

PinkMonkey® Literature Notes on . . .

The Canterbury Tales

by

Geoffrey Chaucer



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KEY LITERARY ELEMENTS

SETTING

Chaucer employs the device of a springtime pilgrimage to the sacred shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury for the setting of his monumental epic. To make the journey a more enjoyable one, the Host proposes a story-telling competition. This ingenious framework enables Chaucer to create a score of narratives of differing literary styles ranging from courtly romance, Breton Lay, fabliaux, saint's legend, tragedy, exemplum and sermon to a beast fable. Chaucer uses a realistic setting instead of an idealistic one, thus imparting an air of authenticity to the tales and their tellers. In the Middle Ages, pilgrimage was a social as well as a religious event and the only time when people from differing social classes could mingle together. Thus the device of the pilgrimage also enabled Chaucer to draw representatives from across a wide range of society.

CHARACTERS

The main characters of *The Canterbury Tales* are comprised of the procession of the twenty-nine pilgrims who traveled from London to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury and passed their long journey by narrating entertaining tales. The pilgrims and their tales represent a microcosm of medieval English society. These characters include the following:

Chaucer - The author of *The Canterbury Tales* and appears throughout the book as one of the twenty-nine pilgrims. He functions as the reader's guide and his ironic comments reveal the true nature of the assorted group. He tells the tales of Sir Topas and the tale of Melibee during the course of the journey. He finally identifies himself at the end.

The Knight - Chaucer describes the Knight as a "verray parfit gentil knight" (i.e. true, perfect, well bred) who had distinguished himself in many Crusades. All the wars fought by the Knight have been religious wars. In spite of being a brave warrior with various victories to his credit, the Knight never boasted of his success.

The Squire - The Knight's son, probably twenty years old. He is described as a "lover and a lusty bachelor" and is a worthy aspirant to Knighthood. Apart from being a warrior he also sings, composes melodies and writes poetry.

The Yeoman - The only servant accompanying the Knight on the pilgrimage. He is thoroughly knowledgeable about forestry and woodcraft and is a true forester.

The Prioress - A pious and saintly woman. However she is sentimental and strives to imitate courtly manners. She is a very sensitive woman who is gentle even with the three small dogs accompanying her in her journey. The attention that she gives to her appearance is an indication of her secret longing for a more sophisticated life.

The Nun's Priest - Mentioned in the Prologue as accompanying the Prioress. He tells the mock-heroic beast fable of Chauncleer and Pertolete.

The Second Nun - Only fleetingly mentioned in the Prologue as one of the companions of the Prioress. She tells the tale of St. Cecilia.

The Monk - An "outrider" i.e. a Monk who rides around the abbey to tend its property. It is implied that the Monk is immoral and loves the pleasures of life. He loves hunting and women. His love for the various pleasures of life goes against his religious vows.

The Friar - A wanton and merry man. These are hardly the characteristics that befit a religious man. He is a "limiter" i.e. a Friar who is licensed to beg within a certain limited area. While hearing confessions he gave the best pardon to those who contributed the maximum amount of money. The author makes this statement in irony when he says that he is probably the only person who practices his profession most accurately.

The Merchant - He sports a forked beard and wears fine clothes. He is extremely pompous in his manners and opinions. He is so clever that nobody could gauge that he was actually in heavy debt.

The Oxford Clerk - A skinny man who is a student at Oxford. He is not at all conscious of his appearance. He is a scholar who is genuinely interested in learning and studies. After the Knight, he is the most admired person

The Sergeant at Law - An accomplished and devious lawyer who has probably used his position to acquire a great deal of wealth.

The Franklin - Said to be Epicure's own son that implies that he lives a hedonistic life in pursuit of pleasure.

The Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, Weaver, And Tapestry Maker - All guildsmen and experts in their professions. They are wearing impressive clothes and carrying handsome silver mounted equipment.

The Cook - Accompanying the guildsmen, the Cook is mainly described in terms of his culinary abilities. However Chaucer does point out that he has an ulcerous sore on his shin.

The Sea captain - A jolly fellow and an able seaman. He could read the stars and was also a good fighter. However Chaucer suggests that he is not completely moral and has no qualms about stealing wine from the Merchant whose casks he is transporting.

The Physician - An excellent doctor who can quickly diagnose the cause of any disease. However Chaucer suggests that this good doctor is motivated by greed more than anything else and has a special fondness for gold.

The Wife of Bath - Described as being somewhat deaf, fat and amorous. She is an excellent weaver and having been married five times knows all the cures for love.

The Parson - A genuinely good clergyman. His self-denial and charity are indeed praiseworthy. He sets a moral standard to his flock of parishioners.

The Plowman - The Parson's brother and a good Christian ever willing to help his neighbors in trouble. He is an honest and hardworking laborer.

The Miller - A hefty and strong fellow, a loudmouth and a teller of scurrilous stories.

The Manciple - The steward of a law school in London who is responsible for buying food. He is a shrewd man who tricks the lawyers by keeping aside some money for himself whenever he is asked to go and purchase food.

The Reeve - A slender and quick-tempered man. He is such a successful manager of his lord's estate that he has more spending power than his lord does. He knows all the secrets of the employees and blackmails them. He is thus feared by all in the estate.

The Summoner - He has a fiery-red cherubic face, which is an indicator of his lecherous and deceitful character. His gruesome physical appearance fits most appropriately with his profession. The author

ironically describes him as a good fellow. He is good as the sinners can easily bribe him.

The Pardoner - A seller of pardons. He dupes innocent poor people by selling them fake relics. Chaucer ironically commends him as an excellent churchman.

The Host - Introduced at the end of the "General Prologue", he proposes the story telling contest in order to make the journey a more enjoyable one.

The Canon's Yeoman - Arrives at the end of the journey along with his master. He is wearing a black cloak and comes panting and gasping for breath after the main group of pilgrims. He proceeds to tell a tale revealing the hypocrisy and deceitfulness of alchemists.

PLOT (Synopsis)

The Canterbury Tales consists of the stories related by the 29 pilgrims on their way to Saint Thomas Becket's shrine in Canterbury. Harry Bailey, the Host, had proposed a scheme in the General Prologue whereby each pilgrim was to narrate two tales on the way to Canterbury and two more while returning. In the course of the journey the Canon and his Yeoman join the pilgrims. However *The Canterbury Tales* are incomplete. There should have been a hundred and twenty tales in all according to the original plan but Chaucer only completed twenty-three tales. Out of these, the Cook's and the Squire's tales are unfinished. Two tales are imperfectly attributed to the teller: the Sea captain's tale begins as though a woman were telling it and was actually earlier meant for the Wife of Bath, while the Second Nun refers to herself as an "unworthy son of Eve". The Knight tells the first tale.

The Knight's Tale describes how two kinsmen Arcite and Palamon fall in love with the same woman named Emily whom they first see out of their prison window. Emily is the niece of King Theseus. Arcite gains his freedom but is banished from Athens. He comes back in a disguise since he cannot bear to live away from Emily. In the meanwhile Palamon breaks out of prison and coincidentally meets Arcite in a forest grove. Here Theseus discovers them fighting a bloody duel. Theseus puts an end to their fight and organizes a contest to resolve their quarrel about Emily. Before the contest Arcite prays to Mars for victory while Palamon prays to Venus for the sole possession of Emily. This creates uproar in heaven and finally both the wishes are granted. Arcite emerges victorious in the joust but falls from his horse and dies and eventually Palamon marries Emily.

The Miller's Tale relates how Old John, an Oxford carpenter, was deceived by a clerk named Nicholas. That is, he had an affair with the carpenter's wife. Nicholas deceives the carpenter into believing that Noah's flood is about to recur and makes him hang three tubs from the ceiling to escape the deluge. The carpenter sleeps fitfully in one tub while his wife Alison spends the night with Nicholas. The young parish clerk Absolon who is also trying to woo Alison arrives beneath her bedroom window only to be humiliated. When Absolon desperately begs Alison for a kiss she thrusts her posterior out of the window. He is angry and returns to take revenge. But now Nicholas extends his backside out of the window and Absolon brands him with a red-hot iron. Nicholas's screams wakes the carpenter who cuts the cord and plunges down breaking his arm.

The Reeve's Tale continues in the bawdy vein and repays the Miller for his sarcastic depiction of a carpenter. It describes how two clerks named John and Alan, whose flour had been stolen, cheat a flour miller. While Alan sleeps with the miller's daughter, John moves the baby's cot near his bed so that the miller's wife gets into it mistaking it for her husband's. At dawn Alan goes to the miller's bed and thinking that John is in it boasts about how he has had the miller's daughter that night. The miller is furious to hear this and starts cursing. The miller's wife, thinking that she is in bed with her husband strikes the miller

mistaking him for one of the clerks. The clerks then escape with their flour that has been baked into a cake.

The Cook's Tale is an unfinished fragment and deals with the story of an apprentice cook named Perkin who loses his job because of his loose habits. The dismissal however has no effect on Perkin and he moves in with a like-minded friend whose wife is a prostitute.

The Sergeant at Law's Tale relates the tragic story of Constance who gets married to a Syrian Sultan after he converts to Christianity. However the Sultan's evil mother is outraged at his renunciation of the Muslim faith and plots to kill all the Christians in Syria along with the Sultan. She then sets the widowed Constance adrift in a boat. Constance finally lands in Northumberland and starts living with the governor and his wife. She converts her heathen hosts to Christianity and miraculously cures a blind man. Satan makes a young Knight fall in love with her but she rejects him. Seething with the desire to take revenge the Knight murders the governor's wife and hides the blood stained knife in Constance's bed to implicate her. Constance is produced in court before King Alla and a mysterious voice condemns the Knight when he falsely testifies against Constance. The Knight is killed and Constance marries the king. She gives birth to a baby boy while the king is away on a Scottish expedition. However Donegild, the King's malicious mother interferes with the messages with the result that Constance is once again set adrift along with her newly born son. When the king returns and realizes the truth he kills his mother. Constance eventually arrives with her son in Rome and lives with a senator and his wife. She is finally reunited with King Alla when the latter comes on a pilgrimage to Rome.

The Wife of Bath's Tale is preceded by a Prologue in which she gives an account of her colorful life with five husbands. Her tale continues the theme of women's desire for mastery over men. A young Knight rapes a country maiden while returning home. As a punishment for his heinous act he has to discover within a year what women most desire. The Knight unsuccessfully wanders in the entire country in search of the answer. Eventually he promises to grant a wish to an ugly old hag in return for the right answer. When he has given the answer in court and secured his liberty, the old croon jumps up and demands that he marry her. The Knight begs her to reconsider and wish for something else but the old hag stubbornly refuses. The Knight marries her secretly. At night as they lie in bed, the Knight keeps on tossing and turning restlessly. The old hag asks him if he would prefer her ugly and faithful or beautiful and faithless. The Knight allows her to decide. The old woman is delighted to have won 'maistrie' over her husband and rewards him by becoming faithful and beautiful all the time.

The who enters into a partnership with a fiend disguised as a bailiff and agrees to work with him even **Friar's Tale** is targeted against the Summoner. It relates the story of a corrupt Summoner after learning his true identity. They see a farmer whose cart is stuck in the mud cursing that the devil takes his horses along with the cart. However the fiend refuses to take them because the curse is insincere. The Summoner then tries to cheat an old woman by levying false charges against her. The poor woman then sincerely wishes that the Summoner is damned and the fiend carts him off to hell.

The Summoner's Tale repays the Friar for his tale about the corrupt Summoner. The Summoner relates a story about a corrupt mendicant Friar. One day the Friar asks a dissatisfied and angry parishioner for more donations. The Friar then preaches against anger. The parishioner then slyly agrees to donate something if the Friar promised to divide it equally among all the twelve members of his chapter and tricks him into accepting a fart. The angry Friar wends his way to a landlord's house and describes his predicament. The lord's Squire, Jankin, explains that the fart nay indeed be divided among the members of the chapter by seating the twelve Friars around a cartwheel with their noses at the end of a spoke and letting off the fart from the center. Everybody except the Friar applauds the solution and Jankin is rewarded with a new coat.

The Clerk's Tale is a rendition of the patient and long-suffering Griselda folk - tale. Griselda's husband inhumanly subjects her to various cruelties simply to test the extent of her patience and love. These cruelties include the pretended murder of her children and his intended divorce and remarriage. Griselda silently bears one ordeal after another till her husband can bear the deception no longer and reveals everything. Her children are finally united with her and her husband once again accepts her as his wife.

The Merchant's Tale recounts how old January marries a young maiden named May and is deceived by Damian. January suddenly loses his vision and becomes intensely jealous and possessive of his young wife. He is unaware of his wife's affair with Damian. One day January and May go for a walk in the garden and May asks him to help her up into a pear tree to pick pears to satisfy her intense craving. Damian is hiding in the tree and they make love. Pluto who disapproves of women's fickleness restores at this point January's sight. However Prosperina, Pluto's wife, gives May the ability to convince January that she was only struggling with Damian and had done so only because she had been led to believe that it would restore January's sight.

The Squire's Tale is an unfinished fragment. King Cambuscan receives a magic horse, sword, mirror and ring as gifts from the king of Araby and India. The horse has the ability to transport a man anywhere he wants to go in a flash. The sword could magically cut through the thickest armor and even heal wounds. The mirror can reveal future misfortunes and tragedies and the ring imparts to its wearer the power to understand the speech of birds. The king's daughter wears the ring and hears a falcon miserably lamenting her betrayal by her fickle lover. She takes the poor falcon to court and nurses its self-inflicted wounds.

The Franklin's Tale recounts the story of Dorigen who is courted by Aurelius during her husband, Arveragus', absence. She rejects his love and kiddingly says that he can have her if he can make all the rocks from the coastline vanish and thus make her husband's return safe. In the meanwhile Arveragus returns from his trip and Dorigen is happily reunited with her husband. But Aurelius who still pines for her enlists the help of a magician and makes the rocks disappear. Dorigen is distraught when her condition has been met. Her husband insists that she must honor her promise. Arveragus's nobility and Dorigen's commitment to her husband move Aurelius. He releases Dorigen from her promise. Aurelius discovers that he does not have money to pay the magician and requests for more time. Upon learning the entire story the magician foregoes his fees and the tale ends with the Franklin's appeal to the pilgrims to judge who is the most generous character.

The Physician's Tale describes a tragic tale of a beautiful and chaste maiden named Virginia. A corrupt judge named Apius lusts after her and invents a charge of kidnapping to force her father to relinquish the young girl to the scoundrel Claudius who is in league with the judge. However the father beheads Virginia in order to protect her honor and virginity and gives the head to Apius. In the meanwhile the town folk discover the fraudulent charge and throw Apius into prison where he kills himself. The rascal Claudius is exiled.

The Pardoner's Tale relates how three drunken men set out in search of death after their friend has been killed by the plague. On their way they encounter an extremely old man who directs them to an oak tree at the end of the lane and tells them that he had last seen death there. The men hurry to the spot and instead find eight bushels of gold. They decide to keep the treasure for themselves. However they grow greedy and kill themselves through trickery.

The Sea captain's Tale recounts how a Monk deceived a Merchant. The Merchant's wife borrows a hundred francs from the Monk and agrees to sleep with him in exchange of his favor. The Monk in turn has borrowed the money from the Merchant. When the Merchant returns from his trip the Monk tells him that he had returned the money to his wife while he was away. The Merchant asks his wife about the money who

informs him that she spent it on clothes.

The Prioress's Tale is a dedication to the Virgin and describes how the Jews murdered a Christian boy. The Virgin gives the dead boy the power of speech. He is thus able to reveal his whereabouts and avenge his death.

Sir Topas' Tale is the 1st story related by Chaucer. It tells of a young Knight named Sir Topas who rides in search of an elf queen. On reaching fairyland he encounters a giant. He promises to engage in a duel and returns to his land. Chaucer then describes the preparation for the duel in great detail. The Host however interrupts the tale and tells Chaucer to narrate some sensible story.

Chaucer then relates the **Tale of Melibee**. Melibee's enemies attack his house and his daughter is injured. But his wife, Dame Prudence persuades him to banish all thoughts of revenge and to forgive his enemies.

The Monk's Tale comprises of a series of tragedies. The Knight who can no longer bear the tediously dismal stories interrupts the Monk.

The Nun's Priest's Tale is a merry beast fable. It concerns the misfortune that befalls a cock named Chaunticleer when he chooses to ignore the import of his dream to please his lovely wife Pertelote. A fox called Daun Russel catches him off guard by praising his melodious voice. Chaunticleer's abduction raises a great hue and cry and all the villagers chase the fox. Chaunticleer urges the fox to shout abuses at the villagers. As soon as the fox opens his mouth Chaunticleer flew safely to a tree top. The fox again praised Chaunticleer but the cock refused to fall in the same trap twice.

The Second Nun's Tale invokes the Virgin Mary. It relates how a virgin maiden named Cecilia converted her husband and his brother to Christianity. They were soon prosecuted for this act but they refused to worship the pagan gods. In the meanwhile Cecilia managed to convert even some of their prosecutors. She was eventually murdered.

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale deals with his own experiences during the practice of alchemy. The tale recounts how a Canon duped a priest into believing that he could transform mercury into silver and sold him the fake formula for forty pounds.

The Manciple's Tale recounts the story of Phoebus who had a white crow that could sing and talk. While Phoebus is away on a trip his wife sleeps with her secret lover. The crow betrays the secret. Phoebus kills his wife. He is then overcome with sorrow and angrily spurns the crow. He plucks out its feathers and replaces it with black ones and curses that all its descendants shall have a coarse voice.

