Constance was to be put to death. She prayed for a miracle and, moved by her pleas, Alla decided to make the knight swear on the Bible that Constance was the murderer. When he did so, the knight was struck down and his eyes burst. Upon witnessing this miracle, Alla converted to Christianity himself and sentenced the knight to death. Alla took Constance as his wife, but Lady Donegild, his mother, was distressed at the development. After their marriage, when King Alla was in Scotland, Constance gave birth to a child named Mauritius. She sent letters to him, but Donegild intercepted them and replaced them with a different letter, claiming that the new child was foul and

wicked. Alla, however, wrote back that he vowed to love the child. She intercepted the new letter, and replaced it with one that banished Constance and her child on the same boat from which they came.

Analysis:

Although the sultana compares Constance to Eve, this comparison is entirely wrong. In the context of the story, Constance does not tempt others to sin, but instead acts as the one bastion for moral behavior. If anything, she is incapable of tempting other characters; Constance is an unwavering, passive character who is moved by the plot and only in rare occasions is an active character. The sultana, however, is irredeemably wicked, ordering her son and his fiancée's murder. That Constance survives is a testament to her Christian faith. During the numerous times in which she faces fatal consequences, Constance relies in prayer for her survival and, without fail, this technique is successful. Therefore her survival during the massacre in Syria can be attributed in part to her Christianity; she is the only Christian among the group and the only survivor.

The Lawyer's tale is essentially one that glorifies Christianity and its values. The warden of the castle and Hermengild prove their worth through conversion, and the narrator makes clear that Christians in England are persecuted for their beliefs. Their adherence to the faith thus becomes a noble sacrifice, for they risk their own lives by becoming Christians. Yet without fail each of the pagan characters is ignoble. The narrator describes the knight who murders Hermengild and attempts to frame Constance as influenced by Satan, while Donegild, a pagan who refused to convert to Christianity, schemes to have her son's wife banished.

The scheming Donegild shares obvious similarities with the murderous sultana. Both design to prevent Constance from marrying their sons, fearful of the Christian influence that Constance brings to their respective nations. The two mothers fall into the same fairy−tale mold as a wicked stepmother, cardboard villainesses with no redeeming qualities. The defining characteristic of both women that mark them as evil is their paganism, which drives them to murderous action.

The Man of Law's Tale, Part Three:

When Alla returned home, he learned what had happened and murdered his mother for her cruelty. But Constance had already set sail, and ended up in another foreign kingdom, where she happened to find the warden's steward, who came to her ship and attempted to rape her. Fortunately, he suddenly fell overboard and was drowned. The story returns to the tale of the sultana. The emperor of Rome sent an army to Syria in response to the massacre of the Christians. On their way home, the senator who led the army in Syria met Constance. They brought her back to Rome, but nobody remembered her, not even the senator's wife, who was Constance's aunt. Meanwhile, King Alla made a pilgrimage to Rome to make penance for what had happened with his mother and his wife. The senator went to feast with King Alla, who saw young Mauritius and vaguely recognized him. He was thus reunited with his wife and son. Constance is also reunited with her father, who did not recognize her after so many years. Alla and Constance returned to England, while Mauritius (Maurice) later became emperor of Rome.

Analysis:

An unwavering devotion to Christian belief saves Constance once more, when she fends off an attack by a (pagan) rapist through divine intervention. Fate and coincidence play a defining role in the story, exposing the knight as a ruthless murderer and preventing the steward from raping Constance. These coincidences always occur in a religious context; the knight suffers divine harm when he swears on the Bible, while Constance's prayer is rewarded when the steward attacks her.

Yet despite her travails - several murder plots against her, banishment and attempted rape - Constance survives and remains devoted to her faith. She is thus comparable to biblical characters such as Jonah and Job. Her final reward for her steadfast faith comes when she reunites with both her father and her husband upon her final return to Rome. Even in the fate of Maurice is the influence of Christianity felt. He becomes emperor of Rome only when the pope gives his assent.

Epilogue to the Man of Law's Tale:

The Host praised the Lawyer for his tale, and urged the Parish Priest to tell a tale. The Parson chides the Host for swearing, and he in turn mocks the Parson as a "Jankin" (a contemptuous name for a priest). The Shipman decides that he will tell a tale next. In the fragments that remain of the Canterbury Tales, however, the Shipman's Tale exists later in the manuscripts, in the seventh set of stories. The Wife of Bath's Tale follows instead.

Summary and Analysis of The Wife of Bath's Tale

Fragment III

Prologue to the Wife of Bath's Tale:

The Wife of Bath begins the prologue to her tale by boasting of her experience in marriage. She has married five men already, and ignores the idea that this is a reproach to Christian principles. She is merely adhering to the Christian principle of "be fruitful and multiply." She cites the case of King Solomon, who had multiple wives, and tells the group that she welcomes the opportunity for her sixth husband. She also points out that Jesus never lays down a law about virginity, and essentially states that we have the parts for sex and should use them as such. The Pardoner objects to the Wife of Bath's musings on marriage, but she decides to tell about each of her husbands. Three were good and two were young men. The good ones were kind, rich and old. She would withhold sex from the old ones to get the riches they might offer her. She would use guilt and jealousy against them, along with other manipulative techniques. Yet the fourth husband that she married was young. He was a reveler and had a mistress as well as a wife. He was a match for the Wife of Bath, sharing some of the similar qualities, but he soon died. The fifth husband was the most cruel to her, kind in bed but otherwise violent. He had been a student at Oxford, and came to be a boarder at the home of the Wife's best friend, Alison, while she was still married to husband number four. Soon after he died, she married Jankin, who was, at twenty, half the Wife's age. She gave him all of the property she owned, but he never let her have her way. Once he struck her so hard on the ear that she lost hearing simply because she tore a page from one of his books. He would cite examples from Roman history and the Bible that indicated a wife should be submissive, and it was one of these passages that she tore from the book. She complains that the stories in the Bible that denigrate women are written by monks who have no experience with them, and that the stories would be far different if women were to write them. After Jankin struck her, she appeared dead, but when she revived he was so penitent that he ceded all authority in the marriage to her. From that point onward she was kind to him, for he had given her what she truly wanted.

Analysis:

The Wife of Bath is perhaps the most fully realized character in the Canterbury Tales. Headstrong, boisterous and opinionated, she wages a perpetual struggle against the denigration of women and the taboos against female sexuality. She issues a number of rebuttals against strict religious claims for chastity and monogamy, using Biblical examples including Solomon to show that the Bible does not overtly condemn all expressions of sexuality, even outside of marriage. Those who use religious texts to argue for the submission of women are the most fervent targets of scorn for the Wife of Bath. She claims that the reason for the bias against women in these texts is due to the lack of experience and contact with women of those who write the text. It is this antipathy to intellectual arguments against femininity that causes her to tear the pages from Jankin's book.

The Wife of Bath's crusade to prove the worth of women does open the prologue to modern interpretations that reconfigure the Wife of Bath as a feminist icon, but she is no unabashed modern heroine. She is overtly manipulative, using her sexuality as a weapon against her husbands in order to shame them into providing for her. She can be a harridan and a harpy, cruelly accusing her husbands of ingratitude and withholding sex to extract gifts from her husbands. Yet in the Wife's boasts of these strategies, she indicates that they were a necessity; she has been afforded so few benefits that she must use her sexuality, the one great weapon that she has, to gain a dominance over her husbands. Within her posturing there is also the indication that the Wife of Bath is in a very precarious situation. She uses her intensity to mask the fact that, as an aging woman who is rapidly losing her appearance - the one asset that she can use - the Wife of Bath is in danger of losing her place in society.

The Wife of Bath uses a language of commerce throughout her tale in reference to marriage. While this could be conceived of as a comparison of marriage to prostitution, it better refers to her conception of the marriage 'debt.' The Wife of Bath's manipulations can be seen as an economic shrewdness. She recognizes marriage for what it is and brings that quality to the fore. Her perceptive nature extends even to herself; she recognizes what sins she may have committed and the social norms she has transgressed, but this quality is most important for allowing her to realize what marriage truly entails for her.

The theme of the Wife of Bath's Tale is thus not female equality in marriage, but rather the power struggles between the husband and wife. She does not seek an equal partnership with a husband, but a situation in which she has control over her spouse. The Wife of Bath even indicates that it is only in a marriage where the wife has control over her husband that true happiness can be attained. When Jankin attempted to exert control over her and struck her down, she reasserted her control over him through guilt. This shift of the balance of power lead to her first truly happy domestic arrangement. Since she was the dominant partner in the marriage, the Wife of Bath no longer saw it necessary to struggle with her husband or withhold sexual favors from him. According to the Wife of Bath, even her husband was more satisfied with this arrangement, although considering her previous boasts one must consider the extremely biased point of view that she gives.

The Wife of Bath's Tale:

The Wife of Bath's Tale tells a story from a distant time, when King Arthur ruled the nation and fairy queens and elves were common. However, now friars are common where elves once were. King Arthur had a knight who, when riding home one day from hawking, found a maiden walking alone and raped her. This crime usually held the penalty of death, but the queen intervened and begged her husband to spare the knight. She told the knight that she would grant his life if he could answer the question "what do women most desire?" She gave him one year to find the answer. The knight went on his journey and could find no satisfactory answer. Some said wealth, others jollity, some status, others a good lover in bed. The knight was despondent that he could not find an answer. When he reached the end of the twelve months before he must return to meet his fate, he found an old woman and asked her the question. She agreed to give the answer and assured him that it was the right one, but would only tell him the answer if he would marry her. She told him that women desire to have the

sovereignty and to rule over their husbands. When the knight faced the queen and gave the correct answer, the old woman announced the knight's pledge, which constrained him to wed. The knight, although pardoned, was miserable that he had to marry such an old crone. She realized his unhappiness, and confronted him about it. He criticized her for not only being old and ugly, but low−born. She scoffs at his snobbery as a definition of a 'gentleman' and defends her poverty as irrelevant to God. She gives him a choice: he can have her as a wife old and ugly, but humble and devoted, or young and fair, but independent. He chooses to give her independence. When he kisses her, she transforms into a young and beautiful woman. They lived happily together; he was devoted to her, while she tended to his pleasure. The Wife of Bath ends the Tale with its moral: let Christ grant all women submissive husbands who sexually satisfy their wives.

Analysis:

The Wife of Bath's Tale centers around feminine issues, posing the question "what do women want most?" and ending with the moral that wives deserve kind and devoted husbands who will cede dominance in a marriage to them. The hand of the Wife of Bath is thus omnipresent in the tale as is no other narrator. The old crone voices the opinions that the Wife of Bath herself gave during her extended prologue before the story, and can be seen as a veiled representation of the Wife of Bath. Like the Wife of Bath in her struggle with Jankin, the old woman marries a younger man, and the two only find happiness when the young husband cedes control to the older wife. The personalities of the Wife of Bath and the old woman of the story are even identical; the old woman is prone to argumentative speeches, such as her defense of poverty and low status, similar to the Wife of Bath's defense of female sexuality in the prologue. The old woman even has rhetoric skills perhaps greater than the Wife of Bath. Her tirade against the knight defending her supposed faults uses nearly impregnable logic. The story even represents a scenario of wish−fulfillment for the Wife of Bath, for the old woman suddenly transforms herself into a young and beautiful woman at the story's end. It is a fairy−tale transformation story in which a kiss turns a hideous creature into a princess.

However, some of the dynamics of the story are problematic. The tale has a fairy−tale structure, but offers discordant elements. The nominal hero of the tale is a rapist. Even after the old woman saves him from execution, he behaves coldly and dismissive toward her. He seems hardly worth of the woman, even in her most aged and haggard form. Still, this opens up the knight for his own transformation. He chooses to cede to the woman sovereignty in marriage and it is when he does this that she becomes young and beautiful. The tale poses her newfound beauty as an incidental effect of her independence, a physical manifestation of her internal qualities.

The final 'moral' of the tale is comic but disturbing. It fully reflects the Wife of Bath's sensibility of exaggerated aggressiveness. The ending makes an ambiguous statement. The wife who has full sovereignty, but still she obeyed him in everything to his liking. This may indicate that she was sexually obliging once she received the sovereignty she wanted, a more comic notion, or may indicate that the gift of sovereignty instituted a state in which there could finally be some mutual interaction impossible when the husband asserts dominion over the wife.

Summary and Analysis of The Friar's Tale

Prologue to the Friar's Tale:

The Friar commends the Wife of Bath for her tale, and then says that he will tell a tale about a summoner. He does not wish to offend the Summoner who travels with them, but insists that summoners are known for lewd behavior. The Summoner does not take offense, but does indicate that he will repay the Friar in turn. The job of the Summoner to which the Friar objects is to issue summons from the church against sinners who, under penalty of excommunication, pay indulgences for their sins to the church, a sum which the summoner often pockets.

Analysis:

The Friar's Tale will continue the pattern of reciprocity that had earlier been established before the interruption of the Wife of Bath's Tale. The Friar will tell his tale about a summoner, while the summoner will in turn repay the friar with a tale about a man of his profession. However, compared to the earlier pattern of tales repaying one another for insults, the interaction between the Friar and the Summoner is more muted and less personal. The Friar insists that he does not wish to insult the Summoner personally, while the Summoner's reaction to the Friar is rational and relatively muted.

The Friar's Tale:

The Friar's Tale tells of an archdeacon who boldly executed the Church's laws against fornication, witchcraft and lechery. Lechers received the greatest punishment, forced to pay significant tithes to the church. The archdeacon had a summoner who was quite adept at discovering lechers, even though he himself was immoral.

The Summoner interrupts the Friar's Tale with an objection, but the Host allowed the Friar to continue his tale. The Friar tells that the summoner of his tale would only summon those who had enough money to pay the church, and would take part of the charge. He would enlist the help of prostitutes who would reveal their customers to the summoner in exchange for their own safety (and offer of sexual services). One day, the summoner was traveling to issue a summons to a yeoman, who had been hunting. The summoner claimed to be a bailiff, knowing that his actual profession was so detested. The yeoman claimed to be a bailiff, and offers hospitality to the summoner. The two travel together, and the summoner asks where the yeoman lives, intending to later rob him. The summoner asks the yeoman how he makes money at his job, and the bailiff admits that he lives by extortion. The summoner admits the he does the same, and they reveal to each other their villainy, until the yeoman finally declares that he is a fiend whose dwelling is in hell. The summoner asks the yeoman (the devil) why he has a human shape, and he claims that he assumes one whenever on earth. The summoner asks him why he labors as such, and the devil says that sometimes he and others are God's instruments. The devil claims that the summoner will meet him again someday and have more evidence of hell than had Dante or

Virgil. The summoner suggests that the two continue on their way and go about their business, each taking their share. On their travels they found a carter whose wagon loaded with hay was stuck in the mud. The carter cursed the devil for his troubles, and the summoner suggests to the devil that he take all of the carter's belongings as retribution. The horses pull the wagon from the mud when he prays to God. The summoner suggests that they visit a stingy old crone, but the devil suddenly leaves him and tells the summoner that they may meet again. The summoner gives her a notice to appear before the archdeacon on the penalty of excommunication, but she claims that she is sick and cannot make it there. She asks if she can pay the summoner to represent her to the archdeacon, but he demands twelve pence, a sum that she thinks is too great, for she claims she is guiltless of sin. She curses the summoner, saying that she would give his body to the devil. The devil hears this and tells the summoner that he shall be in hell tonight. Upon these words, the summoner and the devil disappeared into hell, the realm where summoners truly belong.

Analysis:

The Friar's Tale, like the Reeve's Tale, seems to exist for a single purpose: the humiliation and degradation of members of a certain profession. The Tale begins by exposing the means by which summoners blackmail and extort persons, but does not attack the church system that allows this to happen, but rather the men who represent this system and exploit these workings of the church. Yet the Friar's Tale surpasses the Reeve's Tale in its vitriol for its main character. While Symkyn, the immoral miller of the Reeve's tale, is hardly an exemplary character and exists only for ridicule, he at least is given a proper name that separates him from his profession. The main character of the Friar's Tale is an impersonal representation of all summoners and the fate they deserve.

The comic twist to the Friar's Tale is that, when he meets the devil, the summoner is neither shocked nor overcome with fear. Rather, the summoner regards the devil as a curious colleague. In fact, the narrator seems to hold a higher opinion of the devil than of the summoner. When the devil leaves the summoner, the devil tells him that they shall hold company together until he forsakes him. This may be a chance for redemption that the devil offers the summoner when he visits the old crone, but he does not take it.

The end of the tale is pious and overblown. In the end, the Friar returns to his diatribe against summoners, leaving the specific tale that he has told for a more broad attack on their profession.

Summary and Analysis of The Summoner's Tale

Prologue to the Summoner's Tale:

The Summoner was enraged by the tale that the Friar told. He claims in response to the Friar that friars and fiends are one and the same. He tells that a friar once was brought to hell by an angel and remarked that he saw no friars there. However, Satan lifted his tail and thousands of friars came out from his ass and swarmed around hell.

Analysis:

The Summoner becomes insane with anger upon hearing the Friar's Tale, which, although it was told with great vitriol against summoners, had a measured manner and refrained from personal attacks. Where the Friar was intensely contemptuous yet civil, the Summoner becomes a brutish and ill–tempered barbarian. Rather than combating the image that Friar's Tale had given of his profession, the Summoner confirms the worst about the low qualities of his kind.

The Summoner's Tale:

A friar went to preach and beg in a marshy region of Yorkshire called Holderness. In his sermons he begged for donations for the church and afterward he begged for charity from the local residents. He went to the house of Thomas, a local resident who normally indulged him, and found him ill. The friar speaks of the sermon he gave and essentially orders a meal from Thomas's wife. She tells the friar that her child died not more than two weeks before. The friar claimed that he had a revelation that her child had died and entered heaven. He claims that his fellow friars had a similar vision, for they are more privy to God's messages than laymen, who live richly on earth, as compared to richly spiritually. He speaks about how, among the clergy, only friars remain impoverished and thus close to God, and tells Thomas that his illness persists because he has given so little to the church. When Thomas remarks that his wife is angry, the friar launches into a tirade about the ill effects of ire in men of high degree. He tells the tale of an angry king who sentenced a knight to death because he returned without his partner and automatically assumed that he had murdered him. When a third knight lead the condemned knight to his death, they found the knight that he had supposedly murdered. When the third knight returned to the king to have the sentenced reversed, the king sentenced all three to death: the first because he had originally declared it so, the second because he was the cause of the first's death, and the third because he did not obey the king. Another ireful king, Cambyses, was a drunk. When one of his knights claimed that drunkenness caused people to lose their coordination, Cambyses drew his bow and arrow and shot the knight's son to prove that he still had control of his reflexes. The friar then tells of Cyrus, the Persian king who had the river Gyndes destroyed because one of his horses' drowned in it. The friar then asks Thomas for money that should be divided among all of the monks. Thomas, annoyed by the friar's hypocrisy, told the friar that he had a gift for him that he was sitting on. When the friar reached for the 'gift,' Thomas let out a great fart. The servants

of the house chased the friar out. The enraged friar found the lord of the manor and told him of the embarrassment he suffered, claiming that Thomas promised to divide his riches equally, but only gave the friar a fart. The squire of the lord of the manor said that all will be corrected: the lord of the manor will make sure that the fart will be divided among all deserving friars.

Analysis:

The Summoner's Tale is the third tale thus far in the Canterbury Tales to focus its narrative thrust on a single purpose of humiliation. This tale is a response to the Friar's Tale and its description of fiendish summoners, but this tale employs a far different tone to achieve its effect. The Summoner's Tale also uses a less schematic structure; the tale stands alone as a narrative, as compared to the Friar's Tale, which is significant only in the context that it attacks summoners.

The friar that is the center of this tale is a caricature like the summoner of the Friar's Tale, but this tale grants its character a collection of human foibles and mannerisms, however negative, that create a more rounded character. The friar is a relentless beggar and a leech, yet contrary to his lowly position he is arrogant and demanding. Despite his boasts that friars are the closest men to heaven because of their poverty, he demands a meal from Thomas and his wife and gives her detailed instructions about what he wants. He prefers demanding service to asking for charity. Subtle details illustrate the friar's lack of respect for others; when he arrives at Thomas' house, the friar immediately makes that house his own, pushing the family cat out of the way to get the most comfortable seat.

While the Friar's Tale gives little indication why summoners would be tolerated even with their mandate from the church, the Summoner's Tale places friars in a more realistic context. The friar of this tale is overtly well−mannered and educated, and even can feign concern for others. Where this friar oversteps his bounds is in his relentless obviousness to others' suffering. He chides Thomas and his wife for not attempting church recently, even when the reason is the recent death of their small child. He berates them with lofty tales inapplicable to their situation. The tales of men of ire are exaggerated instances of men driven to homicidal madness having nothing to do with the legitimate distress that Thomas and his wife feel.

The climax of the story in which the friar receives the 'gift' of a fart keeps the story in a strictly comedic vein, removing any pretenses of a high−minded critique on friars. The fart continues with the fixation on bodily functions prevalent in the Summoner's Tale and Prologue. The early anecdote about friars contained in Satan's ass is complemented by Thomas' gastrointestinal difficulties and the final fart given to the friar.

Summary and Analysis of The Clerk's Tale

Fragment IV

Prologue to the Clerk's Tale:

The Host remarks that the Clerk of Oxford sits quietly, and tells him to be more cheerful. The Host asks the Clerk to tell a merry tale of adventure and not a moralistic sermon. The Clerk agrees to tell a story that he learned from a clerk at Padua, Francis Petrarch. He then praises the renowned Petrarch for his sweet rhetoric and poetry. The Clerk does warn that Petrarch, before his tale, wrote a poem in a high style exalting the Italian landscape.

Analysis:

In the Prologue to the Clerk's Tale, Chaucer indulges yet again in a mild critique of his contemporaries. Here he analyzes Petrarch's stories and finds fault with his overindulgent descriptions of the Italian landscape, yet nevertheless he finds Petrarch's story good enough to adapt for his own Canterbury Tales. Geoffrey Chaucer did adapt most of these tales from outside sources, modifying them as he saw fit and often making significant changes in tone and plot points. Nevertheless, many of the stories in the Canterbury Tales did not originate with Chaucer himself.

The Clerk's Tale:

The tale begins with the description of Saluzzo, a region at the base of Mount Viso in Italy. There was once a marquis of this region named Walter. He was wise, noble and honorable, but had one major flaw. He refused to marry, choosing careless pursuits instead. His refusal was so steadfast that the people of his realm confronted him about this, pleading with him to take a wife. They offer to choose for him the most noble woman in the realm for him to marry. He agrees to marry, but makes this one condition: he will marry whomever he chooses, regardless of birth, and his wife shall be treated with the respect accorded the emperor's daughter no matter her origin.

Near the palace lived among the humble folk a man named Janicula, who had a daughter Griselde, who was exceedingly virtuous, courageous and charitable. While hunting the marquis found Griselde and immediately decided that this exemplary woman was the one he should marry. On the day of the wedding Walter had not revealed to the public the woman he would marry, and the populace assumed that he would not marry at all. But he came to Griselde's home and asked Janicula for his permission to marry his daughter. The marquis' servants took Griselde and dressed her in preparation for the wedding; she appeared as if she had been born as nobility, not from her actual humble origin. Her virtue and excellence became renowned throughout Saluzzo, for she was essentially a perfect wife. Soon she gave birth to a baby girl, although she would have preferred a son who

could be his father's heir.

Soon after his daughter was born, the marquis decided to test his wife. He told her that although she was dear to him, to the rest of the nobility she was not. They objected to the new daughter, and wished that she be taken away from Griselde and put to death. The marquis instead sent the child away with one of his sergeants to be raised Walter's sister, the Countess of Panago, in Bologna. Walter did pity his wife, who remained steadfast and dedicated to him, silently accepting her fate and that of her child whom she believed dead.