The Parson's Tale is the concluding tale. It is a very long prose sermon on the seven deadly sins.

The Canterbury Tales ends with Chaucer's **Retracciouns** where he renounces all his secular works including those tales of Canterbury that are immoral.

THEMES

"The Canterbury Tales" has several overlapping themes, which not only enrich the book's texture but also lend it some kind of coherence and unity. Most of these themes are abstract and cannot be stated as singular propositions. Nearly all the subjects of Chaucer's most serious contemplation can be found in his magnificent epic. The major themes are: critique of the church, the problem of predestination and foreknowledge, themes of the inherent corruptness of human nature and decline of moral values, the problem of the position of women and marriage relationships, themes of honor and truth, and themes of Christian

virtue and chivalry.

MOOD

The prevailing mood of "The Canterbury Tales" is obviously that of comedy. The most prominent aspect of the book is the amazing magnitude of the range of its representation of medieval society. The poem aims at wholeness and presents an amalgam of all the themes and conventions of contemporary medieval literature. The tales thus range from courtly romance (Knight's Tale, Sergeant at Law's Tale, Squire's Tale), Breton Lay (Franklin's Tale), Fabliaux (Miller's Tale, Reeve's Tale, Merchant's Tale), Saint's Legend (Second Nun's Tale), tragedy (Monk's Tale), exemplum (Pardoner's Tale), sermon (Parson's Tale, Tale of Melibee), to a beast fable (Nun's Priest's Tale). As such the poem has a wide range of tone and mood. The "General Prologue" serves as a kind of sample of what will follow. The serious ideals of chivalry, religion, and agricultural labor which operate in the portraits of the Knight, Parson and Plowman, provide a sober and solemn tone, while the comic, ironic and satiric portraits of the Prioress, Monk, Merchant, and others provide the predominant comic tone. There are frequent abrupt shifts of mood and tone from the ludicrous to the sublime, from a note of sincere appraisal to outright mockery, from scathing criticism of social corruption and moral depravity to light-hearted gibes at a certain innocuous inanity. This contributes to the charm and humor of the work. The main body of the tales also operates on a similar principle. Serious, grave and sober tales are offset by comic ones.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

A Short List of the Principal Dates in Geoffrey Chaucer's Life

There is a controversy regarding the exact year in which Chaucer was born. The only source of information of his life is primarily the records pertaining to his career as a courtier and a civil servant. In 1386 when testifying at a trial Chaucer declared that he was around forty years or more. Accordingly his year of birth can be placed anywhere between 1340 to 1345.

- 1340 - 1345 Chaucer was born in London, in the Vintry.
- 1357 Page to the Countess of Ulster.
- 1359 Taken captive while on a military expedition to France.
- 1360 Released on ransom and returned to England.
- 1366 Married Philippa Roet, a Lady in waiting to the queen.
- 1367 Served Edward III as a Valet.
- 1368 Went abroad as a Diplomat.
- 1369 Sent to Italy to negotiate a commercial treaty.
- 1374 Becomes Controller of Customs at the Port of London.
- 1378 Sent to Italy as a diplomat.
- 1379 Became Controller of Petty Customs, London.
- 1380 Became Justice of Peace for Kent.

- 1381 Became Knight of the Shire for Kent.
- 1382 Chaucer's wife Philippa Roet died.
- 1384 Started receiving pension from Richard II due to strained financial conditions.
- 1385 Granted an annual hogshead of wine from the King.
- 1386 Pension increased by Henry IV.
- 1389 Became Clerk of the King's Works.
- 1400 Died on October 25 and buried in the Poet's Corner in Westminster Abbey.

A Brief Look at the Chief Works of Geoffrey Chaucer

1. Early Works :

The Book of the Duchess

The House of Fame

The Parliament of Fowls

2. Middle Works:

Troilus and Criseyde

The Legend of Good Women

3. Late Works:

The Canterbury Tales.

A Brief Overview of Chaucer's Life

Chaucer was probably born sometime between 1340 and 1345 and led a varied career as a courtier, diplomat and civil servant under Kings Edward III and Richard II. Thus his vocation brought him into contact with people from different walks of life and social hierarchies and provided him with many opportunities to make an insightful observation of the entire medieval society.

Chaucer was the son of a wealthy London wine merchant and his mother was Agnes de Compton, a lady at Court. It is probable that Chaucer attended the Latin grammar school of St. Paul's Cathedral and later studied law at the Inns of Court.

In 1357 he became page to the Countess of Ulster, Elizabeth, the wife of Prince Lionel, third son of Edward III. Here he learned the ways of the court and made the acquaintance of great men like John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster and Edward III's fourth son. He also learned how to use arms as a page. Chaucer was sent to France on an invitation. However he was captured and released for ransom in 1360. No information is available on his life till 1366.

In 1366 Chaucer married Philippa Roet, a lady in waiting to the queen. There is no way of finding out whether this marriage was entered into for love or for other reasons. By 1367 Chaucer became esquire to

Edward III. In 1370 Chaucer was sent abroad as a diplomat for negotiations. He served as Controller of Customs for London from 1374 to 1386. In 1386 Chaucer moved from his London residence to the countryside probably to Greenwich. He then moved to Kent when he was appointed a Justice of Peace and then Knight of the Shire. However in the very same year Richard II stripped Chaucer of all his appointments when his patron, John of Gaunt, left on a military expedition against Spain. This created financial difficulties for Chaucer. But his offices were restored on John of Gaunt's return to England in 1389. He was appointed Clerk of the King's Works from 1389 to 1391 and was chiefly responsible for the maintenance of royal buildings and parks. During the course of his checkered career as a civil servant Chaucer traveled on several diplomatic missions to France, one to Spain in 1366, and two to Italy from 1372 to 1373 and in 1378 where he discovered the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. These works served to widen and enrich Chaucer's literary resources.

In the last years of his life Chaucer received a pension from the king and lived reasonably comfortably. He leased a house within the area of Westminster Abbey. He died on 25 October 1400 and was buried in the Abbey in what is now known as the Poet's Corner.

Chaucer's Works

Chaucer wrote for a very sophisticated and learned audience of fellow courtiers and officials and even members of the royal family. It is believed that he read his works aloud to this very select audience. During this time the culture of the English upper classes was predominantly under the French influence. English was seen as the language of the lower classes. Thus it is hardly surprising that the contemporary fashionable French poets --- Guillaume De Machaut, Eustace Deschamps and Jean Froissart ---influenced Chaucer and his early works. Chaucer was also thoroughly familiar with the dream allegory *Le Roman de la Rose* by the French poets Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meun. Chaucer thus absorbed the courtly love tradition that was the predominant theme of all French poetry. Chaucer in fact translated *Le Roman de la Rose* but only a fragment of it survives. Chaucer's diplomatic visits to Italy brought him into contact with the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio which left a deep imprint on his own later poetry. Chaucer was extremely well read. One can easily detect the influences of Virgil's *Aeneid*, Ovid's *Heroides* and *Metamorphoses*, Lucan's *Pharsalia*, Statius' *Thebaid*, Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*, and Macrobius' commentary on *Cicero's Somnium Scipionis*.

The Book of the Duchess probably written in 1369 is Chaucer's first important work. It is an elegy for the John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche, who died in 1369, and reveals the influence of Ovid and Machaut. It is a dream allegory in which the poet meets a man dressed in black in a forest who tells him about how he courted a beautiful lady and concludes with the revelation that he is at present mourning her death. *The House of Fame* also a dream allegory followed next and showed the influence of Dante. *The Parliament of Fowls* was Chaucer's next major work. While still in the dream allegory tradition, it combines the influence of Dante and Boccaccio. The poem celebrates St. Valentine's day and describes the mating of birds, which engenders a great debate. All these three dream sequences were written between 1369 to 1385. In this period Chaucer also translated religious, philosophical and historical works including 'a life of St. Cecilia', a sequence of medieval tragedies describing the lives of men weighed down by adverse fortune, and a translation of Boethius' *The Consolation of Philosophy*.

Troilus and Criseyde (1382 – 85?) relates the famous story of Troilus' fatal love for Criseyde, the widowed daughter of Calchas, an astronomer who had foreseen the fall of Troy and defected to the Greek camp. Troilus sees and falls in love with Criseyde and begins a secret affair through the agency of her uncle Pandarus. Their happiness is short-lived and the Greeks demand Criseyde in exchange for a prisoner of war. Fearing public wrath, the lovers neither escape nor negotiate, and Criseyde goes to the Greeks promising to

return as soon as possible. However she does not return and Troilus becomes sad and desolate. In the meanwhile Criseyde takes the Greek Diomedes as a lover. Troilus sees her betrayal in a dream and devotes himself to the battle. He dies a hero's death and ascends to the seventh sphere from where he looks down on earth and realizes the vanity of worldly glory. Chaucer next wrote *The Legend of Good Women* in 1386 but abandoned it in 1387. He then started work on his most magnificent creation *The Canterbury Tales*. He continued to write this for the next thirteen years or so but could not complete his original plans.

Apart from these writings a vast body of spurious material is also attributed to Chaucer. Scholars have labeled this material which includes nearly hundred pieces of verse, the Chaucerian apocrypha. It is believed that a fifteenth century manuscript distributor John Shirley was responsible for these erroneous attributions.

John Dryden called Chaucer the "father of English poetry". Chaucer certainly contributed to the growth and development of English language by employing it at a time when as a rule, court poetry was written in Latin, French or Anglo-Norman. He extended the range of poetic vocabulary and meters in English. He was also the 1st poet to use iambic pentameter, the 7 line stanza that is now termed the rhyme royal, and the heroic couplet. He was one of the most skilful English poets. Chaucer also wrote in prose. Some of his prose writing includes *Boece*, *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*, *The Tale of Melibee*, and *The Parson's Tale*.

CHAPTER SUMMARIES AND NOTES

The General Prologue

Summary

In April the pleasant showers of rain had pierced the drought of March to the very root and bathed every plant with life-giving moisture. The refreshing west wind had quickened the young shoots in every wood and field. The young sun had completed its second half course in the zodiac sign of the Aries, and the small birds encouraged by nature sang melodiously. People longed to go on pilgrimages and seek strange shores in this rejuvenating month. People from every corner of England went to Canterbury to seek the holy blessings at the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket.

One spring day at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, while the narrator (Chaucer) was waiting for the next day to go on his pilgrimage to Canterbury, a group of twenty-nine pilgrims arrived at the inn. The narrator was accepted into their company and they decided to rise early next morning and carry on their journey. The narrator describes each of these pilgrims and tells the reader about their ranks and the kind of clothes they wore.

Notes

In the opening lines Chaucer rapidly sketches a season -- April, an occasion -- pilgrimage to Canterbury, and a location -- Tabard Inn. The enchanting picture of the sun-kissed and rain-cleansed April sky and budding forth of new life possesses a special charm. The passing away of the bleak and dark winter inspired people to go on pilgrimages since it was the only form of holiday in medieval England. Chaucer also states his intention to describe the Canterbury pilgrims. But more importantly he declares his intention to state the social estate or rank of all the pilgrims. Thus the Prologue may be seen as a form of estates literature which enables Chaucer to paint a holistic picture of fourteenth century society.

The Knight - The Knight, an extremely brave and distinguished man, loved chivalry, truth, honor, generosity and courtesy. He had ridden further than any man in Christendom or heathendom and had always been honored for his valor. Although he was brave he was also prudent. He was a true, perfect, gentle knight who never spoke rudely to anybody. His horse was good but he himself wasn't ostentatiously dressed. His

chain mail coat bore the scars of his latest expedition.

Notes

Some critics hold that Chaucer was correct to begin with the portrait of the Knight since he occupied a high status in society. Thus the Knight is respected by all the pilgrims and also tells the first tale. However one must remember that the General Prologue follows the framework of estates literature. In this light it would have been more correct if Chaucer had started with the ecclesiastical characters since in estates literature the clergy occupy a higher position than the others. Chaucer's description of the chivalrous Knight suggests that this is not an actual portrait but an idealistic representation of his profession. Chaucer endows him with all the qualities and gentlemanly traits that one would expect from a Knight. The list of campaigns undertaken by the Knight indicates the religious role played by him. The references to far-away places also add a dash of romance and glamour.

The Squire - The twenty- year-old Squire was the Knight's son. With his fashionably curled locks he was a lusty bachelor and an aspirant to Knighthood. He was of average height and was wonderfully agile. He had conducted himself well in cavalry expeditions in the hope of gaining his lady's favor. He was singing / playing his flute all day long. He wore a fashionable short gown with long wide sleeves. He could compose lyrics, joust, draw, dance, and ride elegantly. He was courteous, modest and helpful.

Notes

Chaucer tells the readers that the young Squire could ride and sing, joust, dance, draw and write poetry. These references to simple everyday activities and the special qualifications required by the profession, enables Chaucer to paint a realistic portrait of the pilgrim

The Squire's curled locks and fashionably short gown embroidered with white and red flowers are appropriate for his role as a figure of romantic chivalry, and provide a stark contrast to the more serious religious aspects of chivalry represented by his father, the Knight.

The Yeoman - The Yeoman was the only servant brought along by the Knight. He was dressed in a green coat and hood and carried a sheaf of bright and sharp peacock arrows under his belt. He carried a large bow in his hand. His hair was closely cropped and his face was tanned. He carried a sword, a shield and a bright dagger. He wore a St. Christopher medallion on his beautiful breast of silver. He had thorough knowledge about forestry and woodcraft and carried a hunting horn.

Notes

The detailed description about the tools and equipment carried by the Yeoman serves to fortify Chaucer's assertion about the Yeoman's mastery in woodcraft. It should be noted that the Yeoman not only carries a bow, sword and buckler which would indicate that he is on military service, but also a hunting horn which implies that he is a forester.

The Prioress - There was also a nun; a Prioress named Madame Eglantine (Sweetbrier) among the Canterbury pilgrims. She was very demure and her oath was, " by Sainte Loy". She sang the divine service with a pleasant nasal intonation. She spoke French fluently in the manner of the school of Stratford at Bow since she didn't know Parisian French. She had excellent table manners and didn't allow any morsel to fall from her lips nor wet her fingers deep in her sauce. She wiped her upper lip so clearly that no trace of grease was left on her cup after she had finished her drink. She had a good disposition and a pleasant and amiable bearing. She strove to imitate courtly manners and to be dignified in her manner. She was so charitable and full of pity that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap. She fed her 3 small dogs with roasted meat, or milk and fine bread. She was very sensitive and had a tender and affectionate heart. Her wimple was

elegantly pleated. She had a broad forehead, straight nose, gray nose and soft small red lips. She wore a golden brooch with the inscription "Amor vincit omnia".

Notes

Chaucer has drawn an exquisite portrait of the Prioress. He presents a lady who is utterly charming and elegant. The reader is told that the Prioress is simple and coy when she smiles. She has a broad forehead and sings the divine service with a pleasant nasal intonation. She is obviously a lady who has not forgotten her past of refinement and fine living. Her strongest oath is by St. Loy which implies that she hardly swears at all. Her tender heart overflows with pity when she sees dead or bleeding mice caught in a trap. She is fond of animals and feeds her dogs with meat and expensive fine bread. She is also vain about her personal appearance and exposes too much of her broad forehead. Her love of jewelry is evident from the rosary and the elegant gold brooch with the ambiguous motto 'Amor vincit omnia' (love conquers all). This type of love could imply both spiritual as well as human love. Since she is a nun it should rather have read 'Amor Dei' (love of God). The Prioress's affectations and her straight nose, gray eyes, and tender sensibility associate her with an elegant society lady rather than a nun. Thus Chaucer fills his portrait of the Prioress with subtle irony by praising her especially for her faults.

Companions of the Prioress - Another nun who functioned as her chaplain and 3 priests accompanied the Prioress.

Notes

The nun and one of the priests will relate tales. They are fleetingly mentioned in the 'General Prologue' and their character only develops through their respective tales.

The Monk - The Monk was in charge of the monastery's estates and loved hunting. He was an able man who was fit to be an abbot. His stable had many fine horses. The Monk was the keeper of the lower houses. He found the rule of St. Maurus and of St. Benedict old and constrictive. He lived entirely according to the new manners of the world and allowed himself greater liberties. He didn't care a straw about the text, which said that hunters are not holy men and that a Monk who neglects his duty and discipline is like a fish out of water. He didn't believe in making himself mad by studying books or toiling with his hands as commanded by St. Augustine. The Monk was a keen rider and had swift greyhounds. He loved to track and hunt the hare. The sleeves of his coat were trimmed with the finest gray fur in the land. His hood was fastened under his chin with an intricate gold pin. His bald head shone as glass and his face shone as if anointed with oil. He was very fat and his eyes gleamed like a furnace under a cauldron. Chaucer says that he was a good prelat (church official) and loved to eat a fat roasted swan.

Notes

The Monk, Daun Piers, is an outrider; i.e. he looks after his monastery's estates. He is a perfect candidate for the post of an abbot. This post was generally reserved for those of noble birth instead of for the truly devout and pious. This reflects that the Monk, like the Prioress, is born in a good family. He loves the good life and takes delight in hunting. He possesses thoroughbred hounds and wears the finest clothes that money can buy. Moreover he does not care about the details of St. Benedict's rule. He finds more pleasure hunting outside rather than devoting himself to study within his cloister. Chaucer is the master of irony and ostensibly agrees with the Monk's point of view. The result is that the reader comes to an entirely different conclusion about the Monk. It is evident that the Monk's way of life is a gross violation of his monastic vows. The Monk would have made a better administrator of the monastery instead of being entrusted with the task of ensuring the spiritual welfare of the people.

The Friar - The Friar was a jovial and merry man. He was a limiter i.e. a Friar licensed to beg within certain

limits. He had mastered the art of small talk. He had arranged the marriage of many young women after seducing them himself. He was a pillar of the church and familiar with the frankleyns and worthy women of the town. He was licensed to hear confessions and granted absolutions easily. He believed that gifting silver instead of prayers and remorseful tears is the best way to show repentance. His hood was overstuffed with knives and other trinkets to give the good women. He had a merry voice and could sing and play very well on the harp. He was well acquainted with the taverns in town and knew every innkeeper and barmaid better than anyone, since it wasn't profitable to deal with poor people. The Friar was the best beggar in his order and was always able to extract money from people. The proceeds of his begging were far greater than the rent he paid to the church. He wore a double-breasted cloak and lisped in affectation to make English soft on his tongue. His eyes twinkled brightly in his head as the stars in a frosty night. The Friar was called Hubert.

Notes

The Friar numbers among Chaucer's portraits of the corrupt clergy. There were four orders of Friars in the medieval age: the Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Augustinians. Friars were mendicants and wandered from place to place and had the authority to hear confessions. Chaucer's Friar is a hedonist and well acquainted with the wealthy and the powerful. Moreover he is lascivious and has seduced many young women with his sweet talk and the trinkets that he always carries in his hood. He is obviously an important member of his order. However he is more worldly than spiritual. Chaucer ironically says that he is the best Friar while meaning the exact opposite.

The Merchant - The Merchant had a forked beard, was dressed in motley and rode a high horse. He wore a Flemish beaver hat and his boots were clasped elegantly. He gave his opinions on English policy very pompously and these opinions were always dictated by his idea of what would be good for trade and lead to an increase of his own profits. He firmly believed that the sea between Middleburgh and Orwell should be guarded at all costs. He profitably sold French crowns called "sheeldes" that he received in exchange for his goods. He was very dignified in the management of his affairs and nobody knew about his debts. Although he was a worthy man Chaucer doesn't know his name.

The Clerk - There was also a serious Clerk of Oxford who had devoted himself to the study of logic. His horse was as thin as a rake. The Clerk was a very thin man. He wore a threadbare upper coat since he didn't have any source of income. He spent all that he got from friends on books and learning and prayed earnestly for the souls of those who gave him the means to study. He was very studious and didn't speak more than what was required. The little the he spoke was full of moral meaning. He would gladly learn and also teach gladly.

Notes

The Clerk is among Chaucer's idealized portraits. There is no irony in his description. Chaucer has deep admiration for the Clerk's serious devotion to his study of philosophy.

The Sergeant at Law - The Sergeant at Law was a careful and wise lawyer. On many occasions he had been appointed directly by the king to serve as a judge. His skill and wide reputation had earned him huge fees and lavish presents. He always sought unentailed ownership of land. He seemed busier than he actually was. He remembers all the cases and decisions which had occurred since King William's time. He had the skill to draw up a legal document with the perfect phrasing. He could recite every statute by heart.

The Franklin - The Franklin accompanied the lawyer. His beard was as white as a daisy. He loved to eat bread dipped in wine in the morning. He was a true Epicurean and a big landowner. His bread and ale were of the finest quality and his cellar was always well - stocked. His menus varied in accordance with the seasons of the year. It snowed food and drink in his house. His coop was filled with fat birds and his fishpond

was populated with brems and pikes. He presided over the sessions of the Justices of the Peace and was a Member of Parliament for his county. He had served as the King's administrative officer and auditor for his county. A short dagger and a silken pouch hung from his milk white belt.

The Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, Weaver, and Tapestry-maker - All of them are dressed in the uniform of their guild. Their equipment was new and lavishly decorated. Their knives were mounted with silver and not cheap brass. Each of them was worthy to sit as a burgess on a dais in the guildhall. They were eligible to serve as aldermen since they were knowledgeable. Even their wives would agree that they earned enough income and owned large properties since it is very pleasant to be addressed as "madam" and have one's mantle carried like a queen's. The guilds men had a cook with them.

The Cook - The Cook accompanying the guildsmen was the best judge of London ale. He was an expert in his trade. He could roast and boil, broil, fry, make stew and bake proper pies. It was a shame that he had an open sore on his shin since he could make the best chicken pie.

The Sea captain - The Sea captain was probably from Dartmouth. He could not ride a horse well. He wore a coarse knee length gown and carried a dagger that dangled from a cord around his neck. He had been tanned heavily by the summer sun. He tapped the wine casks that the wine merchant had brought from Bordeaux while the latter slept. He had no scruples. He knew all about tides and stream currents, and also about the harbors in Spain and Britain. Nobody could surpass his navigational skill from Hull to Carthage. The ship he captained was called "Magdalen".

The Physician - There was no match for the Physician in the entire world where medicine or surgery was concerned. He was trained in astrology and was able to cure his patients by placing their waxen figures in accordance with when a beneficent planet was ascendant. He knew the cause of every disease – whether it was hot or cold or moist or dry – and also which humor was responsible for it. But it was common knowledge that he was in league with the apothecaries and each worked to increase the other's profits. While he was well read in all the medical texts he devoted little time to read the Bible. His diet was moderate. He had made a considerable amount of money during the plague and was extremely reluctant to part with it. Since he prescribed gold in his medicines it can be assumed that he was especially fond of this metal.

The Wife of Bath - It was a pity that the good Wife of Bath was somewhat deaf but she was an excellent weaver. There was no woman in her entire parish who could precede her to the offertory. Her handkerchiefs were of the finest weave and weighed over ten pounds. She wore fine scarlet stockings and her shoes were supple and new. She had a bold and handsome face. Chaucer expresses his irony when he describes her as a respectable woman who had been married five times and has had numerous affairs in her youth. She knows a lot about journeys since she had been on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome, Bologna, St. James' shrine in Galicia, and Cologne. She was gap-toothed and rode on her gentle ambling horse easily. She wore a fine hat as broad as a shield, a riding skirt around her large hips and a pair of sharp spurs on her heels. She knew how to laugh and joke in company but her special skill lay in her knowledge of all the cures for love.

The Parson - The Parson was very needy man who was rich in saintly thoughts and works. He was a learned man who devotedly preached Christ's gospel to his parishioners. He was kind, wonderfully diligent and patient in times of adversity. He did not like to excommunicate anybody for non-payment of tithes but would rather give his own money to the poor parishioners. His parish was wide and the houses were far apart but even poor weather couldn't stop him from visiting the rich and the poor. He set a good example to his parish by practicing the good deeds that he preached. He didn't hire out his parish and leave his poor parishioners in difficulty, to run off to St. Paul's in London to look for an endowment by singing masses for the dead. Instead he stayed at home and guarded his parish against evil. Even though he was holy and virtuous, he

wasn't contemptuous of the sinners. Rather he was discreet and kind in his teaching. He taught the Christian lore but first followed it himself.

Notes

The Parson ranks among Chaucer's idealized characters. He is a truly holy man unlike the lecherous Friar, the gay Monk, the evil Pardoner, and the corrupt Summoner. His humility, virtuousness and punctiliousness (being precise and ceremonious) earn Chaucer's unconcealed admiration. He does not share any of the vices of the clergymen of the medieval age. He sets a good example to his parishioners and religiously guards his flock against all evil. The Plowman, his brother, is an honest laborer and a true Christian.

The Plowman - The Plowman was the Parson's brother. He was a good and faithful laborer and lived in peace and perfect charity. Chaucer describes him as someone who loved God with all his heart and at all times and loved his neighbor as himself. According to Chaucer he would willingly thresh, dig and ditch, free of charge out of Christian neighborliness. He paid his tithes honestly and promptly. He wore a laborer's smock and rode upon a mare.

The Miller - The Miller was a big burly fellow who always won the prize in wrestling. He was barrel-chested, rugged and stocky. He could break any door by ramming it with his head. His beard was red and broad as a spade. Moreover he had an ugly wart on his nose from which a tuft of red hairs protruded and wide black nostrils. His mouth was as big as a furnace and he was a loudmouth and jested about scurrilous and sinful tales. He was well versed in stealing grain and charged thrice the amount, yet he was reasonably honest. He wore a white coat and a blue hood. He could play the bagpipes well and led the pilgrims out of town to its music.

The Manciple - This worthy Manciple (steward) of an Inn of Court might have served as an example to the other stewards in the matter of buying provisions. He even managed to outwit his masters who were learned lawyers and made money on his purchase of food articles.

The Reeve - The Reeve was a slender, choleric man with a close shaven beard. His hair was cut round by the ears and the top was tonsured like a priest's. He had long lean stick-like legs. He was efficient in managing a granary and a storage-bin. There was no accountant who could hoodwink him. He could foretell the expected yield by taking drought and rainfall into consideration. He had managed his lord's estate since his lord was 20 years old. He knew the petty secrets of every bailiff, shepherd and laborer and was hence feared among them. His house was ideally located on a hearth and shadowed by green trees. He had more spending power than his lord did because of the wealth that he had privately accumulated. In his youth he had learned carpentry. He rode upon a sturdy horse named Scot. He was from Norfolk, near Bawdswell. He always rode last among the pilgrims.

The Summoner - The Summoner had a fiery-red, cherubic face, pimples, narrow eyes, black scabbed eyebrows and a scraggy beard. He was as lecherous as a sparrow. It was hardly surprising that children were afraid of his looks. He loved to eat garlic, onions, leeks and to drink strong red wine. He would speak only a few phrases of Latin, which he used to impress people. Chaucer says that the Summoner was a friendly rascal and would allow a lecher to have his mistress for a year for a bottle of wine. He would console sinners and teach them to be unafraid of being excommunicated by the archdeacon since money could buy absolution. He controlled the youth in his diocese and was their sole adviser and confidante. He wore a garland on his head that was large enough to decorate a pub signpost and carried a shield of cake.

Notes

The Summoner's gruesome and fearsome appearance is aptly suited to his character. The Summoner's

vocation was to summon or bring sinners to justice before the ecclesiastical courts. This allowed great leeway for corruption and bribery. His terrible outward appearance reflects the condition of his soul. It is ironical that the Summoner who has no spiritual values is entrusted with the task of bringing sinners to justice.

The Pardoner - The peerless Pardoner had just come from Rome and loudly sang "Come to me, love, hither!" The Summoner sang with him. The Pardoner had waxy yellow hair, which hung sleekly like a hank of flax and he was clean shaven. He spread out what little hair he had, thinly over his shoulders. He rode in the new fashion without his hood and only wore a little cap. He had hare-like glaring eyes and a small goat-like voice. His bag was stuffed with pardons that he had brought from Rome. Chaucer thinks that the Pardoner is a eunuch. Nobody could surpass the Pardoner in his profession. He carried fake relics with him to cheat poor believing people out of their money. Thus with false flattery and tricks he outwitted the parson and the parishioners. But Chaucer says that the Pardoner was a noble ecclesiastic who could read a parable well. However he was best at singing at the offertory since he knew that he must sweeten his tongue and preach to extract the maximum amount of money.

Notes

The Pardoner is a personification of unmitigated evil. He is the most corrupt among the clergymen. He is aware of his own villainy and in the Prologue to his Tale candidly acknowledges his hypocrisy. He has come straight from Rome and has made the selling of indulgences a commercial enterprise. He rides along with the Summoner, his partner in crime, singing a bawdy love song. His thin goat-like voice and lack of facial hair suggests that he is a eunuch. This is confirmed later when the Host taunts him after he has finished telling his story.

The Host - The Host named Harry Bailey, was a handsome man and fit to serve as the master of ceremonies. He was a big man with protruding eyes. He was frank in his speech, wise and well schooled. He was a merry man and well liked among the pilgrims.

These are the 29 pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. That evening after the Host had served an excellent dinner and made everybody feel comfortable, he proposes a scheme to make the journey a pleasant one. It was a common form of entertainment to tell stories during the journey therefore the Host suggests that each pilgrim should narrate two tales on the way to Canterbury and two more while returning. The person who tells the best tale – i.e. the tale that has the greatest moral as well as entertainment value – would be treated to a magnificent supper at the expense of the others. The Host offers to ride along to make the journey more enjoyable and to be the judge for what was best for the group. All the pilgrims gladly accepted the Host as the guide for their journey and immediately retire to bed.

They set out early at dawn the next morning and when they reached the Well of St. Thomas the Host told the group to draw straws so as to decide who would tell the first tale. By luck the Knight drew the shortest straw and agreed to tell the first tale. The General Prologue ends here and the Knight's tale begins.

Notes

The pilgrims described in the 'General Prologue' can be broadly divided into two types: the good and the bad. Thus he has drawn idealized portraits of the Knight, the Squire, the Yeoman, the Clerk, the Parson, and the Plowman. This goodness is antithetically balanced by his portrayal of the 'bad' or evil characters and this includes the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner. Then there are the neutral objective portraits of the Merchant, the Sergeant at Law, the Franklin, the Sea captain, the Wife of Bath and the guild men.

The fact that the pilgrims are called by their professional titles rather than personal names implies that

Chaucer was portraying the stereotypes of the various trades and occupations. By his brilliant use of the device of pilgrimage as the narrative framework, Chaucer was able to represent a microcosm of fourteenth century life in England.

The Knight's Tale - Part 1

Summary

Once upon a time there lived a duke Theseus who was the lord and governor of Athens. He was the mightiest conqueror in his day and had subdued many wealthy kingdoms. With his military genius and bravery he had conquered Scythia, the realm of the Amazons. He married Scythia's queen Hippolyta and brought her and her younger sister Emelye home to his country with great pomp and splendor. The Knight merely touches over the lengthy details of Theseus' siege and the difficulties encountered on his voyage home since it would be unfair to the other pilgrims who should also have their turn to tell their tales. The Knight then continues with his tale. On his triumphant return voyage, Theseus encounters a company of ladies dressed in black who are lamenting loudly. The ladies told Theseus that each of them had once been a duchess or a queen but is now destitute. They tell him that the old Creon had killed their husbands at the siege of Thebes and had maliciously defiled their dead bodies by giving them to the dogs to eat. They appeal to the duke for help. The good duke, enraged by this tale of woe swore upon his honor to take revenge from Creon. He immediately set off towards Thebes with his army and ordered Hippolyta to proceed to Athens with her sister Emelye. Theseus chose a battlefield and killed Creon in a fair combat. He then conquered Thebes and restored the bones of their dead husbands to the ladies.

After the battle got over the soldiers began to pillage the pile of slaughtered men. Among the heap of corpses they found two young knights named Arcite and Palamon who had been badly wounded. They claimed to be of royal blood and swore that they were brothers since they had been born to two sisters. The looters brought them before Theseus who refused to accept any ransom for their release and ordered to imprison them in Athens. Theseus then returns to Athens and lives in happiness while Arcite and Palamon are imprisoned in a tower and lead a miserable existence.

After several years, one fresh May morning beautiful Emelye happened to wander about the garden gathering flowers to weave a garland. The garden was adjoining the great tower in which Arcite and Palamon were imprisoned. Palamon who was cursing his fate happened to see Emily through a window and gave a startled cry of anguish. The alarmed Arcite questions him about this behavior. Palamon replies that he had cried out in anguish because of the unearthly beauty of the lady wandering in the garden. Arcite's curiosity was piqued and he too looked out of the window. Emily's beauty struck him to the quick and he declared that he would die unless he saw her everyday. These words angered Palamon who accused Arcite of being a traitor to declare love for a lady whom he chose first. Arcite disdainfully replied that while Palamon's love was nothing more than a religious feeling while his was real love, the love of a human being. Despite the fact that they are kin and sworn brothers they decide that everything is fair in love and war. They concur that each one shall fight for himself for love. Their friendship soon paled into a bitter and long strife.

It so happened that one day a duke named Perotheus, who was a friend of both Theseus and Arcite, arrived in Athens on a friendly visit. He requested Theseus to free Arcite on certain terms and conditions. It was decided that Arcite would be freed but he shall have to leave Athens forever. If he were ever found in Athens he would be beheaded.

Arcite is very sad at this turn of events and laments that it is his fate to permanently dwell in hell. When he was imprisoned he could at least catch a glimpse of his beloved Emily but now he is condemned never to see her again. He thinks that Palamon is luckier since he is still imprisoned and can enjoy Emily's presence. In

the meanwhile when Palamon realizes that Arcite has been released, he goes wild with grief. He thinks that Arcite can raise an army in Thebes and attack Athens and capture Emelye. The Knight now pauses and asks the reader to make the impossible decision about who is in a worse condition, Arcite or Palamon.

Part 2

Arcite returned to Thebes and spent all his days lamenting his separation from Emelye. He didn't eat, drink or sleep. Thus he grew as thin as a stick and his complexion became pale and sallow. This melancholic state of affairs continued for almost 2 years. One night while sleeping he saw the vision of Mercury which exhorted him to go to Athens. Arcite resolved to go back to Athens and to his fair Emily irrespective of the consequences. Upon looking into a mirror he realized that his appearance had undergone such a drastic change that he might remain unnoticed in Athens. He immediately disguised himself as a poor laborer and set off for Athens. Arriving at Athens he assumed the name of Philostrate and offered his services at the court and was assigned as a chamber page to Emily. As the years passed by he soon became popular in the whole court and rapidly rose in rank to become a chamber squire and a trusted confidante of Theseus. He spent nearly 3 years in this manner.