Walter and Griselde soon had another child, this time a boy, and Walter repeated the same test. She accepted it, and told him that she realizes that she was of low birth and would consent to die if it pleased him. However, she does acknowledge that she has had no benefits of motherhood, only the pain of childbirth and a continued pain of losing her children. Yet when this was done Walter thought of more tests to prove his wife's faithfulness. The people came to loathe Walter, thinking that he had murdered his children. Walter devised his next test: he contrived a counterfeit papal bull that ordered Walter to divorce Griselde and take another wife. Upon hearing this, Griselde remained steadfast.

Walter ordered that Griselde return to her father's house. She was stoic upon hearing this, and protested her love for Walter, but will not repent for loving him. She only asks that she not be sent naked from the palace, but will be given a simple smock to wear to spare her from suffering the indignity of returning home completely unclothed. Walter denied her even this, but she did not complain, despite the embarrassment.

The Countess of Panago arrived at Saluzzo with Griselde's two children. Walter sent a message to Griselde that he would be married soon and wished for Griselde to plan the ceremony. When the people saw the supposed new wife, they at last ended their complaints, thinking that the new wife was as fair as Griselde but had the virtue of youth. When Walter introduced Griselde to his new wife, she pleaded with him not to treat the new wife as unkindly as he did her, but had no malice in her words. Walter kissed Griselde and claimed that she had always been his wife. He reveals to her the actual fate of her two children - the supposed new wife was actually Griselde's daughter. Walter returned Griselde to the castle where he from then on treated her kindly. The Clerk claims that Petrarch's moral to this story is that all women should strive to be as steadfast as Griselde, but not necessarily have to suffer the same torture.

Analysis:

The Clerk's Tale serves primarily to applaud the virtues of patience and noble suffering in women, as represented by Griselde. She suffers unimaginable tortures at the hands of her husband, losing her two children and finally her husband merely to prove that she is capable of bearing any burden placed upon her. However, although the story is a celebration of Griselde's fortitude, the Clerk accurately judges that it would be impossible for any woman to legitimately withstand the suffering that Griselde faced with such resignation. Furthermore, her extreme behavior is not even commendable, for she allows her husband to murder her two children without struggle. The Clerk indicates that women should strive toward the example that Griselde sets, but not

necessarily follow her example in such an extreme form.

Chaucer does humanize Griselde at several points in the story. Although she is a passive character, she is self–aware and realizes that she suffers nearly inhuman torture. When she gives birth for the second time, Griselde laments that she has never experienced the joys of motherhood, and she pleads with Walter to allow her to leave his estate with some dignity. She does not beg for mercy from Walter, but merely asks to be spared some of the indignation that he has inflicted upon her. Without this realization that her situation has been so wretched, Griselde would seem not steadfast, but rather dull and dim–witted. Griselde even breaks from her normal passive state at one point in the story, in which she asks Walter to be kinder to his new wife than he was to her. Although the Clerk takes pains to show that this advice contained no hatred toward Walter, this action is nevertheless more bold than Griselde's normal patterns of behavior. The only point in the story in which her actions do not seem plausible is at the conclusion of the tale in which all is restored. She registers no sense of anger at Walter, whose behavior was far beyond abusive. She only appears grateful that her children have been returned to her.

The great affection that the narrator has for Griselde makes Walter a problematic character. At the beginning of the tale Walter is the ostensible 'hero,' and the narrator frames his choice as honorable. He marries Griselde for love rather than status. This is no small gesture; Walter expects that the people of his realm will demand that he marry a wealthy and respectable woman. Even here, however, the portrayal of Walter is less than positive. At the beginning of the story he has no wish to marry, choosing the easy life of a bachelor over adult responsibilities. His choice of Griselde, the action in the story which speaks most highly of Walter, does not even do much to redeem him. The portrayal of Griselde is so overwhelmingly positive that Walter's affection for her only proves that he is sentient.

Once Walter does begin to test his wife, any sympathy for Walter vanishes immediately. His first test - taking away Griselde's first child - is a mean–spirited prank with the ostensible purpose of proving Griselde's worth. The means by which he demonstrates Griselde's fortitude is callous and inappropriate to the purpose. The following tests that Walter inflicts on his wife appear to serve a different purpose. Walter's motivation seems to shift from demonstrating his wife's capacities to breaking down his wife. This may be due to envy for Griselde, a woman universally beloved by his people, who at the outset of the story consider Walter irresponsible and immature. By the time Walter sends Griselde naked from his home he has become wholeheartedly sadistic.

The reconciliation that concludes the Clerk's Tale is therefore unsatisfying, for it restores to Walter what he does not deserve. The reconstruction of the family that occurs when Griselde and her children return to Walter's estate is at best tenuous, bringing together a wife and a husband who tortured her, and children and the parents who did not raise them.

Summary and Analysis of The Merchant's Tale

Prologue to the Merchant's Tale:

The merchant claims that he knows nothing of long−suffering wives. Rather, if his wife were to marry the devil, she would overmatch even him. The Merchant claims that there is a great difference between Griselde's exceptional obedience and his wife's more common cruelty. The Merchant has been married two months and has loathed every minute of it. The Host asks the Merchant to tell a tale of his horrid wife.

Analysis:

The prologues that link the various Canterbury Tales shift effortlessly from ponderous drama to light comedy. The lamentable tale of Griselde gives way to the Host's complaint about his shrewish wife. This prologue further illustrates how each of the characters informs the tale he tells. The travelers largely tell tales that conform to their personal experiences or attitudes, such as the Merchant, whose awful marriage is the occasion for his tale about a difficult wife. In most cases the influence of the narrator on his tale is apparent, but the authorial touch lightly felt. The Merchant's Tale, for example, gains little from the prologue's information that the Merchant is disenchanted with his own marriage. Only a few of these tales exist largely as extensions of the characters who tell them; the Wife of Bath's Tale is the most prominent of these stories.

The Merchant's Tale:

The Merchant tells a tale of a prosperous knight from Lombardy who had not yet taken a wife. But when this knight, January, had turned sixty, whether out of devotion or dotage, he decided to finally be married. He searched for prospects, now convinced that the married life was a paradise on earth. Yet his brother, Placebo, cited the advice of the scholar Theophrastus, who advised men never to wed, for servants show more diligence and do not claim nearly as much. To this the knight retorted with Biblical stories that state a man without a wife is bent on ruin. These stories cites the creation of Eve for Adam as proof that a wife is man's support, as well as examples of humble and devoted wives. January, wished to have a young wife of no older than thirty, for a young wife would be more pliable, but Placebo warned him that it takes great courage for such an aged man to take a young wife. He warned him of the misery that can come from taking a wife, for she could be shrewish or a drunkard, facts that a husband will not learn until well into the marriage. Despite the common opinion that Placebo has a wonderful wife, he knows what faults she has. They argue about the merits of marriage, with Placebo predicting that January will not please his wife for more than three years, but Placebo eventually assents to January's plan. January finally decided to take a young and pretty wife, foolishly believing that nobody would find fault with his choice. He spoke to Placebo and his friends about his choice, praising his intended wife. January, however, worries that a man who finds perfect happiness on earth as he would with his wife would never find a similar happiness in heaven, for one must choose between one perfect happiness and another. Justinus countered by stating that it is more likely that married men will get to heaven than single men.

He muses that marriage might be January's purgatory.

January thus married his intended, May, in a joyous ceremony. On their wedding night January, consumed with lust, ravaged his wife. He essentially forced himself on May, believing himself justified because they were now married. However, Damian, January's squire, was infatuated with May. He wrote a love letter to May that he pinned in a silk purse next to his heart. One day Damian was not attending January, and to cover for him the other squires told January that Damian was sick. May and January went to visit Damian, and during this visit Damian slipped May the purse with his love letter. She read it and then tore it up to destroy the evidence. May took pity on Damian and gave him a letter in return. Damian felt better the next day, and groomed himself to look presentable for May. January's house had a garden so magnificent that even he who wrote Romance of the Rose could not describe its beauty, nor could Priapus accurately describe its art. January loved this garden so much that only he was allowed to touch the key to it. In the summer he would go there with May and have sex. January became increasingly possessive of his wife, which caused Damian great grief. May made a double of the key to the garden in warm wax which she gave to Damian. January came to the garden looking for May, wishing to have sex, when Damian covertly entered. Damian hid in a tree. It so happened that at this time Pluto, the king of fairies, and Queen Proserpina were walking in this garden, discussing the injustices that women do to men, yet while one man in a thousand is good, no woman is worthy. He gives as an example Damian, May and January. Damian remained in the pear tree, waiting for January to be finished with his wife. May claimed that she was hungry and wanted a pear. Since January was blind and could not climb the tree, he hoisted her so that she could climb to where Damian was hiding. While she was in the tree, she and Damian had sex. At this point Pluto came upon the three and witnessed this injustice. He restored January's sight. Trying to deny what had happened, she tells him that he must still be blind, for if he truly had sight he would never had seen her having sex with Damian. Foolishly January believed this.

Analysis:

The structure of the Merchant's Tale is somewhat lopsided. While the Merchant prepares the reader for a story of a villainous wife, he instead begins the tale with an extended dissertation about the benefits and drawbacks of marriage. The debate between January and Placebo is a relatively dry collection of classical and biblical anecdotes, but it serves to frame the comic sex farce to come as a more serious look at marriage. The beginning passages of the tale also serve as a warning against marriage. When the aged January decides to take a wife he is already sixty and rapidly approaching senility. His wish to marry stems from a realization of his own mortality rather than any love for a wife - in fact, he decides to marry before he has found a fiancee. The Merchant even indicates that January's life to this point has been fulfilling, leaving dotage as the only reason for him to take a wife. His arguments for marriage therefore appear empty in comparison of those by Placebo. While both Placebo and January can cite literary references to back up their claims for their respective positions, only Placebo has the weight of experience to support his claims against marriage. Furthermore, January holds irrational expectations for his wife. He expects to marry a young and beautiful woman who will care for him, not expecting any ill effects from this arrangement - he even foolishly believes that he will be so happy that he may ruin his chances for heaven.

The Merchant therefore dooms the marriage of January and May from the outset. Even in their calendar names they are mismatched: the elderly January is in the winter of his existence, while the young May represents the birth and fertility that comes during the spring. The marriage moves the story into a different realm. The literary tone of the story gives way to the conventions of fabliau.

Each of the three central characters in the tale fit most of the established conventions for fabliaux, although there are significant adaptations in tone and plot points. January is an aged buffoon oblivious to the sexual cravings of his young wife. May is a youthful wife, lusty and crafty in her deception. Damian is equally cunning and fits the fabliau profile of an interloper in a marriage who does not fit into a fixed social class. The plot hinges on the interloper (Damian) contriving to have a sexual tryst with the wife (May) only to have the cuckolded husband learn of the affair and be humiliated. The major aspect of the story that departs from the traditional fabliau mold is the station in which these characters fit. However absurd the character behaves, January is not a lower−class barbarian equal to John the carpenter in the Miller's Tale.

The authorial condemnation of May also departs from the other fabliaux of the Canterbury Tales. Like Alison of the Miller's Tale, she is crafty, but May is also wicked. She escapes without punishment from her husband, but unlike the Miller's Tale this is not a satisfactory conclusion. While the Miller's Tale prized cunning and crafty behavior, the Merchant's Tale adheres to more traditional values. Therefore, May's escape from punishment is a dissonant element of the story, for she behaves contrary to the established values that the Merchant has set for his tale.

Although January is a more sympathetic character than May, he is by no means commendable. Although the narrator does not treat him with the same moralistic condemnation as he heaps upon May, January is still a vulgar object for the audience's mockery. His sexual exploits are grotesque and animalistic. The description of his first conquest of May is replete with violent sexual imagery. January's repeated insistence that their intercourse includes a rationalization that a man and wife are one person, and no man would harm himself with a knife, an unpleasant phallic image. January uses May only as a sexual object; he hammers away upon her, bringing her only pain and boredom.