In the meanwhile worry and distress wore out Palamon who was still imprisoned for seven years. One May night Palamon broke out of his prison with the help of his friend who had drugged the jailer. Palamon fled from the city and decided to hide in the woods by daylight and to return home to Thebes by night, to raise an army and win Emelye as his bride. As luck would have it Arcite who had become the chief squire happened to arrive in the same woods where Palamon was taking refuge. Not knowing that Palamon was hiding in a thicket nearby Arcite began to muse upon the sad events of his life. Palamon, having heard Arcite's tale, was filled with rage and confronted him by calling him a foul traitor. Arcite then challenged Palamon to a duel to decide who was to win Emelye. The next morning Arcite arrived with food and armaments sufficient for both of them. The duel began and they fought furiously against each other. It so happened that Theseus, who loved to go on hunts, arrived along with Hippolyta and Emelye at the very spot where Arcite and Palamon were fighting. Theseus ordered them to stop fighting at once. When Palamon revealed their true identities and the cause of the duel, Theseus condemned them to a death sentence. However Queen Hippolyta and Emelye begged Theseus to have some mercy on them. The tears of the women had the desired effect on Theseus who resolved to free both Arcite and Palamon provided they swore never to harm Athens. Theseus also proposed a scheme to solve the matter of love for Emily. He said that Arcite and Palamon should return within a year with an army of 100 knights each, to fight a joust for winning Emily. Palamon and Arcite were overjoyed by Theseus's generous gesture and returned to Thebes happily.

Part 3

In the meanwhile Theseus spared no expense and built a magnificent amphitheater in which the proposed joust would take place. The Knight describes in great detail the magnificent carvings and figurines which adorned the amphitheater. Theseus built an altar for Venus – the goddess of love – at the eastern gate, another one for Mars – the god of war, and a rich offertory for Diana – the goddess of chastity. At the requisite time Arcite and Palamon arrived in Athens for the joust with their 100 knights in great majestic splendor. Theseus strove to ensure the utmost comfort of his guests and entertained them with banquets, feasts, music, wine, dancing, and singing. That Sunday night long before the approach of dawn Palamon prayed to Venus to grant him the sole possession of Emily. Although Mars is the god of war, Palamon does not care about winning the joust. He only wants to gain Emelye and if he fails to do so he would rather die by Arcite's spear. At sunrise Emily went to Diana's altar and prays that she might always remain a virgin and that Palamon and Arcite's love is turned elsewhere. If this is not possible, she prays, that at least she should have the one who loves her the most. Diana appears before Emily and tells her that she shall marry one of

these two men but she can't reveal which one. An amazed Emelye resigns herself to Diana's care and goes away. An hour later Arcite arrived to pray to Mars for victory in the joust. The carved image of Mars shook and softly murmured "victory!" to assure Arcite.

These conflicting prayers caused a furious row in heaven between Venus and Mars. Jupiter's efforts to make peace were in vain. Old Saturn, the god of destiny, solved the problem by finding an answer that satisfied both Venus and Mars. assured that Palamon would win Emily and promised that Arcite would emerge victorious in the joust.

Part 4

At last the day for the fight arrived. The excited Athenians swarmed in huge numbers to the amphitheater. Theseus announced that there would be no mortal combat and that once a man fell down or was wounded he would be forcibly removed from the arena by the marshals. This would prevent mindless destruction of noble blood. Thereafter Theseus along with Arcite, Palamon and their knights rode elegantly into the amphitheater for the joust. The bloody fight began with the sounding of trumpets and eventually Arcite wounded Palamon and the latter was forcibly carried away from the field.

There rose a roar of approval for Arcite who had emerged victorious. Arcite took off his helmet and rode his horse around the amphitheater to acknowledge the crowd's cheers and Emelye's friendly overtures. But suddenly a fury sent by Plato at Saturn's request erupted. This frightened Arcite's horse and Arcite was thrown off his horse and was fatally injured. He was carried away to Theseus' palace for recuperation.

Theseus also returned to his court. Despite the unfortunate mishap it was generally believed that Arcite would recover from his injuries. An atmosphere of happiness prevailed because of the fact that though both had been wounded nobody had been killed in the joust. Theseus celebrated the happy conclusion of the joust for 3 days and distributed gifts among everybody involved.

In the meanwhile Arcite's condition worsened and Theseus' physicians were unable to help him. It was evident that he would die. He sent for Emelye and after protesting his consuming love for her he asked her to marry Palamon since there wasn't anyone as worthy as him. Arcite died in Emelye's arms. Emelye was inconsolable with grief and nobody could comfort Theseus. Theseus chose the grove where Arcite and Palamon had first fought one another for performing Arcite's funeral rites. In a grand ceremony, flames consumed Arcite's body. After some years the period of mourning ended. Theseus sent for Palamon. In front of the whole court and Emily, Theseus said that Jupiter – the god of destiny – had decreed that Emily should marry Palamon. Through this marriage, Athens also secured the allegiance of Thebe. Emily and Palamon lived in blissful conjugal harmony.

Notes

The Knight's Tale is a romance based on Boccaccio's "Teseida". It deals with the theme of chivalry and is perfectly suited to the Knight's character. It is a tale about noble life and consists of noble Knights and virtuous ladies. The tale primarily deals with the love of Arcite and Palamon for Emelye. This story is related with an amazing wealth of detailed descriptions and realism of expression. There is no coarseness or bawdiness in the story in keeping with the Knight's character. The love of the two young men is noble and ideal. The young men share idealized love for the indifferent Emily. The only possible end of this love can be in marriage. There is no desire for an illicit relationship.

The Tale commends bravery in war, gallantry, courtesy, glory and honor. Arcite and Palamon are in love with the same lady. While Arcite is exiled, Palamon escapes from prison. They accidentally meet each other in a forest grove and boiling anger leads them to resolve the issue through a duel. However Arcite does not

fight an unarmed Palamon. He brings him food and armor before the duel. This is in accordance with the chivalric code of conduct.

The tale reflects the Knight's love of pageantry, pomp and splendor. The Knight describes at length the lavish arrangements made for the joust and the feasting that followed. The joust or tournament is the central episode of the tale and the deciding factor. The vision of a hundred Knights fighting on either side is a magnificent one. The joust is the climactic point of the story and reflects the Knight's love of warfare and battle. The Knight belongs to the warrior class and war is the way of life for him. It is ironic however that warfare and aggression decide the fate of love.

Chance or fortune plays a great role in the plot of the Knight's tale. The reader however does not mind this element of excessive coincidence and willingly accepts it as an integral part of a romance. Coincidences in fact propel the action. It is by chance that Palamon sees Emelye out of the prison window. The biggest coincidence is that both Arcite and Palamon fall in love with the same woman. It is again a coincidence that Duke Perotheus is a good friend of both Arcite and Duke Theseus and secures Arcite's release from prison. Similarly when Palamon escapes from the prison tower he accidentally arrives at the same spot where Arcite is bemoaning his fate. Again Duke Theseus coincidentally arrives at the very same place where Arcite and Palamon are engaged in a bloody duel to determine who shall have Emelye. The Knight through this story is trying to imply that the lives of people are determined by Chance or coincidence. These however are ultimately controlled by the Gods as is seen in this story where Saturn, the god of destiny, ultimately decides the fate of the young lovers. Thus while Arcite wins the joust and in turn Emelyess, he falls from his horse and dies. It is Palamon who marries Emily since he was destined to do so.

The Miller's Tale: Prologue

Summary

When the Knight had concluded his tale everybody agreed that it was noble story worth remembering. The Host then jovially called upon the Monk to tell a tale that would surpass the Knight's. However the Miller who was very drunk protested that he had a splendid tale for the occasion and one that would match the Knight's. But the Host seeing that the Miller was tipsy tried in vain to dissuade him. The Miller was adamant and proclaimed that he would narrate a tale about the deception of a carpenter by a scholar. The Reeve who had been a in his youth objected vehemently on grounds of obscenity. But nobody was able to stop the Miller from telling his vulgar tale. Chaucer apologizes to the readers for including it in his book but reminds the reader that he is bound to tell all the stories since a prize is involved.

The Miller's Tale

There once lived a rich old carpenter in Oxford who also took in paying guests. He had a lodger named Nicholas who was a student of astrology. This young scholar was able to forecast the weather conditions. Nicholas was very clever and wily and fond of playing the harp and singing songs. He was nicknamed Fly Nicholas because he loved pleasure in and out of bed.

The carpenter had married a pretty 18 year-old girl named Alison. He was very conscious of the vast discrepancy in their ages and kept a close eye on her since he was afraid of being deceived. One day when the carpenter had gone to Ossney, Nicholas started flirting with Alison and declared his love for her. At first Alison protested and vowed to scream to gather the neighbors. But she gradually relented. She confided to Nicholas that her husband was very jealous and that they should wait for an opportune moment for the sake of safety.

One day when Alison went to the parish church a young clerk named Absalon saw her and fell in love with

her. The Miller describes Absalon as being very stylish and lively. The overall impression that the reader gets of him is of an effeminate and prim person. Absalon was so overcome by Alison's beauty that when he went around with the collection plate he refused to accept any money from the women out of good manners. That night Absalon went to the carpenter's house with his guitar and sang entreaties to Alison to accept him. The carpenter awoke from his sleep by the noise but to his relief found that his wife was indifferent to Absalon and his protestations of love. This state of affairs continued for a long time. Alice turned Absalon's desperate efforts to woo her into a big joke.

It transpired that one Saturday when the old carpenter had gone to Ossney on some work Alison and Nicholas hatched a plot to sleep together at night. Nicholas carried enough food and drink to last him two days to his room and instructed Alison to tell the carpenter if he should ask for him that she hadn't the faintest idea where he was. The carpenter noticed Nicholas's absence and surmised that something might be wrong with him and even feared that Nicholas might have died. The carpenter's servant went to check on Nicholas and found him sitting bolt upright and motionless with a gaping mouth on his bed. Thinking that Nicholas had an attack of fit the carpenter shook him hard by the shoulders to bring him to his senses. Nicholas then pretended to come out of his stupor and tricked the carpenter into believing that he had a vision that Noah's flood was about to recur in less than an hour's time. Nicholas advised the carpenter to hang three boat-like tubs by the rafters and to stow them with a day's provisions and an axe for cutting the ropes to allow the tubs to float in the flood. Further, the tubs are to be hung far apart from each other and nobody is to talk or look at each other during the flood.

When the carpenter told his wife about the flood she put on a good act of being frightened to death. The foolish carpenter then fastened the three tubs to the rafters. At night the carpenter, Old John, his wife and Nicholas entered into their respective tubs and prayed. In a short while the carpenter fell into a troubled slumber. Soon Alison and Nicholas got out of their tubs and quietly went to bed.

In the meanwhile when the amorous parish clerk Absalon heard that the carpenter had gone out of town on business he hurried to declare his love to Alison. He positioned himself under Alison's window and begged her to give him a kiss. Alison refused to do so but Absalon was adamant and refused to budge. Afraid that the neighbors might get up by Absalon's entreaties, she relented to his demand. But deciding to humiliate him she thrust her backside out of the window, which Absalon kissed. But he soon realized that he had been tricked and went off vowing to take revenge. Absalon then went across the street to a blacksmith and borrowed a red-hot iron. He returned beneath Alison's window and begged for one more kiss. This time Nicholas decided to trick Absalon and extended his posterior out of the window to be kissed. Absalon asked Alison to speak to him and Nicholas thunderously farted. This upset the prim Absalon who branded Nicholas's buttocks with the red-hot iron. The noise of Nicholas' agonized screams startled the carpenter out of his sleep who cut the rope suspending his tub from the ceiling and plunged down to the floor. Nicholas and Alison's screams for help brought the neighbors to the house. The carpenter's fall had resulted in a broken arm. Nicholas slyly told the that the carpenter had gone mad and was convinced of the recurrence of Noah's flood and had tied three tubs to the ceiling for safety. The laughed heartily at the carpenter's lunacy and refused to take his version of the story seriously. The whole affair turned into a hilarious joke.

Notes

The plot of the Miller's tale is incredible and bizarre. It has many points of absurdity. For instance, it is incredible that Old John readily believes Nicholas' story about the recurrence of Noah's flood and following his directions hangs tubs from the ceiling. He appears to be quite daft. This contributes to the humor of the story. One must remember that Chaucer wrote the Miller's Tale as an example of the practical joke. Although its theme is adultery, Chaucer emphasizes on the aspect of the joke. The comic spirit pervading the Miller's Tale redeems its worst faults.

Chaucer has drawn excellent character portraits in *The Miller's Tale*. Old John remains a shadowy background figure as the jealous and foolish husband. Nicholas, the Clerk, is of course, smart, lecherous, and devious. Alison is not simply the lascivious and fickle wife. Undoubtedly she is beautiful but Chaucer's description isn't that of a conventional beauty but that of a village wench. She is amusing and her high and mighty airs when she first rejects (pretends to reject) Nicholas' advances contributes to the humor of the story. Her quick reciprocation of his love is also funny. Absolon's portrait is also drawn with an eye for individual detail. He comes across as a character who is foppish in his attire but at the same time he is effeminate in his character and considers himself as the ultimate Don Juan.

The Reeve's Tale: Prologue

When everybody had finished laughing at Alison and Nicholas's grotesque affair, the Reeve named Osewold grumbled about the Tale's unfairness to carpenters. The Reeve had been a carpenter in his youth and thus he did not like the Miller's Tale. The Reeve counters that he too could tell a bawdy tale about how a swaggering Miller lost his eye. But he has grown old and is now past the age for play. He can now only boast, lie, be jealous or angry. The Host cuts the Reeve's lecture on old age short and tells him to narrate his Tale without wasting any more time. The Reeve cautions the pilgrims that since he is going to repay the Miller, his Tale will also employ bawdy language.

Notes

The Reeve resents the Miller's offensive tale about the deception of a carpenter and takes it as a personal insult since he was a carpenter in his youth. The angry Reeve now repays the Miller by relating a tale about the gulling of a deceitful Miller named Simkin.

The Reeve's Tale

A Miller lived in Trumpington, near Cambridge. He was very proud of the fact that he could fish, wrestle and shoot. He carried several kinds of knives with him and was extremely skilled in their use. He was an irritating braggart. This Miller was in reality a thief. He was nicknamed Simkin. He never lost a chance to steal and even stole the corn or meal that came to him for grinding. His wife was of high parentage as she was the village parson's daughter. She had studied in a nunnery. The Miller had married her so as to elevate his social status. Chaucer hints that the Miller's wife was the Parson's illegitimate daughter and he thus had to give a large dowry for her marriage. The Miller and his wife had a beautiful twenty year old daughter and a six-month-old baby boy.

The Miller had the monopoly of grinding corn for the neighboring territory, especially for Solar Hall College at Cambridge. He used to charge a lot for his work. The master of this college suddenly fell sick and the Miller stole shamelessly from the corn and meal brought to him for grinding. While earlier he used to steal politely, now he openly plundered the warden who brought the corn for grinding.

John and Alan, two students of the college, begged the to grant them a leave to teach the Miller a lesson. They set off with a sack of corn to be ground and vowed to outwit the Miller. When they arrived they told the Miller that they would watch him while he ground the corn. The Miller at once realized that the students were trying to prevent him from stealing and decided to hoodwink them by stealing more than the usual amount to prove that a learned scholar is not the wisest man.

When he saw his chance he stealthily slipped out of the doorway and loosened the bridle of the students' horse. The at once ran away to join the wild horses in the fen. The Miller came back and ground the corn in front of the students and put it in a sack. John and Alan discovered that their horse had run away to the fen to join the wild horses. When the students hurriedly left to chase their horse the Miller stole half the flour from

the sack and told his wife to bake a cake from it. The students spent the whole day chasing the horse and only returned at night. They realized that the Miller had tricked them. They begged the Miller to provide them lodging for the night since they couldn't travel in the dark and offered to pay him money. The Miller replied that his house was small, but they had learned to dispute in college, they would find it easy with their deduction to make a space of 20 feet appear a mile wide. The students accepted the Miller's challenge and gave him money. The Miller sent his daughter to town to buy bread and ale. He put up a bed for the in his only bedroom. Thus the Miller and his wife slept in one bed, the slept in another, and the Miller's daughter slept alone in another bed. The baby boy slept in a cradle at the foot of the Miller's bed.

The Miller and his wife soon fell asleep and began snoring loudly. The couldn't get any sleep amidst this unwanted music. Alan and John complain bitterly to each other about how the Miller had cheated them. Alan says that they are entitled to get recompense. He then goes over to the 's bed and sleeps with her. John jealously grumbles about Alan's luck and stealthily moves the baby's cradle next to his bed. Shortly thereafter the wife gets up to answer nature's call and comes back to her bed. She gropes around for the and not finding it anywhere thinks that she has got into the wrong bed. She then goes over to John's bed and finding the slips in. John seizes the chance and has intercourse with the Miller's wife.

As dawn approached Alan bade farewell to the Miller's who told him to take the cake lying outside the door which had been baked out of the stolen flour before they left the mill. Alan then went to the Miller's bed thinking that his companion John was in it and boasted about how he has had the Miller's three times that night. The furious Miller gets up cursing. The Miller's wife thinks that she is in bed with the Miller and accidentally hits him on the head mistaking him for Alan. The students further beat the Miller and escape with their retrieved flour baked into a cake.

Notes

The Reeve's Tale is another bawdy story and puts the Miller's tale in a different perspective altogether. The contrast in the Reeve and Miller's character comes out starkly in their stories. The Miller is young, healthy, lively, frank and ebullient. The Reeve in contrast is old, thin, choleric and a shady character. Accordingly the Reeve builds on his plot in a more mean-spirited manner. The Miller's Tale is definitely more comic and boisterous than the Reeve's.