The Merchant's Tale also stretches the conventions of fabliau through the climax of the tale in which Pluto and Proserpina intrude upon the sexual intrigues among January, May and John. Proserpina and Pluto discuss the virtues of men and women in marriage, coming to the conclusion that few men are commendable, but absolutely no women are worthy. Their intervention in the situation gives divine sanction to the condemnation of women, purposely giving January his sight so that he can condemn his wife (although in a mordant twist, January can literally not believe his eyes).

Summary and Analysis of The Squire's Tale

Fragment V

Epilogue to the Merchant's Tale and Prologue to the Squire's Tale:

The Host laments the Merchant's tale, praying that he would never find such a terrible wife. The Host admits that he also has a wife that he laments marrying. He advises the Squire to tell a tale next. The Squire's Tale is not complete, ending after only six hundred lines.

The Squire's Tale:

The Squire tells the tale of Cambyuskan, the king of Sarai in Tartary. With his wife Elpheta he had two sons, Algarsyf and Cambalo, and a daughter Canacee. In the twentieth year of his reign on the Ides of March his subjects celebrated his nativity. During a great feast with the king and his knights, a knight with a gold ring and a sword entered the hall. He was sent from the king of Arabia and India, and offers him a steed of brass that can, within twenty–four hours, transport a person safely anywhere on the globe. He also presence to Canacee a mirror that foresees impending mischance and can determine the character of friends and foes, a ring that enables the wearer to understand the language of any bird, and the healing properties of all herbs. He also offers a sword whose edge will bite through any armor but whose flat will cure the wounds inflicted by the edge. The knight was led to a chamber and the ring given to Canacee, but the brass steed would not move until the knight taught people how to move it. The horse was a source of wonder for the people, compared alternately to the Pegasus and the Trojan horse. All one needed to do to move the brass horse was to twirl a peg in its ear, according to the knight.

After the revelry of the night before, the next morning everybody but Canacee remained asleep until late. She had dreamed of the mirror and the ring and thus had her first satisfying rest in a very long time. As she went out walking that morning with her maids, she came across bleeding peregrine falcon that cried in anguish. It had maimed itself. Canacee picked up the falcon and spoke to it, a power she had gained from the ring the knight had given her. The falcon told her a tale of a handsome tercelet as treasonous and false as he was beautiful. Yet the tercelet fell in love with a kite as well as with the falcon, but could not choose between the two. Canacee healed the bird with herbs. The tale then returns to King Cambyuskan, but the tale abruptly ends.

Analysis:

Since the Squire's Tale exists only in a fragmented form, it is difficult to determine certain aspects of the tale. The tale may be a fragment because Chaucer never finished the tale or because the later section of the tale was lost in the manuscripts from which the Canterbury Tales were taken. What remains of the Squire's Tale gives only minor indication of the structure and themes of the tale. The tale is an adventure with elements of fantasy

similar to the Knight's Tale - not surprising, for the Squire is the son of the Knight - but with a less bombastic tone and elements of magic instead of the divine intervention that drives the later sections of the Knight's Tale. Part of the difficulty in deciphering where the tale may continue lies in its loose structure. There are a hodgepodge of plotlines that the story could follow, including the mysterious knight, the mechanical horse, and the injured falcon.

Summary and Analysis of The Franklin's Tale

Prologue to the Franklin's Tale:

The Franklin praises the Squire for his eloquence, considering his youth. He tells the Squire that he has no peer among the company and that he wishes that his own son were as commendable as the Squire. The Host suggests that the Franklin tell the next tale. The Franklin begins by apologizing in advance for his rough speech and lack of education.

The Franklin's Tale:

The Franklin's Tale begins with the courtship of the Breton knight Arviragus and Dorigen, who come to be married happily. Their marriage is one of equality, in which neither of the two is master or servant. However, soon after they marry Arviragus is sent away to Britain to work for two years. Dorigen wept for his absence, despite the letters that he sent home to her. Her friends would often take her on walks where they would pass the cliffs overlooking the ocean and watch ships enter the port, hoping that one of them would bring home her husband. However, she was distressed by the rocks that were near the shore. She feared that whatever ship brought her husband home would crash on these rocks and sink. These friends would also have garden parties in which they would invite singers and squires to dance. One of these squires, Aurelius, had been in love with her ever since she arrived in Brittany. Eventually he declared his love for her. She agrees that she would be his lover if he would find a way to clear the rocks that endangered incoming ships. Aurelius lamented this condition, thinking that such a task would be impossible. His brother suggested that Aurelius meet a student of law at Orleans who was versed in the sciences of illusion. Aurelius made a journey to Orleans to meet this student; he found in the student's house the most fantastic luxuries. The student asked for one thousand pounds to remove all of the rocks from the shore off of Brittany. The student consulted his tables and contrived to make the rocks disappear for a week. When Dorigen learned of this, she was overcome with grief, realizing that she must forfeit either her body or her fair name. She thinks about the numerous instances in which a faithful wife or a maiden destroyed herself rather than submitting herself to another. She cites the maidens of Lacedaemon who chose to be slain rather than defiled, and Hasdrubal's wife, who committed suicide during the siege of Carthage, and Lucrece, who did the same when Tarquin took her by force. Arviragus returned home and Dorigen told him the truth of what had happened. He tells her that he will bear the shame of her actions, and that adhering to her promise is the most important thing. He therefore sends her to submit to Aurelius. When Aurelius learns how well Arviragus accepted his wife's promise, Aurelius decides to let Dorigen's promise go unfulfilled. He claims that a squire can be as honorable as a knight. Aurelius then went to pay the law student, even though his affair remained unconsummated. The law student forgave Aurelius' debt, proving himself honorable. The tale thus ends with this question: who was the most generous? Arviragus, Aurelius, or the student.

Analysis:

The Franklin's Tale presents one of the few examples of a functional marital relationship. There is no overt strain in the marriage between Dorigen and Arviragus. The only difficulties that their marriage faces are external to the couple, and the problem that drives the plot of this story even derives from the overwhelming love and concern that Dorigen feels for her husband. The relative idealization of the marriage conforms to the sense of goodwill that the Franklin shows for each of his characters. Arviragus and Dorigen are both exemplary characters. Her greatest fault is a penchant for dramatics, as when she becomes incapacitated when Arviragus leaves, weeping and wailing over his absence. Arviragus is noble and generous, treating his wife with the respect of an equal. Even Aurelius is a benign presence. He is not a forceful intruder into the marriage; he is honest about his love for Dorigen, but does not pressure her, as other interlopers do during the course of the various Canterbury Tales.

The main story of the Franklin's Tale is a common folktale often known as "The Damsel's Rash Promise." The tale traditionally tells of a wife who agrees to be unfaithful if the prospective suitor performs an impossible deed which, through some trickery, he does in fact perform. Chaucer makes a significant change to the standard structure of this tale: the promise that Dorigen makes to Aurelius is meant to ensure her husband's safety. She promises to harm her marriage by submitting to an affair if Aurelius helps keep her marriage safe. Dorigen's promise is therefore less flighty. It is rather a promise that Dorigen makes to sacrifice her honor in exchange for her husband's safety. That she never suspects that Aurelius would be able to actually rid the shore of these rocks becomes less significant in this case.

The relative moral parity of each of the characters sets up the conclusion in which each acts according to his most noble intentions. Arviragus allows himself the humiliation of being cuckolded so that his wife may fulfill her promise. Aurelius forgives Dorigen's promise, allowing her to remain faithful to her husband. And the student absolves Aurelius of his debt for removing the rocks. This last noble act is the most surprising, for it breaks a simple contract that has no external moral implications. For each of the other noble acts, there is the sense that to behave otherwise would be immoral, yet the role of the student was a simple business transaction.

There can be no definitive answer to the question that the conclusion of the story poses, yet a legitimate case can be made for each. The case for the law student was previously stated; a counter−argument to the claim that he was the most noble is that his sacrifice was purely monetary. He gave up nothing of substance when he absolved Aurelius of his debt, while Aurelius and Arviragus gave up something that legitimately mattered. One could argue that Arviragus behaved most nobly because he risked his reputation and gave up what was rightfully his, yet for Arviragus there may not have been another reasonable option‹the other solution that Dorigen considers is suicide. And Aurelius made what was perhaps the largest sacrifice, for he gave up what he desired most, yet what he gave up he had no legitimate right to have.

A final option is that Dorigen was the one who behaved most nobly throughout the course of the story. She sacrificed her honor for the safety of her husband and was honest to both Aurelius and Arviragus. However, this does not consider the inherent foolishness of her initial promise and the fact that her behavior after Aurelius fulfilled this promise was highly constrained.

Summary and Analysis of The Physician's Tale

Fragment VI

The Physician's Tale:

As Titus Livius tells us, there was once a knight called Virginius who had many friends, much wealth, and a loving wife and daughter. The daughter possessed a beauty so great that even Pygmalion could not create her equal. She was also humble in speech and avoided events in which her virtue could be compromised. There was a judge, Appius who governed the town who saw the knight's daughter, and lusted after her. He believed that he could take the daughter by force. He plotted against the daughter with a churl named Claudius. In Appius' court Claudius accuses Virginius of stealing his servant (the daughter), and Appius immediately decides that Virginius must hand over his daughter to Claudius. Virginius tells his daughter, Virginia, that she must now suffer one of two pains, shame or death. Virginius would rather have her dead, however. He chopped off her head and brought it to Appius, who immediately sentenced Virginius to death. However, when the people realized what had happened, they themselves took Appius off to jail, where he committed suicide. Claudius was to be hanged, but Virginius intervened and spared his life. He was merely banished. The moral of this story: forsake your sin ere you will forsake.

Analysis:

The Physician's Tale is not among the most notable of the Canterbury Tales, significant primarily for the way in which it continues to develop themes more fully realized in other tales. The tale centers around the noble suffering of Virginia, who chooses to be murdered rather than to submit her chastity to a fraudulent man. The Physician's Tale thus resembles the Man of Law's Tale and the Clerk's Tale. But unlike Constance or Griselde, Virginia is not the central character of her story. She exists only for the purpose of a single sacrifice, unlike the constant barrage of torment that the other two women suffer. The stature of Virginia's sacrifice is therefore diminished.

Furthermore, the mechanics of this sacrifice are distasteful. The story focuses primarily on the schemes of Appius and Claudius, who are no more than one−dimensional villains. The sacrifice that Virginia makes is perilously close to murder - the choice that her father offers her between shame and death is nearly a threat, and the means by which her death is achieved is unfortunately brutal.

The conclusion of the story is further dramatically unsatisfying, for although it serves the appropriate punishment to the villains, the conclusion shifts the story from Virginia's sacrifice to the villain's mistake. The Tale becomes an exceedingly simple warning for moral behavior - those who contrive to rape the daughter of a powerful man will be punished - instead of a meditation on sacrifice.

Summary and Analysis of The Pardoner's Tale

Prologue to the Pardoner's Tale:

The Host thinks that the cause of Virginia's death in the previous tale was her beauty. To counter the sadness of the tale, the Host suggests that the Pardoner tell a lighter tale. The Pardoner delays, for he wants to finish his meal, but says that he shall tell a moral tale. He says that he will tell a tale with this moral: the love of money is the root of all evil. He claims that during his sermons he shows useless trifles that he passes off as saints' relics. He proudly tells about how he defrauds people who believed they have sinned. He states explicitly that his goal is not to save people from sin, but to gain money from them. The Pardoner says that he will not imitate the apostles in their poverty, but will have food, comfort, and a wench in every town.

Analysis:

Among the various pilgrims featured in the Canterbury Tales, the Pardoner is one of the most fully realized characters. The only character to whom Chaucer gives greater detail is the Wife of Bath. The Pardoner is a fraudulent huckster who shows no qualms about passing off false items as the relics of saints, but he also demonstrates a great sense of self–loathing. The Pardoner shifts from moments of direct honesty to shameless deceit, openly admitting the tricks of his trade to the travelers but nevertheless attempting to use these various methods on these travelers who are aware of his schemes. The Pardoner is in many senses a warped character, unable to hold to any consistent code of moral behavior. Even in his physicality he is deformed. The General Prologue, suggesting that the Pardoner resembles a 'gelding or a mare,' hints that the Pardoner may be a congenital eunuch or, taken less literally, that he is a homosexual. In his deformity the Pardoner becomes a shell of a person. Although he is one of the most developed characters, he is the character perhaps most defined by his profession. The Pardoner has substituted a system of values with a rote performance, which conforms to his profession, which substitutes a meaningless monetary transaction for penance for sin. The Pardoner therefore suggests a traditional Vice character who behaves strictly out of the most impure motives, but where he departs from vice characters, who shamelessly commit misdeeds for their own pleasure, is that he lacks the necessary amoral quality. The Pardoner is not a moral man, but he nevertheless has a moral system to which he most certainly does not adhere.

The Pardoner's Tale:

There once lived in Flanders a group of three rioters who did nothing but engage in irresponsible and sinful behavior. They were blasphemous drunkards who, while in a tavern one night, witnessed men carrying a corpse to its grave. A boy told the rioters that the dead man was one of their friends, slain by an unseen thief called Death. They remark that Death has slain thousands, and vow to slay Death themselves. The three drunken men go off to find Death, but only come across an ancient man shrouded in robes. He claims that Death will not take him, and says that they can find Death underneath a nearby oak tree. When they found the tree they only found

bushels of gold. They decide to take the treasure and divide it evenly, but realize that if they immediate went into town with it they would be presumed robbers. They therefore draw lots; the one with the shortest straw shall go into town and fetch food and drink for them. They shall stay in the forest with the gold until they can leave in the middle of the night. The youngest drew the shortest lot and was sent into town. The two that remain decide to murder the third once he returns, for they would then be able to divide the gold by two instead of three. However, while the third rioter was in town, he bought poison from an apothecary which he poured into the wine bottle. When he returned, the two rioters stabbed the third, murdering him. They then drank the poisoned wine and died themselves.

The Pardoner interrupts the end of his tale with a diatribe against the sin of avarice, then launches into a sermon in which he attempts to sell relics to the other travelers. The Host argues with him, telling him that the only relic he would want from the Pardoner is his testicles enclosed in a hog's turd. The knight mediates the conflict.

Analysis:

The Pardoner's Tale is a direct extension of the personality of the narrator, an overtly moralistic tale that serves primarily to elicit a specific response. It is a particularly shameless tale, a condemnation of avarice that stems from the avarice of its narrator; by condemning the sin, the Pardoner hopes to motivate the travelers to pay the Pardoner to absolve their sins. The character of the Pardoner is omnipresent throughout the tale, which is told in an intimidating oratorical style that intends to create a sense of horror at the consequences for sinful action. Throughout the tale the narrator drifts in and out from the story, as the Pardoner occasionally leaves the plot of the tale to launch into sermons against sin. Finally, at the conclusion of the tale, he reveals the rationale for this authorial intervention, preaching against avarice for the sole intention of selling phony relics to the travelers. The tale is thus less of a fully formed narrative than a performance given by the Pardoner in which he never submerges his presence in the story.

The importance of the narrator is reflected in the relative unimportance of the characters in the story. The three rioters are anonymous hoodlums to whom the narrator gives no distinctive characteristics. The one distinction that the Pardoner makes among the three is that the rioter who is sent for food and drink is younger than the other two. Their characteristics are uniformly negative, but relatively broad - they are avaricious, but also drunkards and murderers, which gives the Pardoner opportunity to condemn a vast array of sins.

The old man that points the rioters in the direction of death is the single developed character in the story, a grotesque figure who waits to die out of extreme weariness for life. When he tells the rioters that he wishes to die, he claims that he walks on the ground, his 'mother's gate,' and asks to return to the earth (in the form of a decayed corpse). This conforms to the idea of rebirth, as the old man asks to return to the earth (his mother's womb) presumably to be born once again. However, for the old man this is only his second choice. He would prefer to exchange bodies with a young man, but can find no man willing to trade. He suffers the misery of a man who does sees no hope for redemption. He does not consider the possibility of heaven and Christian redemption, but rather adheres to ideas of earthly reincarnation. Quite significantly, this is the only expression

of any spirituality contained in the Pardoner's Tale. The Pardoner has little concern with actual religious matters and makes no real reference to Christianity. His concern is money, and the Christian religion is only the means to achieve this end.

The Tale itself is a relatively simplistic moral fable that hinges on the distinctions between literal and figurative language. The initial personification of death that the young child uses as a metaphor and euphemism leads to the actual physical manifestation of Death as a tangible object: the piles of gold that the three rioters find. The plot of the tale derives from the rioters' literal interpretation of euphemism - since death has taken their friend, they must find death. This personification of death finally becomes metaphor once again when the piles of gold represent the death that they find.

Summary and Analysis of The Shipman's Tale

Fragment VII

Introduction to the Shipman's Tale:

The Host asks the priest to tell a tale, but the Shipman interrupts, insisting that he will tell the next tale. He says that he will not tell a tale of physics or law or philosophy, but rather a more modest story.

The Shipman's Tale:

A merchant at St. Denis foolishly took a desirable woman for a wife who drained his income by demanding clothes and other fine array to make her appear even more beautiful. Since his wife demanded so many costs, the merchant was forced to take in guests; one of these was a monk. John, a young monk no older than thirty, claimed to be the cousin of this merchant, and when he did stay with them he was quite generous with tips to the servants. Before he was going to make a journey to Bruges, the merchant invited John to visit him and his wife. On the day that the merchant was ready to leave St. Denis, he awoke early and went to his counting–house to balance his books. John was also awake early and went into the garden to pray. The wife went into the garden, worried that something was bothering the monk. He in turn worries about her; he thinks that she did not sleep well, for the merchant kept her up all night in sport. She admits that she has no lust for her husband. John realizes that she is keeping something from him and promises to keep whatever she could tell secret. He admits that he is not a cousin to the merchant. She complains that her husband is stingy and tells that wives want six things: their husbands to be hardy, wise, rich, giving, obedient and good in bed. She tells him that she must pay a debt of one hundred francs to her husband. He agrees to get that sum for her, and the two end the transaction by kissing. The merchant leaves on his journey, advising both his wife and John to be diligent with money while he is gone. Before he leaves, John asks the merchant for one hundred francs so that he can buy cattle. When he gives the wife the one hundred francs, she repays John by engaging in an affair with him. Later, when Dan John and the merchant meet, he tells the merchant that he repaid his debt to him when he gave the wife one hundred francs. The merchant therefore scolds his wife when he gets home, telling her that she must be careful when others give her money to repay debts, for he needs to take accurate measure of who owes her what. The wife realizes the monk's trick, but remains silent. She instead tells the merchant that she is his wife and will repay her debt to him in bed.

Analysis:

The overriding concern of the Shipman's Tale is money and its relationship with sex. The story uses terms relating to business and monetary transactions in reference to all of the sexual dealings of this story, and money is found to be virtually interchangeable with sex. The wife agrees to have an affair with Dan John as a business transaction, and she claims at the end that she will repay her debt to her husband in bed. The story never stoops

to condemn the wife for her actions by finding them the equivalent of prostitution, but merely constructs the parallels between sex and business as a natural and normative fact. Chaucer illustrates the parallels through a series of double entendres, such as the wife's order to her husband to 'score [her debt] upon my tail,' as well as the rhyme of 'francs' and 'flanks' that illustrates the transaction between the monk and the wife.

The Shipman's Tale seems to have the proper qualifications for a fabliau, but the story is instead a light comic anecdote. There is no moment in which the infidelity is revealed, and no character suffers for his behavior. The actions of the tale have a perfect symmetry. The money that changes hands finally returns to the proper source, without the husband knowing the particular circumstances of this interaction.

The merchant of this tale is a notable figure in the Canterbury Tales, for he is industrious and concerned with money without resorting to avarice. He is the single entrepreneur of the tales; if he is stingy, as his wife complains, he still does not refuse money when he believes that it will serve a constructive purpose. His admonitions to his wife to be careful with money are not meant as parody; they are simple, instructive maxims. The problems between the merchant and his wife do not stem from any inherent moral defects in either character, but instead from incompatibility. The wife also deviates from the norms of the unfaithful spouse established throughout the other Canterbury Tales. She is not a devious manipulator; her turn to infidelity comes out of what she perceives to be necessity. Her situation generates genuine pathos, for she is trapped in a loveless marriage. Furthermore, she suffers a private humiliation. Her husband does not know that she was unfaithful, but she nevertheless realizes that she has been deceived.

The extraordinary sympathy that the Shipman gives to the merchant and his wife softens the satiric remoteness that marks many of the comedic Canterbury Tales. The Shipman's Tale therefore removes the pleasure that most of the tales offer in mocking the characters' fate and replaces it with a more abstract and palatable pleasure in the themes of the tale and the symmetry of the action.

Summary and Analysis of The Prioress' Tale

The Prioress' Tale:

The Prioress tells a tale set in an Asian town dominated by the Jewry in which usury and other things hateful to Christ occurred. The Christian minority in the town opened a school for their children in this city. Among these children was a widow's son, an angelic seven year old who was, even at his young age, deeply devoted to his faith. At school he learned a song in Latin, the Alma redemptoris, and asked the meaning of it. According to an older student, this song was meant to praise the Virgin Mary. As he was walking home from school one day singing this song, he provoked the anger of the Jews of the city, whose hearts were possessed by Satan. They hired a murderer who slit the boys' throat and threw the body into a cesspool. The widow searched for her missing child, begging the Jews to tell her where her child might be found, but they refuse to help. When she found him, although his throat was slit, he began to sing the Alma redemptoris. The other Christians of the city rushed to the child and carried him to the abbey. The local provost cursed the Jews who knew of this murder and ordered their death by hanging. Before the child was buried, he began to speak. The Virgin Mary had placed a pearl on his tongue that allowed him to speak, despite his fatal wound, but when the pearl was removed he would finally pass on to heaven. The story ends with a lament for the young child and a curse on the Jews who perpetrated this crime.

Analysis:

The Prioress' Tale is overtly a religious tale centered around Christian principles and a devotion to the Virgin Mary, but within the warm affection that the Prioress shows for her Christian faith is a disquieting anti−Semitism that will be immediately obvious to the modern reader. The tale is an overwrought melodrama, replete with scenes of such banal sentimentalism and simplistic moral instruction. The tale is an unabashed celebration of motherhood. The guiding figure of the tale is the Virgin Mary, who serves as the exemplar for Christian values and the intervening spirit who sustains the murdered child before he passes on to heaven. Her mortal parallel is the mother of the murdered boy, who dearly loves her son and struggles to find the boy when he is lost. The depiction of the mother is the most realistic and harrowing section of the story, for the Prioress finds in the mother a legitimate fear and concern that transcends the more sentimental and reprehensible portions of the tale.

Yet surrounding the kernels of legitimate pain and suffering in the Prioress' Tale are sections that are nothing more than shallow sentimentalism and vicious bigotry. The child is angelic, at seven years old more devoted to Christian teachings than any of the clergymen throughout the Canterbury Tales. The final moments of the tale in which the Virgin Mary sustains him after his throat is slit are a shameless exploitation meant to engineer false tears. The Prioress extends warmth and sympathy only to the mother and her child, while heaping unabashed vitriol upon the Jews of the city, who are portrayed as nothing less than allies of Satan. The details of the murder are gruesome: the child is murdered for singing the praises of the Virgin Mary and dumped in a pool of

excrement. The logical conclusion of this tale is the Prioress' curse on the Jews for their actions.

Despite the anti−Semitic propaganda that the Prioress offers during her tale, this does not represent Chaucer's view. The Prioress is a grotesque comic character and the tale conforms to the portrait that Chaucer offers in the General Prologue. Chaucer describes the Prioress as a foolishly sentimental woman who would weep over the death of a small mouse. She can extend her sympathy to small children and other easy targets, but cannot find room for true mercy or compassion. Although it would be a mistake to consider the tale as an overt attack on anti−Semitism, for it would project modern liberal sensibilities into Chaucer's work, the tale certainly condemns the Prioress for her cheap emotional responsiveness.