There has been a progressive deterioration of ideals and values in the first fragment. The Reeve's Tale is a far cry from the chivalrous world of The Knight's Tale. Petty motives propel both characters and the plot. Theft, mistrust, deception and maliciousness replace honor, truth, virtue and goodness. The Clerks want to deceive the Miller, who in turn dupes them by stealing the corn. At the end a rough kind of poetic justice is meted out as the Clerks enjoy a blissful night with the Miller's wife and daughter. In contrast to The Miller's Tale the Reeve's story involves a double deception. Moreover while the Knight's tale had an idealized lady as the object of love and devotion, and Alison was ravishingly beautiful in the Miller's tale, the Miller's wife and daughter do not appear to be sexually appealing. The Reeve's description of the wife and daughter makes it very clear that they are plain, thick - set countrywomen. Thus there has been steady erosion of the genteel mores and ideals of conduct.

The Cook's Prologue

The Cook has thoroughly enjoyed The Reeve's Tale and thinks that the Miller had justifiably received what he deserved. The Cook then offers to tell a funny story that actually happened in his city. The host jokingly adds that he must tell a good tale to compensate for all the stale pies that he has sold to the pilgrims. The Cook, named Roger, takes this joke in a good spirit and tells his tale.

The Cook's Tale

An apprentice Cook lived in London. He was a good looking man of a stocky build and had stylish long black hair. He danced so well that people named him Perkin Reveler (Peter Playboy). He would sing and dance at every wedding feast. He was fonder of the tavern than of minding the shop-counter. He spent most of his time in the company of his own sort of people and went with them for dancing, singing and gambling. His master came to know about his loose habits when he noticed money missing from the shop-counter. Although the master tolerated Perkin, one day he decided that one rotten can spoil the entire basket and dismissed Perkin. However Perkin was unaffected by his dismissal and was instead glad because he was now free to enjoy himself all night. He moved in with his friend whose wife kept a shop to mask her activities as a prostitute.

Notes

The Cook is a repulsive figure. His suppurating sore suggests filthy personal habits and the Host accuses him of serving stale food. The Cook's Tale is unfinished. It deals with an apprentice cook. It was probably intended as the last merry tale in the first fragment. Its plot is very similar to the earlier tales. The plot contains an eligible woman, the wife of the apprentice's friend who keeps a shop to mask her activities as a prostitute. Perhaps this is an indication that there are two rivals vying for the hand of this lady - her dissolute husband and Perkin Reveler. However since the plot does not develop the reader does not get the full picture. Perhaps the Cook's Tale was meant to be more raunchy than the Reeve's tale through which Chaucer intended to depict the London low life. The setting of the Cook's tale with its taverns and shops is a sharp contrast to the glamorous world of The Knight's Tale.

Introduction to the Sergeant at Law's Tale

The host realizes that one-fourth of the day had already passed away and urges the pilgrims not to waste any more time. He then asks the Sergeant at Law to tell a story and reminds him in a legal sounding language of his to do so. While the Sergeant at Law has no intention of dishonoring his commitment, he complains that Chaucer has already written all the good stories that can be told. He further announces that he will speak in prose and tell his story plainly.

The Sergeant at Law's Tale

Once upon a time a group of wise, sober and honest traders lived in Syria. They exported spices, gold, satins, etc far and wide. It so happened that the leading traders of this prosperous group made up their minds to go to Rome for business purposes. During their stay in Rome the Syrian traders came to know about the incredible beauty of Constance, the daughter of Roman Emperor Tiberius Constantinus. Constance was commended for her remarkable beauty, humility, strength of character, holiness, generosity and graciousness. After finishing their business these merchants sailed back home to .

They were on good terms with the Sultan and after every foreign trip they would inform him of the news of various countries and the wonders that they had either heard of or seen. The merchants, among other things, told the Sultan about Lady Constance. The Sultan was captivated by Lady Constance's description and resolved to make her his wife. The Sultan sent for his Privy Council and quite plainly told them that he would die if he could not win her over.

The Sultan's problem engendered a great debate on the issue. Nothing except marriage seemed feasible. But the councilors foresaw that no Christian ruler would be willing to let his heir marry a Muslim. The Sultan was so much in love with Constance that he dismissed this religious objection and declared that he would convert. Soon all his Syrian subjects also converted Christianity.

The Roman emperor made magnificent preparations for his daughter's wedding. When the day of departure finally arrived Constance was overcome with sorrow and wept at being sent away to a strange land and being distanced from her friends. An unhappy Constance tearfully set sail for Syria.

In the meanwhile the Sultan's mother, who was very angry at her son's renunciation of the teachings of the holy Koran for the sake of Constance, summoned some of her counselors and made them pledge that they would rather die than renounce their Muslim faith. She told them to make a pretense of accepting and to kill all the Christians at the end of the banquet that she would arrange to celebrate her son's wedding. The Sergeant at Law denounces the evil maliciousness of the Sultan's mother.

Part 2

The Sultan received Lady Constance and the accompanying her with great joy. A splendid crowd of the Syrian subjects had turned out for the occasion. After the wedding ceremony, the Sultan, Constance and all the Christians went to the banquet hosted by the Sultan's mother. Suddenly her conspirators entered and hacked all the Christians including the Sultan to pieces. Even the Syrian subjects who had converted to Christianity were not spared. Only Lady Constance was left alive. The widowed Constance was captured and set adrift in a well-provisioned sailing vessel. Her little boat tossed upon the stormy waves for more than three years and by divine grace finally landed in Northumberland.

The constable of the castle found the worn out Constance in the wrecked vessel and took her home to his wife. They took care of her and soon enough Constance's tirelessness won everybody's hearts. She and his wife, Hermengild, like the rest of the inhabitants of Northumberland, were heathens. Under Constance's influence secretly converted to Christianity. One day Constance miraculously cured a blind man and converted the heathen constable to Christianity.

However this peaceful state of affairs was too perfect to last long. Satan made a young Northumbrian knight fall in love with Constance who spurned him. One night the knight burning with the desire to take revenge murdered and put the blood stained knife in Constance's bed so as to implicate her. The grief stricken constable found the murder weapon in Constance's bed and produced her before Alla, the King of Northumberland. Nobody in court could believe that Constance could have perpetrated such a foul act. The knight however publicly testified that Constance had killed . At this moment a mysterious voice was heard which condemned the knight for falsely defaming a disciple of Christ. This marvel astonished those present in court and everybody including King Alla embraced Christianity. The knight was sentenced to death for his perjury and King Alla married Constance. However Donegild, the King's tyrannical mother, didn't approve of this marriage.

Constance gave birth to a beautiful son while the King had gone on an expedition to Scotland. The child was christened Maurice. The constable sent a message to Alla to inform him of the happy news but the King's evil mother interfered with the message and instead wrote a false letter saying that Constance had given birth to a horrible and fiendish creature. Although Alla was grief stricken he reconciled himself to his fate and accepted it as God's will. The King wrote a message instructing the constable to keep the child and Constance safely until his return. However once again intercepted the message and wrote a letter commanding the constable to set Constance and her child adrift in a boat within 3 days. Accordingly Constance along with her son had to once again endure hardships to prove the strength of her faith.

Part 3

When Alla returned from his Scottish expedition, he was consumed with grief at the loss of his wife and child. Upon questioning the constable and the messenger Alla soon discovered Donegild's evil hand in the

plot and killed his mother.

Constance had to sail for more than five years and endure many hardships before her ship touched land. In the meanwhile, the Roman emperor heard about the massacre of the Christians in Syria and the tragic fate that befell his daughter. He dispatched a senator with an army to Syria to exact revenge. The Roman soldiers killed the Syrians and then victoriously set sail for Rome. On the return voyage the senator came upon Constance's boat and brought her back to Rome. Constance had lost her memory and didn't recognize Rome as her homeland and lived with the senator and his wife.

Alla decided to go to Rome to do penance for the bad luck that had befallen his beloved Constance. The news of Alla's pilgrimage spread throughout Rome and the senator went to receive him. Alla invited the for dinner. Constance's son, Maurice, accompanied the senator to the banquet. Alla was struck by the child's resemblance to Constance. Alla then went to see Constance and explained his innocence and the role played by his evil mother in distorting the messages.

There followed a joyous reunion and Constance requested Alla to invite her father, the Roman Emperor, to dinner without revealing anything about her. Soon Constance was reunited with her father. Alla then returned with Constance to Northumberland and lived happily. But earthly joys are transient and Alla died after one year. The widowed Constance returned to Rome and lived with her father. Her son Maurice later became the Emperor of Rome.

Notes

The story of Constance is also told by John Gower in 'Confessio Amantis' (Lover's Confession) and is the basis of the verse romance 'Emare' but Chaucer's immediate source was the Anglo-Norman chronicle of 1355 by Nicholas Trivet. Chaucer compressed Trivet's story a great deal and has added philosophical musings to adapt it to the character of the learned Sergeant at Law.

The Sergeant at Law's Prologue is a close translation of Pope Innocent III's pamphlet titled "On Despising the World". The Prologue has little thematic connection with the tale that follows. This has led commentators to suggest that Chaucer perhaps intended the Prologue to function as the tale and only later added the tragic tale of Constance.

The Sergeant at Law declares in the Prologue that he will speak in prose but proceeds to deliver a story in verse form.

The plot of the Sergeant at Law's Tale revolves around the central character of Constance who is the epitome of perfection and goodness. She embodies the highest Christian virtues and ideals of conduct. She is exceptionally beautiful, patient, humble, generous, optimistic and retains faith in the goodness of God during all her ordeals. She is the daughter of the Roman Emperor. She is married twice to a pagan ruler, converts both her husbands to Christianity, is treacherously betrayed both the times by a vengeful mother-in-law, and is set adrift on the stormy seas both the times. The plot does seem fantastically incredible but Chaucer makes no attempt to explain Constance's good fortune. Chaucer simply accepts Constance's survival as a miracle of the merciful God.

The focus of the tale is upon the goodness and perfection of Constance. Every incident serves to highlight her fortitude and faith in God. The reader feels compassion for her miseries and is happy when she is finally reunited with her second husband, King Alla. The plot is cumbersome and superfluous. The essence of the tale lies in magnifying Constance's virtuous character.

The Epilogue of the Sergeant at Law's Tale

The host congratulates the Sergeant at Law for narrating such an excellent Tale and requests the Parson to tell another handsome Tale. But the Parson checks the host for swearing in the name of God. Fearing that they will now hear a sermon, the Sea captain declares that they need to hear a merry Tale, one devoid of philosophy and the jargon of law.

The Sea captain's Tale

A rich merchant of St. Denis had an extremely beautiful wife who was very fond of parties. The merchant kept an open house and entertained huge crowds daily. Among his guests was a handsome young Monk named Brother John.

The Monk had grown quite familiar with the Merchant. In order to avail himself of the Merchant's lavish hospitality, the Monk claimed to be his cousin or very closely related. The Merchant good-naturedly didn't deny this claim and swore kinship to the Monk. The Monk was always welcome in the Merchant's house and liked by everybody because he always got gifts and even tipped the lowest page.

One day the Merchant planned to go to Brussels to purchase merchandise. He dispatched a messenger to Paris to invite Brother John to spend a few days with him and his wife before he left on his planned tour to Brussels. The Monk gladly accepted and lost no time in coming to St. Denis.

After the third day of Brother John's visit the Merchant awoke early and went to his counting room to take stock of his financial affairs. The business of accounts kept the Merchant occupied until nine in the morning. The Monk had also risen early and was pacing in the garden when the merchant's wife quietly stole into the garden to talk to him. The merchant's wife asked the Monk the reason for his getting up so early in the morning. The Monk in turn replied that he only needed five hours sleep but that probably she should get more rest since the Merchant may have kept her awake all night. The merchant's wife protested that she never got the least pleasure from that game and that she was so miserable that she was thinking of running away or even killing herself.

The Monk asked her to unburden herself by telling him the cause of her grief so that he could give her advice. Both swore secrecy never to divulge what was said. The merchant's wife then apologized to the Monk for criticizing her husband since he is his cousin. The Monk immediately revealed that he wasn't her husband's cousin and had only used kinship to get better acquainted with her because he loved her passionately. The merchant's wife then revealed her sorrowful tale of marital neglect. She told the Monk of the Merchant's sexual abstinence, cowardice and extreme stinginess. She desperately begged the Monk to lend her a 100 francs by next Sunday to pay for some clothes that she had bought. In return she promises to render any favor / service that the Monk desired. The Monk agreed to lend her the money as soon as her husband left for Brussels. He then clasped the merchant's wife tightly and repeatedly kissed her.

The Merchant instructed his wife to take care of the house while he went away to Brussels and then sat down to dinner after saying a hurried mass. Soon after dinner the Monk requested the Merchant to lend him a 100 francs for a week since he had to buy some cattle to stock one of the farms upon his abbey. He also requested the Merchant to keep the matter of the loan a secret. The Merchant was only too glad to help and readily gave the money to the Monk. The Monk then left for his abbey.

The Merchant left for Flanders the next morning and reached Brussels and concluded his purchases. On the Sunday following the Merchant's departure the Monk arrived at his house. Apparently he had struck a deal to spend the night with the merchant's wife in exchange for his loan of a 100 francs. After a blissful night the

Monk left for his abbey without arousing the least suspicion.

Some days later the Merchant went to Paris to borrow some money in order to clear his debts. After finishing his business transactions he paid an affectionate social visit to Brother John and not to ask about repayment of the loan. The Monk nevertheless informs the Merchant that he had already repaid the money to his wife only a few days after he took the loan.

The Merchant merrily returned home after concluding a profitable financial deal. He gently chided her for not informing him that Brother John had repaid the loan in his absence. The wife was unfazed and boldly replied that she had spent the money on clothes and that she would amply repay him in bed. The Merchant realized that nothing was to be gained by scolding her and forgave her along with a mild warning not to spend what belonged to him.

Notes

The Sea captain's Tale suits his character. It is an immoral story narrated by a thoroughly immoral man. The readers learn from the 'General Prologue' that the Sea captain is dishonest and has no qualms about stealing the wine that he is transporting for a Merchant. He owns his own ship named 'Magdaleyne' and is from Dartmouth. He is a tough captain and ruthless in his dealings with pirates. His tale is a mean-spirited account of a trusting Merchant who is deceived and duped by a Monk. The baseness and unscrupulousness of the Sea captain's tale is appropriate to his character. What is even more disgusting is the fact that the Sea captain appears to derive an immense delight from this tale about adultery. He takes pleasure in the Monk's devilish antics and in the Merchant's wife's dissolute behavior. The Merchant's wife is only concerned about acquiring new clothes and has no qualms about selling her body and honor in return. She connives with the Monk and with his help robs the Merchant. The Merchant never comes to know that his wife has betrayed him. The Monk too never shows a moment's hesitation about violating his monastic vow of celibacy and frankly confesses that he had cultivated friendship with the Merchant in order to get close to his wife.

However despite the tale's apparent suitability to the Sea captain's depraved character, it is certain that the tale wasn't originally designed for him. The beginning lines of the tale (lines 12 – 19) shows that the tale was designed for a female character, probably for the Wife of Bath where the Sea captain says that our husbands desire us to be wise and good in bed. Such a view accords well with the Wife of Bath's character. But the tale suits the Sea captain's character extremely well.

The Prioress' Tale: Prologue

The host politely requests the Prioress to tell a story who gladly agrees to do so. She begins by praising the marvels of God and declares that her story will be about Virgin Mary. The Prioress praises the Virgin as the source of goodness and the balm of souls. She glorifies the Virgin's divine power, humility, magnificence, goodness and benignity.

The Prioress' Tale

In a great Christian city in Asia the ruler kept the Jews in one quarter of the city for the purposes of usury. The Christians hated the Jews. A small Christian school for young Christian children stood down the lane of the Jewish quarter.

The school included a 7 year-old boy. He had been taught to always honor the Virgin Mary and to go down on his knees whenever he saw the Virgin's image. One day while he was reading his primer, the little boy heard the older children singing "Alma redemptoris" (O Alma redemptoris mater – loving mother of our Redeemer). He drew as near to the older children as he dared and had soon memorized the opening verse. He

had no idea about what the Latin meant and one day begged an older friend to explain the meaning. The older boy merely replied that the anthem praised the Virgin and pleaded her to help them when they died. When the young boy learned that the anthem was in praise of the Virgin he resolved to learn the entire words before Christmas so that he could honor the Virgin. He secretly learned the whole anthem with the help of his friend and began to sing it perfectly. He sang the song confidently on his way through the Jewish quarter to and from the school. The serpent Satan poisoned the hearts of the Jews and made them think that the boy sang the anthem to scoff at their religion. The Jews conspired to kill the innocent young boy. They hired a killer who stalked the boy in an alley, slit his throat and threw his body into a drain.

The child's mother who was a widow waited anxiously all night for him to return home. The next morning she went in search of her son and learned that he had been last seen in the Jewish quarter. She looked everywhere for her child and even entreated the Jews to tell her if they had seen him. But the Jews claimed to know nothing about the child. At this moment Jesus in his divine grace directed the widow to the drain in which her son's body had been thrown. The murdered boy had been granted the power of speech by the Virgin and sang loudly. A huge crowd of Christians gathered to witness the miracle. The city's magistrate was sent for and upon seeing the miracle he commanded the Jews to be bound up.

The child who was still singing was pitifully carried into a neighboring abbey. His mother fainted near his bier and could not be parted from her dead child. He ordered every Jew who knew about the murder to be put to death by torture. He ordered that they should be torn apart by wild horses and later hanged.

The child continued to sing during the mass. The abbot sprinkled holy water over him and questioned the boy about his ability to sing when his throat had been slit. The child answered that Jesus had *(willed him to sing until his death) and when his death neared the Virgin commanded him to sing the anthem even in death and laid a pearl upon his tongue. The Virgin had assured him that she would take him away to heaven after the removal of the pearl. The saintly abbot then took away the pearl and the child died peacefully. The whole congregation fell prostrate to the ground in praise of the Virgin. A shining tomb of marble was erected in honor of the young boy.

Notes

There has been a radical change in the mood after the Sea captain's tale. The Prioress's invocation to the Blessed Virgin establishes a mood of devout exaltation. The Prioress' Prologue to her Tale is aptly suited to her character as a nun. She religiously praises the goodness of the Virgin Mary. This also acts as a connecting link with her tale that describes a miracle of the Virgin.

The Prioress thinks that she is telling a moral tale and appears to be totally unconscious of the immorality embodied in it. She is absolutely certain that she is telling a moral and idealistic tale full of the virtues of innocence and purity while unaware that her tale concerns the barbaric persecution of the Jews.

Anti-Semitism (hatred of Jews) was a widespread feeling in the Middle Ages. Jews had been officially banned from England since 1290. Hatred of Jews took the form of religious fervor and was fuelled by such stories. The first story of this type can be traced to the fifth century to Socrates. The first English story that was written was in 1144 when Jews murdered St. William. However the Church had taken an official stand against such inhuman discrimination and seen the baser economic motive underlying it. Chaucer was widely traveled and more broad-minded than the rest of his countrymen. In *The Prioress's Tale* Chaucer questions her moral blindness and exhibits sympathy for the Jews.

However Chaucer's intention is not to denunciate the Prioress. He only wished to remind the Englishmen of their inhuman treatment of the Jews. The Prioress has no idea whatsoever that she is telling a tale of

questionable ethics and moral blindness. She is a simple – minded woman who cannot understand why the massacre of the Jews is unethical.

While Chaucer exhibits concern for Jews, he does not water down their wickedness in the story. He emphasizes more on the human rather than the supernatural aspect. His main focus is on the young child's devotion to the Virgin.

Sir Topas: Prologue

The Prioress' Tale had put every member of the group in a grim mood and they rode silently for a while. Then the host attempted to lighten the mood and taunted Chaucer for staring at the ground as if he had lost sixpence and found a penny. He then asks Chaucer to tell them a comic tale without wasting any time. Chaucer replies that he only knows one tale that is in rhyme and proceeds to narrate it.

Tale of Sir Topas

Chaucer tells the tale of a Knight named Sir Topas who lived in Flanders. His father was a dignified and wealthy nobleman. Sir Topas was a handsome man. His face was as white as the whitest dough and he had rose red lips. He wore Spanish shoes and the finest silken gown that money could buy. He was good at hunting, wrestling and archery. Many young maidens pined for his love and spent sleepless nights in vain because Sir Topas never harbored unchaste thoughts.

One day Sir Topas rode on his horse through a forest filled with many wild beasts and suddenly the sweet smell of herbs and the melodious songs of birds awakened in him an intense longing for love & he madly galloped away. After his exhausting ride the Knight rested near a watering hole and fell asleep. He dreamt that an Elf Queen had slept beneath his cloak. When he awoke he resolved to track down the Elf Queen and to make her his mate.

He thus galloped across long distances till he found the country of Fairyland in a secret spot. Here he encountered a burly eight-headed giant named Sir Elephant who threatened to kill the Knight unless he left the dwelling place of the Elf Queen. The Knight sportingly accepted the challenge and fixed an assignation for the next day when he would come dressed in his armor. He then left to prepare for the battle. Upon reaching home the Knight held a great feast for his merry men in celebration of the battle with the giant.

The Knight put on his armor and wore his fine weapons and had a fine feast. Chaucer describes this activity in some detail. Sir Topas then leaves the court and proceeds to the woods.

The Prologue to the Tale of Melibeus

Here the Host Interrupts Chaucer's Tale of Sir Topas

The host interrupts Chaucer and commands him to stop his "arrant drivell" and his doggerel rhyming. He tells Chaucer that he is merely wasting their time with his silly rhymes and asks him to tell a tale in prose and one that is amusing. Chaucer agrees to tell a little thing in prose. He asserts that this tale is an edifying moral story and that he has included oft-quoted proverbs to strengthen its effect. He entreats the pilgrims to let him complete narrating his entertaining tale.

Notes

This is the first tale told by Chaucer. The Host interrupts it after 246 lines because of its illiterate rhyming. It is a composition of traditional verse romance in six line stanzas divided into feet of uneven length.

The protagonist of the tale Sir Topas is a parody of the romantic aspects of Knighthood. It is clear that his attainments, attire, and weapons are not worthy of a stately dignified Knight. To top it all, his quest is for a mysterious elf queen. This parody makes the traditional verse romance seem absurd and vitiated. Even the Host realizes its absurdity and begs Chaucer to stop his arrant driveling. Chaucer ironically protests that these are his best rhymes. However it is clear that the stanzas are mocking traditional cliches and Chaucer's aim was to ridicule the innumerable tales extolling a Knight's quest for a beautiful and virtuous maiden. Chaucer mocks the genteel traits of Knighthood and exposes the escapism involved in such mindless entertainment.

Chaucer's Tale of Melibee

The main subject of this story is whether one should avenge violence with more violence. A rich young man named Melibee and his wife named Dame Prudence had a daughter called Sophie. It so happened that when Melibee was away from home, three of his enemies entered his house and beat up his wife and grievously injured his daughter. When Melibee returned home his wife told him to abandon all thoughts of revenge. She advised him to consult his friends and relatives and then decide on the course of action. Melibee followed his wife's advice and a great argument was engendered. While some favored revenge, others advised Melibee to act with caution. Dame Prudence herself advised Melibee to have patience and not to act in haste. However Melibee refused to court danger by following female advice. He also did not wish to appear effeminate and a weakling because if he acted on her advice it would seem that he had given up his authority to her. At this Dame Prudence undertook a great defense of the excellence of advice given by women and quoted numerous authorities in her support. Finally Melibee surrendered and agreed to follow her advice. Dame Prudence persuaded Melibee to be reconciled with his enemies.

Ultimately when his enemies were brought before him, Melibee wished to impose a fine upon them. However Dame Prudence dismissed this idea. Finally Melibee forgave his enemies completely after rebuking them. The reader does not learn anything about Melibee's daughter Sophia.

Notes

The Tale of Melibee is a prose allegory. It is a close translation of 'Le Livre de Melibe et de Dame Prudence' ascribed to Renaud de Louens, which is itself based on Albertinus of Brescia's 'Liber Consolationis et Consilii'. The allegorical meaning of the tale is quite absurd. The name of the central character, Melibee, means a man who drinks honey, i.e. the honey of riches and worldly honor and glory. Thus Melibee is drunk with worldly glory and has forgotten God. His enemies ---the world, the flesh, and the devil --- attack him and his wisdom (daughter Sophie) is injured. Since the reader does not learn anything about Sophie's condition this symbolizes Melibee's fall. However at the end the enemies are presented as real enemies and Dame Prudence mediates on their behalf. She advises Melibee to exercise restraint. Melibee must necessarily become reconciled with his enemies. However the reconciliation implies resignation and trust in God's mercy and grace. These two planes of meaning are inconsistent with each other and hence absurd.

The Monk's Tale: Prologue

The Host enjoyed Chaucer's tale of Melibee and expresses the wish that his wife had Dame Prudence's patience. It seems that the Host's wife is always driving him to pick up needless fights in order to defend the imagined slight to her honor. He moans that one day his wife will surely provoke him into killing somebody.

The Host then changes the subject and expecting to hear a merry tale asks the Monk to tell a story in keeping with his character, perhaps about hunting. Instead the Monk relates a series of tragedies. He begs to be excused if his tales aren't in the chronological order since he will relate them just as they happen to come to his mind. He told the others that some of his tales maybe familiar to them.

The Monk's Tale

The Monk begins by narrating the story of Lucifer, the brightest angel, who fell from his high station to become Satan. He then recounts the unfortunate fall of Adam by his act of disobedience.

The Monk proceeds to tell the story of the mighty Samson who could tear a huge lion to pieces with his bare hands. His feats of extraordinary strength astonished everybody and he became the ruler of Israel. It was evident that was the chosen one but he came to a tragic end when he married his beloved Delilah and revealed that the source of his superhuman strength was in his hair. The treacherous exposed this secret to Samson's enemies who shaved away his hair, took out his eyes, and imprisoned him in a cave forcing him to grind at a mill. had to endure humiliation and jeers at the hands of his enemies. One day his prepared a feast in a temple and commanded to display some feats. However strength had been restored and he pulled down the stone pillars supporting the temple killing himself along with all his . Three thousand people were killed that day. The Monk then moralizes that tragedy serves to warn all husbands not to confide life-endangering secrets to their wives.

The Monk then recites the tragic story of Hercules, the paragon of strength. Hercules conquered all the kingdoms and countries because nobody could oppose his strength. He slew numberless monsters and beasts. However Hercules fell in love with the ravishing Dejanira who sent him a fine shirt to wear. But the shirt had been steeped in poison and Hercules had barely worn it for half a day when his flesh was stripped off from the bone. Hercules preferred to throw himself on burning hot coals rather than die by poison. The Monk draws the moral that men should always beware of Fortune who loves to overthrow her victims in a manner that they least expect.

The Monk next relates the story of King Nebuchadnezzar who grew too proud and ordered all his subjects to pay reverence to a gold statue of himself or risk being thrown in a furnace. This arrogant king was transformed into an animal by God and remained in this state for many years. When God at last restored reason to him, he thanked God and never dared to commit a sinful act again. The monk also relates the tale of Balthasar who was extremely proud and dishonored God. Ultimately he was killed and his kingdom was divided among the Persians and the Medes. The Monk moralizes that power and authority do not insure one against fate.

The Monk continues with the story of the beautiful Zenobia, the Queen of Palmyria, whose strength and expertise in war was unsurpassed. She wasn't afraid to roam the woods in search of wild beasts and could easily wrestle and subdue any man. She was married to Idenathus and bore him two sons. Together, the conquered a vast territory in the East as well as many cities of the Roman Empire. Idenathus eventually died but Zenobia continued her conquests and nobody dared to oppose her. Her sons were treated like kings. But Fortune decided to reverse Zenobia's good luck. When Aurelius became the Roman emperor, he decided to subdue Zenobia and took her captive along with her sons. He took them through a victory procession in Rome where the mobs gaped at her humiliation.

The Monk then warns everybody to beware of treachery and narrates a few stories in support. The noble King Pedro of Spain was treacherously betrayed and killed by his own brother. His own companions killed the great King Peter of Cyprus in bed. Bernardo of Lombardy was imprisoned and then killed by his own nephew and son-in-law. Ugolino, the Count of Pisa was imprisoned along with his three children on a false accusation by the bishop and left to starve to death. His youngest son died for lack of food. The Count bit his arm in grief at his child's death but the other children thought that he bit his arm out of hunger and offered him their flesh to eat. In a day or two even these two children died. Finally even the mighty Count starved to death. Thus Fortune hurls many people down from their high estate.

The Monk then relates the story of the vicious Nero who held a mighty empire under his sway. His every wish became a law. He burned down Rome just for the sake of fun, killed all the senators only to hear them weep and scream, killed his brother and slept with his own sister. He even killed his mother and slit open her womb to see the place of his conception. However power corrupted with cruelty does not last long. The people rebelled against him and he had to flee to escape their wrath. Nobody offered him shelter and even spurned his request to kill him. Finally he had to kill himself. Fortune thus overthrew Nero's overweening pride.

Holofernes was made arrogant by his success and forced people to renounce their faith and worship Nebuchadnezzar as God. But one night when Holofernes lay drunk in his tent, a woman named Judith beheaded him.

The Monk next tells the story of the mighty king Antiochus who actually believed that he could reach the stars and even hold in check the ocean tides. He hated the Jews and planned to wreck havoc upon Jerusalem but God thwarted his plans by inflicting him with a painful and incurable wound that ate its way into his guts. When he persisted in his plan, God made him fall out of his chariot. As a result his limbs and skin were lacerated and he became a cripple. Finally his body began to rot and stink so horribly that nobody came near him. He died alone on a hill.

The story of Alexander is well known. He conquered the whole world but was poisoned by his own people.

Julius Caesar rose from humble origins to become the mighty emperor of Rome. He was blessed with fortune for a long time. But then came the moment when Brutus and Cassius grew envious of his success and plotted his assassination. They stabbed him to death in the Capitol. But Caesar retained his dignity even in death by covering his thigh with his cloak. Fortune who was Caesar's friend suddenly became his foe.

Croesus, the king of Lydia, was taken captive and sentenced to be burnt to death. But a sudden heavy downpour put out the fire and let him escape. He became convinced that he could not be killed by anybody and once again started waging wars. One night he had a strange dream, which his daughter interpreted as a warning that he would be hanged to death. And the proud king indeed met his death by hanging.

Here the Knight interrupts the Monk because he can no longer bear the dismal stories.

Notes

The Monk relates a sequence of dismal tragedies and is interrupted by the Knight after 775 lines because he cannot bear to hear any other woeful story. Scholars have attributed the sources of the Biblical, Classical and contemporary figures to Boccaccio's 'De Casibus Virorum et Feminarum Illustrium', 'De Mulieribus Claris', Le Roman de la Rose, the Bible, Boethius and Dante.

The Monk's choice of his tale has been the subject of many a critical debate. It is believed that like Boccaccio, Chaucer aspired to write a book of tragedies. He thus wrote a series of stories but didn't get around to completing it and used it in 'The Canterbury Tales' instead. However a more logical explanation exists. In the 'General Prologue' the Monk was described as an 'outrider' with extravagant tastes. The Monk's choice of tale was probably made in reaction to the Host's taunts and the Sea captain's story about a lecherous Monk. The Monk now seizes the chance to repay these insults by telling a learned story. The Monk tells the tragedies in random order. This impulsiveness imparts spontaneity to his tale.

The Monk's stories have obvious morals: Fortune overthrows the powerful. Samson, Hercules, and Holofernes come to their miserable and tragic ends because of women. Lucifer fell because of sin, Adam fell because of disobedience, Balthazar's story shows that there is no security in power and friends desert one in

times of misfortune. Antiochus' tragedy is the result of pride and Alexander's overweening ambition proved to be his own undoing.

The Nun's Priest's Tale: Prologue

The Knight stops the Monk from continuing since he can no longer bear the dismal tales of woe and sorrow. He says that it is more gratifying to hear a tale about the rise in fortune of a poor man. The Host heartily agrees with the Knight's interruption and asks the Monk to tell something else. He adds that the Monk's Tale was so boring that he would have long ago fallen asleep were it not for the jingling of his bridle bells. He asks the Monk to tell a story about hunting instead. But the Monk is in no mood to indulge in frivolities and says that somebody else should tell a story. The Host then asks the Nun's Priest to tell a pleasant tale.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

Once upon a time there lived an old widow along with her two daughters in a small cottage near a meadow. The widow led a very simple life since her income was frugal. Her meadow was enclosed with a wooden fence. Here the widow kept a magnificent cock named Chauncleer. In the entire land Chauncleer was unsurpassed in crowing. His voice was mellower than the mellowest organ. He had an instinctive knowledge of equinoctial cycles and revolutions of the planet. He thus "told the hour better than any clock in abbey-tower". His comb was redder than the choicest coral and crenellated like a castle wall. He had a glossy black beak and a body of burnished gold. Moreover Chauncleer was also blessed with the power of speech. This cock had seven hens at his disposal. The hen with the brightest feathered throat was the lovely and gracious Lady Pertelote. Her social poise and gentility had captivated Chauncleer's heart.

Early one morning when Chauncleer was sitting with his wives on the perch with the lovely Pertelote sitting next to him, he began to lurch and groan like a man who was badly troubled with a dream. When Pertelote asked him the reasons for his groans, Chauncleer recounted a ghastly dream he had in which a beast was about to seize him and then kill him. The description of the yellow-red beast with black tipped ears, narrow snout and glowing eyes fits the appearance of a fox.

Pertelote rebuked Chauncleer for his cowardice in being afraid of dreams and declared that he had quite lost her love by showing fear. She firmly asserts that dreams are the result of overeating, flatulence and imbalance of bodily humors. She is certain that an excess of red bile or choler caused Chauncleer's dream. She quotes Cato in support who stated that dreams are meaningless. She urges Chauncleer to take some laxative to purge himself of choler and prescribes him a diet of worms as a digestive.

Chauncleer thanks Pertelote for her advice but maintains that dreams aren't meaningless but rather they foreshadow the joys and tribulations that one undergoes in life. He then proceeds to quote a string of ancient authorities in support of his argument. He recites Cicero's story of two friends on a pilgrimage who couldn't find any lodging in a busy town. They are thus forced to part company. While one found room in an inn, the other had to sleep in a farmyard barn. At night in the first pilgrim's dream his friend appeared and said that he was sleeping in an ox's stall and would be murdered at night unless he came to his aid. The pilgrim ignored the dream and went back to sleep. However he had the same dream twice and at the 3rd time his friend appeared and said that he had been murdered for his gold and his body had been tossed in a dung laden cart at the town's western gate. The next day the pilgrim awoke early and went to the barn in search of his friend. The innkeeper informed the pilgrim that his friend had already left early at dawn. However when the pilgrim saw an ox-stall he became suspicious and went to the west gate and found his friend's body in a dung cart.