Summary and Analysis of Tale of Sir Thopas

Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas:

When the Prioress' Tale was done, the Host told the narrator (Chaucer) to tell a tale. The Host describes the narrator as having a small waist and a weakly appearance. He tells the narrator to tell a mirthful tale, and the narrator says that he has only one tale, a rhyme that he learned many years before.

Analysis:

The description of the narrator is another example of a witty self−parody in Chaucer's work. Chaucer has the Host describe the narrator (Chaucer himself) as slight and meek, certainly not a flattering physical description. The section of the Canterbury Tales devoted to the narrator only rise slightly above this satiric level and serve as a diversion from the bulk of the Canterbury Tales, a self−referential projection of the author into his own work.

The Tale of Sir Thopas:

The Tale is a poem in rhyming couplets about Sir Thopas, an honorable knight who would often go out for horseback rides. He decided to take an elf queen as a wife, but he came across a great three−headed giant called Sir Olyphant who attempted to prevent his entrance into the fairy kingdom. Sir Thopas escaped the giant and gathered men to combat him. He armed himself with great weapons and rode again to face the night. The tale is interrupted here.

Analysis:

The Tale of Sir Thopas is a comically terrible tale meant strictly as a parody of Middle English romances. In its sing−song rhyme scheme it resembles oral literature told in song and in its content it effectively mirrors the mechanics of adventures tales told in Chaucer's England. The tale includes all of the elements of a romance: a dashing knight, mystical creatures and fearsome monsters. However, Chaucer takes these elements and makes them exaggerated and nonsensical. It is an act of mercy for the reader when the Host finally interrupts the narrator and forces him to conclude.

Summary and Analysis of Tale of Melibee

Prologue to the Tale of Melibee:

The Host interrupted the Tale of Sir Thopas, pleading with the narrator to desist. He told him that the rhymes were doggerel, and asks him to tell a tale in prose. The narrator agrees and asks for the group's attention once more.

Analysis:

The connecting passages between the tales that Chaucer himself tells are more dramatically fulfilling than the stories themselves, which are little more than comic anecdotes. These passages best illustrate the narrative behind the tales themselves. The tales exist as they relate to one another in a complex set of interactions between the various pilgrims; they are not simply a set of free−standing short stories given a rough context. The tales themselves are products of this interaction; the Tale of Melibee that Chaucer will give is a response to the Host's unfavorable reaction to the Tale of Sir Thopas.

The Tale of Melibee:

A young man called Melibee, mighty and rich, had a wife named Prudence and a daughter Sophie. One day while he was in the fields he left his wife and daughter in his house. Three of his old foes broke into the house, raped his wife and left his daughter for dead by wounding her in five places - her feet, hands, eyes, nose and mouth. When Melibee returned he began to weep. Prudence consoled him, then asked him to desist and to be as patient as Job. She tells him to call on the counsel of his true friends. His physicians vowed to cure Sophie. They advice him to set guards at his house, but not to attempt vengeance. The younger men, however, advised him to declare war. Prudence agreed with the elders, who did not want to attack the perpetrators in haste. However, Melibee cites Solomon, who advised that no wife or child should ever have mastery over a husband. Melibee and Prudence continue to debate on the subject, discussing every bit of minutiae in the subject debated. Finally she advises that he delay his attack on his enemies, telling them that if they will accept peace they shall be forgiven. They came to the court of Melibee and he gives them an option: they can put the punishment in the hands of Melibee or Prudence. The wisest of his enemies admits that they are unworthy to come into his court, and submit to his judgment. He tells them to return to the court for their judgment later. Melibee told Prudence that he wished to disinherit his enemies of all of their land and exile them. She tells him that the sentence is cruel and covetous. Melibee was touched by her argument. When his enemies returned to his court, he grants them mercy.

Analysis:

The Tale of Melibee is an exceedingly dull tale told in a dry prose format that serves as an obvious reaction the Host's distaste for the florid poetry of the Tale of Sir Thopas. It is this quality to the tale that is most interesting, for the tale itself is devoid of any narrative thrust or real character development. The Tale of Melibee is an earnest and noble telling of one woman's capacity for forgiveness, but the tale is bogged down in ponderous discussions concerning how Melibee should deal with his enemies. Even in the question of how Melibee will deal with his enemies there is no drama, for the tale transforms the decision into an academic debate rather than a narrative point. That the tale is unsatisfying and not particularly noteworthy is certainly Chaucer's intention, for the tale fits in with the narrative push of the entire structure of the tales. Chaucer thus sacrifices the literary qualities of this particular tale to serve the larger structure of the Canterbury Tales.

The few points in the Tale of Melibee that are notable concern their relation to the other Canterbury Tales. Prudence is another example of the patient and long−suffering wife who demonstrates her virtue through stoicism. Her name is an obvious signifier of one of her prominent qualities. Her role in the story is not as an active agent. She is a passive influence on the other characters. Although the tale celebrates Prudence, the title is apt: it is the tale of Melibee, for he is the character who is able to act and to change.

Summary and Analysis of The Monk's Tale

Prologue to the Monk's Tale:

When the tale of Melibee ended, the Host said that he'd give up a barrel of ale to have his wife hear the tale of Prudence and her patience, for she is an ill−tempered woman. The Host asks the narrator his name, and attempts to guess his profession - perhaps a sexton or other such officer, or a wily governor. The Monk will tell the next tale, a series of tragedies.

Analysis:

Chaucer uses the prologue to the Monk's Tale as one more opportunity for satiric, self−referential comedy. Within the story he is a necessarily opaque character. Significantly, the Host assumes that Chaucer is, at best, a mid−ranking government official and not an artist capable of constructing a landmark piece of literature such as the Canterbury Tales.

The Monk's Tale:

The Monk's Tale is not a strict narrative tale as are most of the other Canterbury Tales. Instead, it chronicles various historical characters who experience a fall from grace. The first of these is Lucifer, the fair angel who fell from heaven to hell. Next is Adam, the one man who was not born of original sin, but lost Paradise for all humanity. Samson fell from grace when he admitted his secret to his wife, who betrayed it to his enemies and then took another lover. Samson slew one thousand men with an ass's jawbone, then prayed for God to quench his thirst. From the jawbone's tooth sprung a well. He would have conquered the world if he had not told Delilah that his strength came from his refusal to cut his hair. Without this strength his enemies cut out Samson's eyes and imprisoned him. In the temple where Samson was kept he knocked down two of the pillars, killing himself and everyone else in the temple. The next tale is of Hercules, whose strength was unparalleled. He was finally defeated when Deianera sent Hercules a poisoned shirt made by Nessus. The Monk then tells the tale of Nebuchadnezzar, the king of Babylon who had twice defeated Israel. The proud king constructed a large gold statue to which all must pray, or else be cast into a pit of flames. Yet when Daniel disobeyed the king, Nebuchadnezzar lost all dignity, acting like a great beast until God relieved him of his insanity. The next, Balthasar, the son of Nebuchadnezzar, also worshipped false idols, but fortune cast him down. He had a feast for a thousand lords in which they drank wine out of sacred vessels, but during his feast he saw an armless hand writing on a wall. Daniel warned Balthasar of his father's fate. Daniel warned him that his kingdom would be divided by Medes and the Persians. The next story tells of Zenobia, queen of Palmyra, who was beautiful and victorious in war. However, she refused the duties of women and refused to marry, until she was forced to wed Odenathus. She permitted him to have sex with her only so that she could get pregnant, but no more. Yet the proud woman, once Odenathus was dead, was defeated by the Romans and paraded through Rome bound in chains. King Pedro of Spain, subject of the next story, was cast from his kingdom by his brother. When

attempting to regain his throne, Pedro was murdered by this brother. Peter, King of Cyprus, is the next subject; he brought ruin on his kingdom and was thus murdered. The next story is of Bernabo Visconti, wrongly imprisoned his nephew. The cause of Visconti's death is not clear, however. Count Ugolini, the next subject, was imprisoned in a tower in Pisa with his three young children after Ruggieri, the bishop of Pisa, had led a rebellion against him. His youngest son died of starvation, and out of his misery Ugolini gnawed on his own arms. The two children that remained thought that Ugolini was chewing himself out of hunger, and offered themselves as meals for him. They all eventually starved. The next story is of Nero, who did nothing but satisfy his own lusts and even cut open his own mother to see the womb from which he came. He had Seneca murdered for stating that an emperor should be virtuous. When it appeared that Nero would be assassinated for his cruelty, he killed himself. Holofernes, the next one examined, ordered his subjects to renounce every law and worship Nebuchadnezzar. For this sin Judith cut off Holofernes' head as he was sleeping. The Monk next tells of Antiochus Epiphanes, who was punished by God for attacks on the Jews. God made Antiochus infested with loathsome maggots. The Monk then admits that most have heard of Alexander the Great, poisoned by his very own offspring. He follows with the tale of Julius Caesar, who had Pompey murdered but was himself assassinated by Brutus. The final story is of Croesus, King of Lydia, the proud and wealthy king who was hanged.

Analysis:

The Monk's Tale deserves little comment. It is a compendium of historical and literary characters, all of whom were leaders who lost their authority in one form or another. The Monk gives biographies of sixteen figures, a number that far exceeds what is necessarily but nevertheless falls short of the one hundred that the Monk originally intends to tell before the Knight interrupts the tale. Once again Chaucer exercises a literary discretion, judging the worth of the various tales he has written and constructing them to conform to a varying standards of literary quality. The Monk's Tale, which is no more than a broad survey, conforms to a very low standard.

Summary and Analysis of The Nun's Priest's Tale

Prologue to the Nun's Priest's Tale:

The Knight interrupts the Monk's Tale, for as a man who has reached a certain estate, he does not like to hear tales of a man's fall from grace. He would rather hear of men who rise in esteem and status. The Host refuses to allow the Monk to continue, instead telling the Nun's Priest to tell his tale.

The Nun's Priest's Tale:

The Nun's Priest tells a tale of an old woman who had a small farm in which she kept animals, including a rooster named Chanticleer who was peerless in his crowing. Chanticleer had seven hens as his companions, the most honored of which was Pertelote. One night Chanticleer groaned in his sleep. He had a dream that a large yellow dog chased him. Pertelote mocked him for his cowardice, telling him that dreams are meaningless visions caused by ill humors. Citing Cato's advice, she tells him that she will get herbs from an apothecary that will cure his illness. Chanticleer, however, believes that dreams are prophetic, and tells a tale of a traveler who predicted his own death and whose companion dreamed about who murdered him and where the victim's body was taken. Another man dreamed that his comrade would be drowned, and this came true. He also cites examples of Croesus and Andromache, who each had prophecies in their dreams. However, Chanticleer does praise Pertelote, telling her "Mulier est hominis confusio" (Woman is man's confusion), which he translates as woman is man's delight and bliss. He then 'feathered' her twenty times before the morning. Following her advice, Chanticleer goes to search for the proper herbs. A fox saw Chanticleer and grabbed him. Pertelote began to squawk, which alerted the old woman, who chased the fox away. Chanticleer was thus saved.

Analysis:

Although the Nun's Priest's Tale is a comic fable, it is one of the richest and most adult tales in the Canterbury Tales. It conforms to the personality of its narrator; the Nun's Priest is pious, yet robust and masculine. The tale, even though it has animals as its main characters, seems more adult than a conventional and simplistic tale by the Prioress.

With the possible exception of Arviragus and Dorigen in the Franklin's Tale, there is no more stable and robust 'marriage' between two characters in the Canterbury Tales than that between Chanticleer and Pertelote. The two fowl have a fulfilling sexual relationship, as Chaucer indicates when he writes that Chanticleer 'feathers' Pertelote several times during a night, yet the sex occurs as an end to itself, a stark contrast with the sexual transactions that occur in the more dramatic tales, and occurs out of some genuine emotion in contrast to the lustful encounters in Chaucer's fabliaux. The main characters are animals to be sure, yet have behaviors that are far from animalistic.

Beyond the sexual nature of their relationship, the interplay between Chanticleer and Pertelote reveals a sharp wit and depth of emotion. The two behave as would a normal married couple. They bicker, flatter, and advise each another, never at the other's expense. Chanticleer is stubborn but does relent to Pertelote's rationality, but when he does he gets one final joke on her. He claims to tell her that "woman is man's delight and bliss" in Latin, but the phrase that he uses is actually "woman is man's confusion." Yet even this joke turns back on Chanticleer himself - the story indicates that women so confuse men precisely because they are his delight and bliss.

The narrative thrust of the Nun's Priest's Tale is minimal, but the actions that it does contain gives an equal share of praise and mild criticism to both the husband and wife. Chanticleer is absurd to believe that his illness is caused by some psychic portent and rightly follows his wife's sane advice to find herbs to cure himself. However, when he does so, his prediction comes true - he is chased by a fox.

The Nun's Priest's Tale does contain some religious overtones. The old woman who owns the farm and saves Chanticleer behaves as a god–like figure, while the Nun's Priest establishes several trinities: the widow and her two daughters, the three cows, the three sows, and such. Yet these parallels cannot be stretched too far. They provide an allegorical frame for the story but do little to inform the actual substance of it.

Summary and Analysis of The Second Nun's Tale

Fragment VIII

Prologue to the Second Nun's Tale:

The Host praises the Nun's Priest for his tale, but notes that, if the Nun's Priest were not in the clergy he would be a lewd man. He says that the Nun's Priest, a muscular man with a hawk's fierceness in his eye, would have trouble fending off women, if not for his profession. The Second Nun prepares to tell the next tale, warning against sin and idleness. She says that she will tell the tale of the noble maid Cecilia.

Analysis:

The Host's description of the Nun's Priest highlights the disparity between traditional conceptions of the clergy and their actual roles and personalities. The Nun's Priest is, as dictated by his profession, celibate, but the Host serves to remind the reader of his sexual persona.

The Second Nun's Tale:

Saint Cecilia was by birth a Roman and tutored in the ways of Christ. She dreaded the day in which she must marry and give up her virginity. However, she came to be engaged to Valerian. On the day of their wedding she wore a hairshirt, praying to God to remain unspoiled. On their wedding night she told a secret to Valerian: she had an angel lover who, if he believes that Valerian touches her vulgarly, will slay him. He asks to see this angel, and she tells him to go to the Via Appia and find Pope Urban among the poor people. Once Urban purges him of his sins, Valerian will be able to see the angel. When he reached Via Appia, Urban suddenly appeared to Valerian and read from the Bible. He baptized Valerian and sent him back home, where he found the angel with Cecilia. He has brought a crown of flowers from Paradise that will never wilt, and gives it to Cecilia. The angel claims that only the pure and chaste shall be able to see this crown. Cecilia asks for the angel to bless her brother and make him pure. This brother, Tibertius, enters and can detect the flowers. The angel gives crowns to Valerian and Tibertius, and advises Tibertius to give up false idols. They plan to visit Pope Urban, and Tibertius asks Cecilia how she can worship three gods. She says that each divinity represents part of God. But after both Valerian and Tibertius were christened, Roman sergeants brought them to Almachius the prefect, who ordered their death. During their execution, one of the sergeants, Maximus, claims that he saw the spirits of Valerian and Tibertius ascend to heaven. Upon hearing this, many of the witnesses converted to Christianity. For this Almachius had him beaten to the death, so Cecilia had him buried with Valerian and Tibertius. For this Almachius summoned Cecilia, but she refuses to appear frightened of him. She refuses to admit her guilt and condemns him for praising false idols. He ordered that she be boiled to death, but she suffered not a burn. When he ordered that she be decapitated by a sword, she is struck three times but does not die. The executioner did no more, but left her to die. The other Christians attempted to save her, but she only lingered for a few more days,

during which time she ordered that all her property be distributed among the poor. Pope Urban had her buried secretly, and praised her as a saint.

Analysis:

The Second Nun's Tale is an entirely conventional religious biography. The Second Nun tells the story of Saint Cecilia in a dry, sanctimonious fashion that exalts her suffering and patient adherence to her faith. The tale contains few moments of character development and equally few rounded characters. Only Cecilia has some dimension, and even this is relatively simplistic.

However, the Second Nun's Tale does contain some notable ideas pertaining to Christian belief. The angelic gift of the flowers that only a Christian can see are a physical manifestation of the idea that Christians belong to a City of God, a distinct community with shared values that nevertheless exists within a secular and often hostile environment. Also, the tale does give impression of larger psychological insights into Cecilia with the description of her aversion to sex. Her intense displeasure concerning losing her virginity leads her to masochistic behavior, and she channels her sexual impulses into her spiritual beliefs, telling her husband that an angel is her 'lover.'

The rest of the story contains more traditional elements. There are moments of spontaneous conversion to Christianity, randomly performed miracles, and portrayals of Roman persecution of early Christians. Chaucer does insert one moment that diverges from the strict Christian propaganda that this story represents, allowing moments of legitimate discussion of the Trinity. This discussion admits that the tripartite division of God is problematic, and Cecilia attempts to resolve this dilemma.

Summary and Analysis of The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

Prologue to the Canon's Yeoman's Tale:

When the story of Saint Cecilia was finished and the company continued on their journey, they came across two men. One of them was clad all in black and had been traveling quickly on their horses; the narrator believes that he must be a canon (an alchemist). The Canon's Yeoman said that they wished to join the company on their journey, for they had heard of their tales. The Host asked if the Canon could tell a tale, and the Yeoman answers that the Canon knows tales of mirth and jollity, and is a man whom anybody would be honored to know. The Host guesses that his master was a clerk, but the Yeoman says that he is something greater. The Host, however, wonders why the Canon dresses so shabbily if he is so important. The Yeoman brags about what the Canon can do, such as creating the illusion of gold, until the Canon tells him to stop. For shame at his Yeoman's behavior, the Canon then departed. The Canon's Yeoman then decides to tell a tale himself.

Analysis:

The dull religious reverie of the Second Nun's Tale gives way to the most prominent narrative development within the story of the pilgrims to Canterbury. Chaucer introduces two new characters, the Canon and his Yeoman. The Canon is an imposing figure, a mysterious and intimidating character who differs greatly from the Canterbury pilgrims, who are either jovial and boisterous or quiet and respectable. The Canon is nearly silent, yet his reticence does not stem from chivalric honor or religious principles. He is a man of menacing action afraid to be definitely identified as part of his dubious profession. This automatically marks him as different from the other travelers, who primarily exist as part of their particular job and accept it, even when that line of work - as in the cases of the summoner and the pardoner - is not respectable.

The Canon's Yeoman serves as the voice of his master, but that voice proves inadequate. The Canon's Yeoman reveals too much about his master and then turns on him, condemning the Canon for his fraudulent practices.

The Canon Yeoman's Tale:

The Canon's Yeoman admits that he has served the Canon for seven years and knows a great deal about his craft. He warns that anybody who becomes involved with a canon will suffer similar miseries: losing one's wealth and esteem. He tells about the wicked craft of alchemy from which they try to gain wealth. He claims that there is a canon of religion of how an alchemist can defraud a person. He then begins his tale of a priest in London who was visited by a false canon who begged for a loan. Two days later he repays the loan and offers to show the priest his methods. The priest was blinded by his avarice. The canon tells the priest to have his servant fetch three ounces of quicksilver and coal. The canon claims that he can make the quicksilver into real silver. The canon contrived to make it appear to the priest that he had made real silver in his crucible. The priest unwittingly exchanged this false silver for money, which he gave to the canon, who made the priest promise

never to reveal his methods. The Canon's Yeoman ends his tale with a warning that these types of fraud will eventually be punished.

Analysis:

The actual profession of the Canon is that of an alchemist, a profession that relates to modern scientific pursuits but in Chaucer's time was endowed with mysterious connotations borne from fear and wonder. The Yeoman regards the Canon as a man of great powers, yet fears the implications of his craft. The Yeoman is most assured when he tells of his masters' sins and deceptions, for it is here that he can consign the Canon to the status of mere charlatan.

The description of the Canon that his Yeoman gives during his tale is equivalent to that of the devil. He deals in mystical and dark forces, with references to brimstone and fire, and serves the same purpose as the devil incarnated in several of the other tales, tempting weak men to sin by appealing to their weaknesses. In this case, the Canon manipulates the priest's avarice.

The story serves as a confession for the Canon's Yeoman, who admits the sins that he and his master have committed. By revealing his master's professional practices he asks for penance.

Summary and Analysis of The Manciple's Tale

Fragment IX

Prologue to the Manciple's Tale:

The Host asks the Cook to tell the next tale, but the Cook is drunk and incoherent. The Manciple agrees to tell a tale in his place and criticizes the Cook for his boorish behavior. The drunken Cook, angry at the Manciple, attempts to get on his horse, but is too unsteady and falls off. He then tries to fight the Manciple, but fails. The Host warns the Manciple that he is foolish to so openly criticize the Cook, for he will eventually get his revenge.

The Manciple's Tale:

When Phoebus lived on earth, he was the lustiest of bachelors, a superior archer and the envy of all for his singing. Phoebus had a white crow that he had taught to speak and a wife whom he kept guarded out of jealousy. Yet guarding a wife so closely is unnecessary - if she is faithful, there is no need to do so, but if she is unfaithful no amount of monitoring will keep her faithful. Phoebus treated his wife well, but this was merely a gilded cage for her. Once when Phoebus was gone she sent for her lover. The white crow saw what they did, but did not say a word. When Phoebus returned, the crow gave the sorry news to Phoebus. The enraged Phoebus murdered his wife with an arrow and subsequently went on a rampage, breaking his musical instruments. The crow lamented that he told Phoebus the news. Phoebus, believing that the crow lied about his wife, called the crow a false thief and plucked off his white feathers. He also cursed the crow, telling him that all crows should forever be black and never sing beautifully again. The Manciple leaves this as a warning: never tell another man that his wife has been unfaithful, for such gossip only causes the cuckolded husband to hate the messenger.

Analysis:

The Manciple's Tale, a slight fable concerning marital jealousy, deals primarily with the idea of the controlling spouse. Phoebus keeps his wife in a figurative gilded cage, a metaphor that Chaucer employs during the story; he treats her well but nevertheless controls her actions. Chaucer parallels the fate of the wife with the fate of his white crow. Both are objects that Phoebus controls, caged and treated well until they displease him. The means by which Phoebus murders his wife are even appropriate to the caged bird metaphor. He uses an arrow, a weapon appropriate for shooting birds.

The ending of the Manciple's Tale shifts to a different theme, for the bird is punished not for disobeying Phoebus, but rather for his honesty. The Manciple makes an overt statement of the tale's moral, claiming that the crow suffered for speaking when discretion would have been wise, but this statement ignores the main thrust of the tale, which deals with the consequences of conditional possession. The crow suffers because of its indiscretion, but this depends on the conditions of ownership; Phoebus treats the crow well insofar as it pleases

him. Only when the crow displeases Phoebus does it suffer such dire consequences.

Summary and Analysis of The Parson's Tale

Fragment X

Prologue to the Parson's Tale:

When the Manciple's Tale was done, it was then four o'clock. The Host claimed that only one tale remained. The Parson, however, refused to tell a foolish story, for Paul advised against telling false stories. He says that he will tell a virtuous tale in prose.

The Parson's Tale:

There have been many spiritual ways that have led people to Jesus Christ and to the reign of glory. The most prominent of these ways is Penitence. St. Ambrose claims that Penitence is the acceptance of guilt for what a man has done and a pledge to do no more. Perfect Penitence requires contrition of heart, confession of mouth and satisfaction. The root of these is contrition that lives in the heart of he who is repentant. From this comes confession and satisfaction. There are six causes that should move a man to contrition. First a man shall remember his sins. Second, a man should have disdain for his sins. Third, a man should have a dread of doom and a fear of hell. Fourth, a man should remember the good he has left to do on earth. Fifth, a man should remember the suffering of Jesus Christ for our sins. Sixth, a man should hope to forfeit sin and receive the gift of grace and the glory of heaven. This contrition should be universal. The second part of Penitence is confession, the sign of contrition. Confession is the showing of all sins to a priest. All sins stem from the original sin of Adam, and there are two types, venial sins and sins of deed. The latter occur when a man loves any creature more than Jesus. Venial sins occur when a man loves Jesus Christ less than he ought.