Chauncleer then expiates on the certainty of punishment overtaking the murderer. He gets so engrossed by

his rhetoric that he digresses from his argument. He then tells another story about 2 men who were to set sail the next day for some distant country. As luck would have it one of the men dreamt at night that they would drown if they set sail the next day. When the man told his friend about his dream, he laughed it off and dismissed the dream as a delusion. The friend set sail according to the plan and after some distance his ship capsized and he was drowned.

Chauncleer tells Pertelote that it is thus foolish to disregard the warnings posed by dreams. He proceeds to quote some more authorities in support. He cites the example of St. Kenelm who foresaw his own murder in a dream. He cites Macrobius' commentary on Scipio's dream to confirm that dreams are indeed forewarnings of future events. He also reminds Pertelote about the dreams of Joseph and Daniel of the Old Testament, Croesus, King of Lydia, and Andromache. He winds up his argument with a flourish and concludes that he doesn't require any laxatives.

Sensing that he has probably been too rude to Pertelote, Chauncleer changes the subject and praises her remarkable beauty. He then quotes a Latin phrase, "In principio / Mulier est hominis confusio" that is, "Woman is man's whole joy and happiness". He says that his love for her makes him defy all dreams. He then gallantly struts about the barnyard amidst the adulation of his seven wives.

In the meanwhile a sly black fox named Daun Russel had crept into the yard and was hiding among the cabbage leaves waiting for the opportune moment to attack Chauncleer. In mock-heroic tone the Nun's Priest compares Daun Russel the fox to such traitors as Iscariot, Ganelon and Sinon. The Nun's Priest bewails that Chauncleer ignored the warning in his dream and jumped down from his perch. He then digresses into a lengthy discussion about predestination and free will.

The Nun's Priest resumes his story of a cock and describes how the fox caught Chauncleer. Chauncleer was delightedly watching a butterfly as it glided over the cabbage patch when he suddenly noticed the fox who was hiding there. His natural instinct bade him to flee from his arch enemy but the fox restrains him by praising his excellent voice. The fox asserts that he is Chauncleer's friend and had only come to hear him sing. He cunningly tells Chauncleer that he wants to see if Chauncleer can surpass the melodious voice of his father's voice.

Chauncleer was overcome with the fox's flattery and closing his eyes burst into a song. At that very moment the fox leapt up and grabbed Chauncleer by the neck and ran into the woods. Chauncleer's wives unleashed a torrent of outcry and lamentation at this tragedy. Pertelote shrieked the loudest of all. The screeching of the hens awoke the widow and her daughters who saw the fox carrying away Chauncleer. Immediately their cries for help gathered a number of men and women who chased the fox. Even the farm animals joined in the chase. This created a hideous racket and it seemed as if the very skies were falling down.

However there was a reversal of fortune. Chauncleer goaded the fox into hurling curses at the crowd chasing him. The foolish fox was enchanted by this suggestion and when he opened his mouth Chauncleer broke free and flew to a high perch on a tree. The fox realizes that God sends ill luck to those who talk when they should keep quiet; while Chauncleer realizes that fortune doesn't favor those who shut their eyes when they are required to look. Thus the Nun's Priest ends his tale with a moral.

Notes

The Nun's Priest's Tale is a wonderfully crafted short story and beast fable that provides an excellent example of Chaucer's vast learning and scholarship. The tale abounds with an impressive number of diverse scholastic references ranging from the Bible to Greek philosophy and from medieval medicine to theology.

Like Shakespeare, Chaucer felt no hesitancy in borrowing material for his stories from earlier writers. In 'The Legend of Good Women' he tells the reader that he owned sixty books, which was an impressive library in the context of the fourteenth century. The Nun's Priest's story of the cock and the fox is based on an Aesopian fable. Chaucer probably adapted the French 'Roman de Renard' by Marie de France and the German 'Reinhart Fuchs' for his beast fable. However Chaucer has made the tale more real and interesting. He also adds the characters of the widow and her daughters and places his story in their humble farmyard.

The Nun's Priest's Tale also speaks volumes for Chaucer's skill as a craftsman and short story writer. Chaucer's choice of the Nun's Priest for telling the tale is a brilliant stroke of luck. The tale is perfectly suited to its teller. The Nun's Priest is a religious man and is expected to be a man of vast learning and knowledge. His story is thus replete of learned allusions. The fable also has all the traditional ingredients of an exemplum that the Nun's Priest could preach. The reader can easily associate the Nun's Priest with the moral of his fable. The tale focuses attention upon the Nun's Priest himself and may be seen as a comment on his own position. Like Chauncleer, the Nun's Priest too is ruled by women and evidently does not like it.

The Nun's Priest's Tale is a mock epic and is absolutely hilarious because of the ridiculous disparity between the manner of writing and the subject matter. An epic is usually a long, narrative poem on a serious subject, narrated in a formal and elevated style. It is centered on a quasi-divine figure on whose actions depends the fate of an entire nation. The Nun's Priest's Tale also has as its central character, a cock named Chauncleer on whom nothing but his own life depends. Nonetheless it's a long narrative poem and adopts various conventional features of the heroic poem. The setting of an epic is ample in scale. However Chauncleer is owned by a widow and has a barnyard as his hall. The action of an epic involves superhuman deeds in battle such as Achilles' feats in the Trojan War. However Chauncleer's plight is his being stalked and carried away by a fox, to be eaten as a meal. His journey takes him from the yard to the edge of a wood. Chauncleer escapes by a reversal of Fortune. The fox had tricked Chauncleer through flattery and he in turn tricks the fox. At the end of the tale both have learned survival strategies.

The Nun's Priest's Tale also discusses two favorite themes of Chaucer – dreams and predestination – with weighty classical, philosophical and medical allusions. Chaucer held that dreams were visions of the future and thus had metaphysical importance. This view established that God in some way already determined the future. However Pertelote explains Chauncleer's dream medically and does not see it as a prophecy of the things to come. She even prescribes some laxatives and digestives to the ailing cock. Chauncleer insists that his dream is prophetic and supports his argument with references to Cato, St. Kenelm, Daniel and Joseph from the Old Testament, Andromache and Hector.

Although the Nun's Priest's Tale is a conventional beast fable, Chaucer overcomes the restrictions of the genre by endowing his animals with human qualities. When the cock vainly swaggers in the farmyard before his adoring wives, the reader automatically associates him with a courtly lover. The lovely lady Pertelote's mockery of her husband's queer ideas about the prophetic importance of dreams aptly reflects wifely behavior. But at the same time the reader is not allowed to forget that this is a story of a cock and fox. Although the author highlights the human aspects of these animals, they are nevertheless creatures of the barnyard. The fact that they speak in such a learned and noble way is an indirect comment on how absurd human aspirations can be.

Chaucer also deals with problem of women's position in society. Traditionally women were seen as the source of evil and Eve was denounced for causing the fall of mankind. The Nun's Priest obviously holds this view but dismisses it as a joke.

The Wife of Bath's Tale: Prologue

In the Prologue the Wife of Bath gives an account of her colorful marital life. Her experiences give her substantial authority to speak on marital troubles. She has been married five times. She cannot understand Christ's rejection of the woman at the well for having married five times. Instead she prefers God's command in the Bible "to increase and multiply" and that a husband must leave his family and live with his wife. She also notes that the Bible does not state an exact figure for the number of times one might marry. She further augments her argument by citing the example of King Solomon, Abraham and Jacob among other holy men who had more than one wife. Further she points out that St. Paul had said that it is better to marry than to burn with desire. She demands to know where is it written that God had ordained virginity. While St. Paul advises against marriage, his advice isn't a command. The decision has been left to the individual's own judgement. She agrees that virginity is a great excellence but it is meant for those who want to lead perfect lives and she is not perfect. She argues that God created the organs of generation for both function and pleasure. And she intends to make full use of her organs. She will never be difficult or demurely refuse to have sex when her husband wants to. The Pardoner who says that he was planning to get married but has now dropped the idea after hearing her on the subject interrupts the Wife of Bath. The Wife of Bath tells him to decide only after he has heard her tale about the joys of marriage. The Pardoner urges her to continue and to teach her technique to all the young fellows.

The Wife of Bath then relates her marital experiences. Her 1st three husbands were good, very rich and old and she enjoyed absolute power over them. She advises young inexperienced and naïve wives to constantly nag their husbands to keep the upper hand in marriage and provides a long list of examples. For instance, she rebuked her husband when he criticized her extravagant spending. She railed at another husband who curbed her liberty and kept a strict vigilance on her movements. She reprimanded the husband who felt that her character was endangered every time she smiled at another man when her only intention was to be polite and courteous. She nagged the husband who employed a spy to keep track of her doings and instead beat him at his own game by getting the apprentice and her niece to testify her marital faithfulness. Ultimately by force, fraud, strategy or unending grumbling she would always gain the upper hand. She never spared her husbands and paid them back for every word that they said. It was obvious that one of them had to knuckle under and man being a more rational creature than woman, it was always her husbands who surrendered.

She then reveals that her 4th husband was a libertine and kept a mistress. She was a passionate and headstrong young woman at the time and wished to enjoy life. It troubled her that her husband took delight in another woman and decided to make him stew in his own "greece". She pretended that he had been deceived and thus made him suffer with jealousy. However he died when she returned from her pilgrimage to Jerusalem.

The Wife of Bath recalls that her fifth husband whom she had married for love and not for money treated her the worst of all and beat her so hard that her bones ache even today. He was an Oxford scholar named Jankin and they had met through her best friend. She made him think that she had fallen in love with him. At her 4th husband's funeral she saw the scholar Jankin again and although she was twice his age she decided to marry him. By the month's end they got married and she relinquished all her property to him. But she was soon sorry for doing so because Jankin was very authoritarian and hit her so hard on the ear for simply tearing a page from his book that she became quite deaf. He would constantly lecture her about what was permissible behavior and read out stories from Roman history about the sad fate of disobedient wives. The Wife of Bath then reveals why she tore a page out of his book. One night Jankin started reading out tales about treacherous women from his book. He disparaged Eve as the cause of the ruin of mankind and went on to cite a steady list of traitresses of antiquity. He spoke at length about the modern day wives who killed their unsuspecting husbands in bed. When the Wife of Bath realized that Jankin intended to continue reading the infernal book

all night long, she tore three pages out of it and hit him so hard on the cheek that he fell back into the fire. He then jumped up and furiously hit her on the head. She pretended to swoon and fell to the ground and claimed that she was dying. She railed at him for having murdered her for her property. He was filled with remorse and promised to let her do as she pleased. She thus obtained complete mastery over him. She made him burn the wretched book and remained faithful to him. She announces she will now tell her tale.

Notes

The Wife of Bath's Prologue is more important than her tale for thematic considerations. It virtually amounts to a defense of her marrying more than once. Her Prologue is a confession of all the techniques through which she gained control and supremacy over her five husbands. She is a parody of the conventional oppressed wife. The Wife of Bath may be seen as one of the earliest feminist characters.

The Wife of Bath presents a strong case for the liberation of women. She refutes the stereotype that women ought to be meek and submissive and asserts that she would never refuse to have sex with her husband if he wished to do so. Her argument is that the sexual organs were made for both procreation as well as pleasure. She candidly acknowledges that virginity is superior but adds that it is only viable for those who wish to lead a perfect life. She slyly accepts that men are more reasonable than women are and thus are more patient and accept women's domination to avoid quarrel and disharmony.

The Wife of Bath logically argues in favor of marriage. In the Middle Ages virginity was highly prized and marriage was seen as an inferior state. The Wife of Bath uses Scripture to prove her point. She points out that the scriptures do not officially condemn marrying more than once and cites instances of great men who took more than one wife. She cannot understand Christ's rebuff to the woman at the well who had also married five times and rather prefers the biblical command to increase and multiply. She quotes St. Paul who said that it was better to marry than to burn. Virginity was only an ideal to be aimed at by the select few who wanted to become perfect Christians. Besides, she argues if everybody were to remain celibates then there would be no more virgins. Moreover after mankind's fall from Paradise one could not realistically expect to lead perfect lives.

The Wife of Bath is frank enough to confess that she married her first three husbands for their wealth and all of them died while trying to satiate her sexual appetite. She has had an eventful life. Her fourth husband was a ladies man and she reveals how she made him fry in his own stew. Her fifth husband was the most troublesome. This is strange since this time she married for love. He ill-treated her and hit her so hard that she became quite deaf. She reveals that her fifth husband used to read out anti-feminist tales from a book that tried her utmost patience. This is obviously the *Book of Wicked Wives*. When she couldn't bear it any longer she tore out a few pages and as a result received the heavy blow on her head that made her quite deaf in one ear. Ultimately however she attained dominance over her husband and she remained faithful to him forever.

The dispute between the Summoner and the Friar

After the Wife of Bath's Prologue had ended the Friar laughed and said that it was a very long preamble to a tale. The Summoner cut in and said that the Friar was a fine one to talk of perambulation since he himself is always falling into other people's affairs. The Friar got angry and vowed to tell a story exposing a Summoner. The Summoner retaliated by remarking that even he had a couple of stories about Friars. The Host ordered both of them to shut up and asks the Wife of Bath to tell her story.

Notes

The squabble between the Summoner and the Friar is an indication of their retaliatory tales that immediately follow the Wife of Bath's tale.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

In the magical days when England was ruled by King Arthur, a young Knight was riding home when he saw a beautiful young maiden walking all alone in the woods and raped her.

This outrageous act created a great stir and King Arthur was petitioned for justice. The Knight was condemned to death according to the law and would have been beheaded if the queen had not mediated on his behalf. After many pleas for mercy King Arthur finally told the queen to decide the Knight's fate. The queen then told the Knight to answer the question what women desire the most in order to save his life. She also gave him a time period of one year to find an answer and appear before her.

Seeing no other solution the Knight decided to go in search of the answer. He visited every house and every spot in the country but couldn't find any two people who agreed on the subject. Some women loved riches and wealth while others loved fine clothes. There were yet others who claimed that they best loved flattery and attentiveness. There were still others who took great delight at being considered as dependable and discreet. In short everybody held a different opinion.

The one-year granted to the Knight eventually drew to an end but he had still not found an answer. He rode back home with a heavy heart. On his way he happened to catch a glimpse of twenty-four ladies dancing but they miraculously disappeared when he reached the spot. There was nobody in sight except for an extremely ugly old woman. She asked the Knight, what he was looking for, as she might be able to help him since old women know plenty of things. The Knight explained his predicament. The old woman said that if he would pledge to do the first thing that she required of him then she would give him the correct answer before the night. The Knight promised to grant her a wish and they rode for the Court.

The Knight proclaimed that he had found the answer and told the entire court that women most desire to have mastery over their husbands and their lovers. None of the women assembled in the court could contradict the Knight and the queen spared his life. Thereupon the old woman sprang up and told the queen that she had taught the answer to the Knight in exchange for a wish. She now demands, that the Knight marry her and fulfill her wish. The Knight pleads with her to ask for something else but the old hag refuses to reconsider. Ultimately the Knight realizes that he has to marry her.

The Knight married her secretly in the morning. When he went to bed with her he kept tossing and turning while she lay beside him. She reprimanded the Knight and asked him whether this behavior was customary among Knights who marry. The Knight couldn't bear his misery any longer and replied that her hideousness, low birth and old age were the causes of his unease and distress. The old woman replied that she could rectify these things within three days provided he behaved courteously. She then proceeded to reprimand the Knight for his affectations. Gentility doesn't come with noble birth but with good acts and a virtuous way of life. Only noble deeds determine gentility. As regards poverty, Christ himself willingly chose a life of poverty. She says that poverty is a hated boon and a great enhancer of wisdom. She then tells him that old age should always be respected. As regarding her loathsome appearance she tells the Knight that now he need not fear about being deceived. Old age and ugliness are in fact the best guards for protecting chastity. She then asks him whether he would prefer her ugly and faithful or beautiful and faithless.

The Knight thinks for a moment and sighs that she may make the choice in their best interests. Delighted that she has gained "maistre" or sovereignty over him, she asks the Knight to kiss her. To the Knight's utter joy she becomes young and beautiful. They live in perfect joy and harmony and she remained faithful to him at all times.

Notes

The Wife of Bath's Tale continues the theme of sovereignty of women that she had dealt with in her Prologue. It also focuses on the issue of what constitutes a proper marital relationship. The tale is thus rich in meaning. The source of the tale can be traced to Jean de Meun's "Roman de la Rose".

The protagonist of the tale is a Knight who has raped an innocent country girl. As punishment for his heinous crime he has to find out the answer to the question: what women desire the most. The Knight roams the entire country in search of the answer in vain. Suddenly he meets an old hag who gives him the answer: women most enjoy dominating their husbands. The Knight wins his pardon by giving the right answer in court. The old hag claims her share since she has told the Knight the correct answer and forces him to marry her. The old hag then presents him with the choice of having her old, ugly and faithful or beautiful and disloyal. The Knight allows the hag to make the choice herself. She is delighted to have won 'maistrie' and rewards the Knight by being both beautiful and faithful all the time. The Wife of Bath's Tale is thus an appeal for the liberation of women. In the medieval age women were supposed to be subservient and expected to love, honor and obey their husbands. The Wife of Bath's assertion that women should have 'maistrie' in marriage amounts to an apostasy.