There are seven deadly sins. Pride is the worst of them, for the other sins, Ire, Envy, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lechery, stem from Pride. Pride can be manifest in many forms, including the wearing of ostentatious clothing. The remedy for Pride is humility, when a man holds himself as not worthy of heaven, despises no other man and cares not what men think of him. Envy is the sorrow in others' fortune and delight in others' pain. The remedy for Envy is love of God first and trust in one's fellow man. After Envy there is Ire, which manifests itself in hate. The remedy against Ire is patience and the acceptance of suffering. Sloth is the anguish of a troubled heart. The remedy for this is fortitude. Avarice is the desire to have earthly things. Avarice can be distinguished from Envy, for Envy is to covet things that one does not have, while Avarice is to keep things that one has without rightful need. The remedy for Avarice is pity. Gluttony is the immeasurable appetite to eat or drink. This sin has many types, including drunkenness. Abstinence is the cure for gluttony. Lechery includes all sins related to sex, and was so despised by God that the laws against it were quite harsh. The remedy for Lechery is chastity. Even in marriage men and women should remain modest with one another. There are a number of conditions to penitence, including the intensity of the sin committed, the haste to contrition and the number of times the sin was committed. The fruit of this penitence is goodness and redemption in Christ.

Analysis:

The Parson's Tale is not a tale at all. It is a dissertation on sin in essay form, dealing with the three parts of redemption: contrition, confession, and satisfaction. The tale is the longest of the Canterbury Tales but is most likely the least significant. It has none of the structural narrative pleasures of the other tales, nor the aesthetic qualities that the poetic form that most of the tales offer. Its inclusion is as a summation of the Canterbury Tales, an attempt to place it in a more religious context that might mitigate the more base entertainment of the fabliaux and adventure tales.

As religious doctrine, the Parson's Tale adheres relatively faithfully to Christian principles. Nothing in the content of the Parson's Tale appears novel, for the structure of the tale is such that it becomes essentially a compendium of definitions and examples.

Summary and Analysis of Retraction

Retraction:

Chaucer prays that whoever reads these tales and finds something worthy in them should thank Christ. Yet if readers find offense in the tales, Chaucer asks that they impute this not to any ill intention, but rather to Chaucer's own ignorance.

Analysis:

The final passage of the story is a minor qualification in which Chaucer attempts to absolve himself of any blame that may be placed on him for the more vulgar and unsuitable material contained within the various tales. He pleads ignorance, a tactic that is not quite convincing considering the intellectual labor that the Canterbury Tales represent. Otherwise, the retraction is a conventional summation that gives praise to Christ as the inspiration for the tales.

Related Links

http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm
Old English E−text

http://www.csis.pace.edu/grendel/projs2c/ch1.html
Informative Chaucer Site by James Sigona

Author of ClassicNote and Sources

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Chaucer, Geoffrey. Canterbury Tales Ed. Derek Pearsall. 1985.

Essay: "Love" in the Courtly Tradition

by Anonymous
May 03, 2000

In the "Franklin's Tale," Geoffrey Chaucer satirically paints a picture of a marriage steeped in the tradition of courtly love. As Dorigen and Arveragus' relationship reveals, a couple's preoccupation with fulfilling the ritualistic practices appropriate to courtly love renders the possibility of genuine love impossible. Marriage becomes a pretense to maintain courtly position because love provides the opportunity to demonstrate virtue. Like true members of the gentility, they practice the distinct linguistic and behavioral patterns which accompany the strange doctrine of courtly love. The characters' true devotion to the relationship becomes secondary to the appearance of practicing the virtues of truth, honor, and generosity. After establishing the inverted hierarchy of values, Chaucer paints a bleak picture of the potential for love and relationships in a world in which a distinction needs to be made between secular and private roles. Dorigen differentiates between "hir housbonde" and "hir love" (250) and Arveragus distinguishes between "his lady" and "his wyf" (125).

Immediately, Chaucer signals the practice of chivalric courtship as the knight who is of noted "heigh kinrede" (63) ceremoniously completes the "many a labor" (60) of a courtly lover. The description of the duties that must be undertaken by a classic courtly lover seeking a wife for social fulfillment corruptss the image of courtship being motivated by the existence of true love. The emphasis on the inconvenience with which Arveragus, "dide his payne" (57) suggests he performs "many a greet empryse" (59) out of obligation and convention rather than as a part of a genuine amorous pursuit. The weakly disguised presence of the "ye" in each of these words announces Arveragus' awareness of the eyes of the courtly audience observing his performance. The concern with the outward appearance of the relationship extends to Dorigen as she dutifully accepts his proposal as a means of repaying the "distresse" (65) undergone by her lover. The brief description of the couple's courtship covers only 13 lines, suggesting that the relationship's foundation has little time to progress beyond the preliminary stages of lusty, physical attraction before the marriage is instated.

Framing the already bleak portrayal of this "accord," (69) a word typically used to refer to business agreements or compromises, is the contractual terminology of their agreement which further downplays the emotional foundation of the relationship. Instead, the negotiated terms that "frendes everich other moot obeye" (171) indicate that the lovers are settling for amicable companionship. The agreement itself is ridden with contradictory terms trying to reconcile the tensions between the inner sphere where passionate love resides and the outer sphere which operates under the codes of courtly love. The two agree that Arveragus will be her "Servant in love, and lord in merrage" (121), but the in reality these two social positions are mutually exclusive, indicating the impossibility of the success of this relationship. One of the two will have to be the dominating figure for it to survive, but then this will eliminate the possibility of love which "wol nat ben constreyned by maistrye" (92). The "lawe of love" (126) in the medieval period mandates that a husband is the lord of his wife, and Arveragus grants her sovereignty only within the scope of their private life because he must uphold the

tradition of male domination in the outside world. Arveragus' promise to becomes a way to demonstrate that " [p]acience is a heigh vertu" (101). Always aware of the connection between his actions and his rank he states, "Save that the name of soveraynetee, / That wolde he have for shame of his degree." (79–80). If the two truly were in love, these sorts of issues would not need to be settled or would even arise because a couple would assume that a wife would be true to her husband and that he would treat her with respect and honor. Instead, marriage is being used to further one's opportunity to perform noble and virtuous roles, explaining the struggle between a lover's commitment to his personal or public life. Chaucer foreshadows the improbable success of this duality with the Dorigen's proclamation, "Ne wolde never God bitwixe us tweyne" (171). Not only does this contain a double negative, suggesting that a force will indeed disrupt this arrangement, but the phraseology also indicates that their relationship will be without God who should be a uniting force in any marriage.

Chaucer takes pains to mention that "[t]he joye, the ese, and prosperity" (132) of their relationship last only a "yeer and more" (134). Chivalric love's preoccupation with appearances impels behavior that stymies the success of love. In addition to the previously noted irony of a lover undergoing a painful courtship to win his desired object, Arveragus undertakes additional burdens under the charade of being a good lover. Chaucer criticizes the requirements of courtly love by placing such pursuits directly at odds with their objects. Arveragus self–imposes a two–year separation from Dorigen is an effort "to seke in armes worshipe and honour." (139). Why must a husband leave his wife to prove he is worthy of her love? His decision to leave his bride after only a year of marriage suggests the value he places upon success in the public eye overrides the need to be attentive to his private affairs. In fact, Arveragus pursues this task with more enthusiasm than he shows in any of his interactions with this wife. "Perhaps the "lust he sette in swich labour" (140) indicates Arveragus' preference to be a warrior lover in the public sphere instead of a servant in his private sphere. On the battlefield, he can through virile performance release some of the sexual frustrations which develop from the constraints in his marriage. Assuming this is true, his departure represents a revolt against his powerless position in his marriage.

Dorigen strengthens the possibility of marital bliss existing only as a pretense when she pines away for her husband not as one would secure in the belief that he will return to her, but as if she is apprehensive about his desire to voluntarily leave the battlefield. He sends her "lettres hoom of his welfare," (166) establishing that her worries extend beyond mere concern with his health. Although Dorigen's reaction to the separation from her husband is marked by her profound sense of grief, there seems to be a melodramatic insincerity in her response. She weeps "as doon these noble wyves whan hem lyketh," (146) suggesting her mourning is a ploy to win her friends sympathies and their attentions to "every confort possible in this cas" (154). Perhaps she is behaving in concert with the belief that true lovers suffer from a physical and emotional malady, amor hereos. Her belief that "with good hope lete hir sorwe slyde" (175) further establishes the facade of grief is easily replaced with a face of good cheer when it befits her interests.

The already weak links in this marriage culminate in Aurelius' pursuit of Dorigen. The very fact that Aurelius undertakes the methods of a courtly lover in an attempt to covet another man's wife implies that in this courtly environment the sacred vows of truth in marriage are commonly corrupted by adultery. Although Dorigen rejects his advances and pledges to grant him her love only if he performs a task she deems impossible, it shows

the fault of a society operating under a system where relationships exists only when they fulfill predetermined conditions. If Dorigen faithfully enters her promise of truth to her husband, she would not respond to Aurelius as she does– "Than wol I love yow best of any man / Have heer my trouthe in al that evere I can" (326). The last few words imply that truth in marriage is all but impossible for its promisors to uphold. Dorigen's conflicting words "Ne shal I nevere been untrewe wfy" (312) reveal the inevitable failure of her pledge of faithfulness.

Once Arveragus discovers Dorigen's promise to Aurelius, his humble reaction reflects the state of imbalance in the marriage. The ridiculous length with which Arveragus goes to maintain his adherence to the idea that "[t]routhe is the hyest thing that man may kepe" (807) is incompatible with the behavior of a man deeply in love. Although their marital vows provide grounds for Dorigen to avoid fulfillment of her promise, he releases her to commit adultery "with glade chere in freendly wyse' (795). His response seem highly inappropriate, perhaps there is a pun on the word fiendish, considering that he values the pledge of truth to an outsider who plots to sabotage the preexisting truth in the relationship with his wife. He values the societal maintenance of truth to such an extreme degree that he would rather "dye in sorwe and in distresse" (924) than allow his wife to tarnish her commitment to truth less it be a reflection upon him. Concurrently, he treats truth hypocritically by forbidding Dorigen upon the "peyne of deeth" (809) of telling anyone of this affair. There lies a contradiction in his pledge to kill her if she threatens his honor while he concurrently allows himself to be cuckolded which is also a peril to his honor. Explaining this discrepancy could be the possibility that he dispatches her as a demonstration of his "maistre" (75) over her actions– the one condition that eliminates the possibility of love. The tears could be either a melodramatic attempt to feign his concern for her well being or a realization that he sacrifices a bit of honor in gaining dominance in the relationship.

Marriage becomes a conduit for men to display their "grete gentillesse" (851) instead of a union of lovers. After Dorigen's careless promise to Aurelius, she becomes a pawn in the high stake display of chivalric behavior. The concerns with rank emerges as a challenge of gallantry and honor which forces the knight, squire, and the philosopher to release each other from their truths. The fact that they are so willing to part with their pledges demonstrates the value placed upon words is directly tied to how it reflects upon social standing. The virtue of generosity becomes so entangled with the self–interests that no one commits acts of good will without ulterior motives of personal gain, framing this irony is the Franklin's question "Which was the moste free, as thnketh yowe?" (950). If a world places a higher position on truth in external interaction than it grants to private relationships, true love in the courtly tradition of behavior targeted to further self interest can never survive. In the tale's conclusion, Dorigen and Arveragus place the masks they wear when facing the outside world and reunite in a farce of mutually contentment. Perhaps "never eft ne was there angre hem bitwene" (881) although the wording suggests likewise, but even assuming that there is no discord, there appears to be no passionate love either.

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