Chaucer has portrayed a real woman in the Wife of Bath. She is not free from faults. Chaucer satirizes the frailties of women through her character. While she is a sinner, she does not earn our reprimand. She has had numerous affairs in her youth. She has flirted with Jankin while still married to her fourth husband. At her fourth husband's funeral, she was less filled with grief and more occupied in taking notice of Jankin's fine legs and resolving to marry him despite the vast gap in their ages. She is guilty of adultery but frankly acknowledges it. Chaucer does not pass any judgements on her and even asks the reader to have sympathy for her. Whether Chaucer sympathizes with her opinion on marriage and celibacy is not clear. But one thing is apparent that he did not agree with the existing ideas of celibacy of his times.

The Wife of Bath's Tale is an exemplum, which is a story told to illustrate a strongly held opinion. It presses home the point that women most desire sovereignty in marriage.

The Tale may also be read as a wish-fulfillment fantasy in which an old crone gets transformed into a beautiful lady, acquires a handsome Knight for a husband and leads a happy life. It has all the ingredients of a fairy tale. Some critics suggest that the old hag wasn't literally transformed into a beauty but only acquired beauty of character.

The Friar's Tale: Prologue

During the Wife of Bath's Tale the Friar had kept on giving black looks at the Summoner and had only restrained himself from swearing for the sake of good manners. Now when the Wife of Bath's the ended the Friar told her that she had touched upon a difficult academic problem that should best be left to schools of learning and sermonizers since their purpose was entertainment. He then offers to tell a story about a Summoner. However the Host reprimands him from taking revenge of the Summoner and tells him to tell another tale. However the Summoner interposes and asks the Friar to say what ever he wishes since he too has a tale about a lying limiter (i.e. a Friar).

The Friar's Tale

There once lived a corrupt Summoner who worked for a very strict archdeacon. This Summoner had a secret network of private spies, that even included pimps and harlots, who acted as his informers. They would provide the Summoner with incriminating evidence against the parishioners thereby enabling him to fleece them. The poor parishioners would quite willingly fill the Summoner's purse to avoid being

excommunicated. The Summoner was extremely skilled at finding adulterers, concubines and whoremongers since his income depended on it.

One day the Summoner set out with the intention of delivering a false summons to a poor old widow on some trumped-up charges. On his way, he met a jolly Yeoman who carried the trademark bow and arrows and wore a short green coat and a black fringed hat. The Summoner pretended to be a bailiff and told the Yeoman that he had set out to collect rent. The Yeoman greeted the Summoner as a fellow brother since he was also a bailiff and the two of them became friends.

As they rode on together the Yeoman said that he lived far in the northern country. Their conversation soon turned to their occupations and the Summoner asked the Yeoman some way to make profits. He told the Yeoman not to hold back anything for the sake of conscience or fear of sin. However the Yeoman replied that his wages were very low as his master was very tight-fisted. By hook or by crook he barely managed to subsist. The Summoner said that his position was the same as the Yeoman's and proposed that they should enter into a fellowship. He then asked the Yeoman his name who revealed that he was actually a fiend and lived in hell.

The Summoner was surprised at this revelation since he had really taken him for a Yeoman since he had a human form. He asks the fiend about his ability to transform himself into any shape. The fiend explains that he can assume any form that he liked but the process was too complicated for the Summoner to understand. The Summoner decides to work with the Yeoman even after learning his true identity and both set off towards the village.

On their way just at the entrance of the village they saw a man whose cart laden with hay was hopelessly stuck in the mud. He whipped his horses but the cart refused to come unstuck. The man then started cursing his horses in frustration and hoped that the Devil would take his hay, cart and his three horses as well. The Summoner urged the fiend to take the horses and the cart of hay but the fiend replied that the man didn't sincerely mean it from his heart. Soon enough the horses pulled the cart free from the mud and their master blessed them. The Summoner and the fiend then rode on to the house of an old widow against whom the Summoner had fabricated false charges to extract some money. When they arrived at the widow's door the Summoner delivered her a summons to appear before the archdeacon to answer the charge against her. The widow replied that she would not be able to go since she was unwell and asked for a copy of the summons so that her lawyer could reply to the charges against her. The Summoner then told her to pay him twelve pence to ignore the matter. However the widow refused to do so. When the Summoner continued to threaten her the poor widow she wishes that he be damned, and carried away body and soul to hell. The fiend asks her whether she sincerely wishes that the Summoner be damned, she said that unless he repented then and there, she really wanted him to go to hell. The Summoner scoffed at the idea of repentance and the fiend was only too glad to fulfil the widow's curse and carried him off to Hell. The Friar ends his tale by wishing that hell is the heritage of Summoners and prays that they mend their ways before the devil gets them.

Notes

At the end of the Wife of Bath's Tale a quarrel erupted between the Friar and the Summoner. Both proceed to tell a tale against the other. Friars and Summoners were always competing against each other. The Friars held direct authority from the Pope while the Summoners came under the jurisdiction of the archdeacons and bishops. Since Friars were not under the dominion of bishops they were immune from Summoners. It is common knowledge that neither Friars nor Summoners were liked by the people and were condemned for their corrupt practices. The Friar harbors a professional hatred against the Summoner and thus attacks him through his tale.

The Friar skillfully attacks the Summoner and shows him in alliance with the devil himself. Further the Summoner comes off the worse when compared to the devil. The Friar shows that devils have a better code of honor and integrity. The devil/ fiend is perceptive enough to realize that the Summoner's curse against his horses isn't heartfelt. But he readily accepts the widow's sincere curse that the Summoner be damned. When the Summoner refuses to repent the devil promptly carries off the Summoner to hell. Thus the Friar satirizes the Summoner through his tale. The high point of ironic sarcasm is reached when the Summoner thinks that the Yeoman (devil) looks similar enough to be his brother in trade. Even after learning the Yeoman's true identity the Summoner continues his partnership with him. The author here makes an indirect comment on the Summoner's character and also on his character.

The Summoner's Tale: Prologue

When the Friar had finished telling his story the Summoner grew wild with anger and shook like an aspen leaf. He declared that he would now tell his tale to repay the Friar. It is hardly astonishing that the Friar is so familiar with hell since Friars are in league with fiends. The Summoner relates a story about a Friar who dreamt that he had been taken to hell by an angel. However he didn't see any Friars there and asked the angel whether Friars always go to heaven. The angel then showed him the torture chamber of more than a million Friars in Satan's arse. The Friar quaked in terror and awoke to his relief. The Summoner prayed for all the Friars except the damned Friar present among them.

The Summoner's Tale

There lived a limiter in Holderness, a marshy region in Yorkshire, who used to go around preaching to people and begging for alms. One day after preaching his regular sermon to donate money for the masses of the dead, the Friar exhorted to the parishioners that instead of squandering it elsewhere they should contribute money for the building of sacred edifices. After his fiery sermon the Friar went around the parish begging for alms and wrote down the names of the contributors who had paid, promising to pray on their behalf. His servant accompanied him on these rounds carrying a sack to hold whatever contributions the people made. However as soon as the Friar got out of the parishioner's door he would rub out every single name that he had written on the tablets earlier.

The Friar then came to the house of Thomas who had been bedridden due to illness. The sick man mildly criticized the Friar for not having called on him for almost a fortnight. The Friar falsely replied that he had been praying hard for Thomas' salvation during that time. He told him that he had preached about the virtue of Christian charity in the parish church and then inquired about his wife.

The man's wife soon came in and the Friar gallantly hugged her and kissed her sweetly while he praised her beauty. The Friar told her that he would like to preach to Thomas since it is his special skill. The man's wife asks the Friar to talk to her husband about his mercurial temperament and crabbiness. Before leaving the good wife asked the Friar what he would like to have for dinner. The Friar hypocritically replied that he just wanted a simple homely meal but suggested a menu fit for a feast. The wife added one short word before leaving. She told the Friar that her baby had died two weeks earlier. Thereupon the Friar quickly replied that he had seen a vision of the baby being carried up to heaven within half an hour of his death. The other Friars had also seen this vision. They had then sung Te Deum and had also fasted. The Friar then proceeded to deliver a long lecture about the benefits of fasting and abstinence from worldly delights. He illuminated his lecture with the examples of Moses who fasted for 40 days, Aaron who fasted before offering prayers, and Christ who prayed and fasted for forty days. Thus he said the prayers of Friars who fast and lead a life of poverty are more acceptable to God than those offered by ordinary people.

Turning to Thomas the Friar launched into a didactic discourse praising the virtues of leading a life of poverty. He told Thomas that the prayers of such holy, chaste and poor Friars swooped upwards into God's ears. He then told Thomas that their entire convent prayed for his health day and night. Therefore he should show his gratitude by donating some of his gold for the improvement of the convent. But Thomas was not impressed and bluntly replied that the prayers had not done him any good despite the fact that he had spent his entire money on all kinds of Friars.

The Friar immediately pointed out Thomas' fallacy of seeking out all kinds of Friars. He tells him that the reason why his prayers didn't have any noticeable effect was because he didn't give him enough. He had diluted the effectiveness of the Friar's prayers by giving a load of oats to one convent, twenty-four goats to another convent and a penny each to many Friars. Instead Thomas should have concentrated his donations to him alone in order to ensure efficacy. The Friar then proceeded to preach against anger. He tells him to be patient with his wife since innumerable men have lost their lives through quarrelling with their wives. An angry woman only desires vengeance. Moreover anger is one of the seven deadly sins and only spells destruction. He points out Seneca's account of how an angry magistrate unjustly ordered three innocent Knights to be executed. Cambysses who had a choleric temperament betted with a Knight that excessive drink did not affect judgement. Accordingly he drank heavily and killed the Knight's innocent boy. Similarly the Persian Cyrus drained the entire river of Gysen out of anger simply because his horse had drowned in it. And the wise Solomon had advised never to befriend an angry man. The Friar wound up his homily by telling Thomas to restrain his anger and instead make a confession. But Thomas replied that he had already confessed to the parish priest. The Friar then urged him to donate gold for building a monastery. This angered Thomas all the more. However he agreed to give something if the Friar promised to divide it equally among all the twelve members of his convent. The Friar readily agreed to do so. Thomas then told the Friar to reach down and feel beneath his buttocks for the gift. As soon as the Friar put his hand Thomas let out a thunderous fart. The Friar was enraged at being tricked and left vowing to take revenge.

The Friar then went to the house of the lord of the village. After having dinner he furiously relates how he had been tricked into accepting a fart that had to be divided among all the members of his chapter. The lord mulled over the impossibility of dividing the noise of the fart into twelve equal parts. He told the Friar to forget the mad fellow. However the Lord's Squire, Jankin, who was standing near the table heard the entire incident and explained that the fart could be divided equally by seating 12 Friars around a cartwheel, each with his nose at the end of a spoke, and making the old man let off the fart from the center. The lord and lady, in fact everybody except the Friar, agreed with Jankin's proposal and rewarded him with a new gown.

Notes

The Summoner's Tale is an attack on his worst enemy the Friar. The Friars were an immensely despised lot of the fourteenth century England. Friars were mendicants and were supposed to live a life of poverty. They had to be dependent on the charity of the people and were in return expected to preach and set examples by doing good works. However Friars became corrupt and extracted money from the poor people by deceiving them. The Summoner exposes the true colors of the Friars through his retaliatory tale.

The Summoner describes a deceitful Friar in his tale who does not stop at anything to extract money from the people. He exposes the hypocrisy of the Friar through ironic portraiture. The Friar is shown to be insincere, perfidious, gluttonous, greedy, dissolute, terribly hypocritical and dishonest. For instance, while the Friar holds forth on the virtues of leading a simple life, he suggests a lavish menu for dinner in the same breath. He preaches to Thomas against anger but is himself thunderously angry when the latter tricks him into accepting a fart. He obviously does not think much about the monastic vow of celibacy and kisses Thomas' wife passionately and praises her beauty. In brief, the Friar's conduct violates all his monastic vows of poverty, religiosity and celibacy. He is only concerned about augmenting his own welfare and does not care the least

about his patrons. He sweet - talks the people into giving donations but does feel obliged to pray for their souls. The Summoner has thus drawn the figure of an archetypal corrupt Friar in his tale. Chaucer has satirized the entire community of Friars through this tale.

It is evident that both the Friar and the Summoner hate each other passionately and wish each other to be damned. But while the Friar's tale was subtler in its sarcasm, the Summoner's tale is coarse and ends with a preposterously vulgar riddle about dividing a fart among the twelve members of the Friar's chapter. This points out the Summoner's grossness of character. However it is difficult to determine who is the worst among the two.

The Clerk's Tale: Prologue

After the Summoner had finished his retaliating story against Friars, the Host turned to the Clerk and said that he had not said a single word since they had left the inn. It seemed as if he was meditating on some profound philosophical proposition. The Host told the Clerk that there was an appropriate time and place for everything. He then told the Clerk to cheer up and tell them a jolly tale of adventure but at the same time keep his language simple. The Clerk agreed to obey the Host, and said that he would tell a tale that he learned at Padua, from the great Italian scholar and poet Petrarch.

The Clerk's Tale

Part 1

A young marquis named Walter once ruled Saluzzo in Western Italy. He was wise, handsome, strong, honorable, courteous, and highly esteemed by his subjects. His chief fault was that he concentrated solely on the present moment's pleasure and was determined that he would never marry.

One day a group of courtiers went to him to persuade him to marry to ensure a line of succession. They even offered to choose a wife for him. Their humble plea moved the marquis and he agreed to marry but said that he would choose his own wife. He also laid down the condition that they would always have to honor whatever wife he chose. He asked the courtiers to pledge that they would neither oppose nor disapprove of his choice. The courtiers heartily agreed but asked him to name a definite day for the wedding. The marquis ordered his officers to make preparations for the wedding day.

Part 2

There lived a poor man named Janiculia in a hamlet near the marquis' palace who had a beautiful and virtuous daughter named Griselda. The marquis had often seen her on his hunting trips and had appraised both her beauty as well as her goodness. He resolved to take her as his wife.

The appointed wedding day soon arrived but nobody knew who would be the bride. The wedding preparations had all been completed. The marquis then proceeded with the lords and ladies towards the hamlet to ask Janicula for his permission to marry his daughter. He then asked Griselda's consent but made her swear that she would always cheerfully submit to his will whether it pleased or pained her to do so. Further she would never complain, murmur or frown regarding his wishes. Griselda humbly accepted these conditions and the marquis married her.

She adapted herself perfectly to the life of a marchioness. Her innate goodness increased manifold. Her modesty, eloquence, kindness, and simplicity won everybody's hearts and her fame spread far and wide. People would travel to Saluzzo just to see her. She then gave birth the to a daughter and there was great

rejoicing in the land because the people knew that she was not barren and would eventually produce a male heir.

Part 3

While the child was still being suckled at its mother's breast the marquis decided to test Griselda's steadfastness. One night he reminded Griselda of how he had rescued her from poverty and told her that his courtiers resented servitude to a common village girl. He said that the time had arrived to test her patience. The Marquis then told her that one of his courtiers would soon come for her child. He then asked her whether the taking away of her child would effect her love for him. Griselda replied that both her own and her daughter's lives were at his disposal and nothing would ever change her love for him. The marquis was happy with the answer but went away with a grim countenance. He then ordered a bodyguard to take away Griselda's daughter.

The bodyguard arrived and seized the child cruelly away from Griselda and made it appear as if he was going to slaughter her. But Griselda didn't betray any emotions and complied to her husband's will.

The bodyguard returned to the marquis and related the entire incident and described Griselda's behavior. The marquis then ordered him to take the child to his sister at Bologna. In the meanwhile Griselda's love for her husband did not abate.

Part 4

Four years passed away and Griselda gave birth to a male heir. When her son was barely two years old, the marquis once again decided to test Griselda's patience. He told her that her son would also be slain. Griselda patiently complied to her husband's will. The bodyguard again arrived and made Griselda believe that her son would be slain but in stead conveyed the prince to Bologna.

The marquis marveled at his wife's patience and unchanged love. However he was still not convinced. When his daughter grew 12 years old, he had a Papal dispensation forged, granting him permission to remarry. When Griselda heard this news she resolved to patiently undergo Fortune's adversity. In the meanwhile the marquis wrote a letter to Bologna instructing his sister to bring both the children home to Saluzzo in utmost secrecy. It was to be said that the maiden was going to marry the marquis. Thus the young girl was dressed for the wedding and her brother was also splendidly dressed.

Part 5

In the meanwhile the ruthless marquis decided to test Griselda's patience to the utmost. He told her that he had acquired a Papal dispensation to remarry as his subjects considered Griselda to be of a very low birth and wanted him to marry a woman of a higher birth. He ordered her to go back to her father's house and to take her dowry along. Griselda firmly replied that she had always been his humble servant and would willingly return to her father if he so desired. She recalls that she had not brought any dowry and had come dressed in rags. She then strips away all the rich clothes, jewels and the wedding ring and requests to be allowed to wear an old smock to hide her nudity. She walked barefoot to her father's house. However she remained a paragon of wifely patience and did not weep or give any other hint of her distress.

Part 6

The Earl of Panago arrived with the would be marchioness. The marquis then called Griselda and asked her to supervise the decoration of the rooms. Griselda patiently assisted in preparing the bedrooms and the

banquet hall. Clothed in rags Griselda cheerfully went to receive the bride. She also unceasingly praised the young girl and her brother. When the marquis saw Griselda's patience and constancy, he could not bear the deception any longer. He revealed that the young girl was her own daughter and her brother would certainly become his heir. He revealed that they had been secretly brought up in Bologna. The cruel tests had only been designed to ascertain her strength of will and constancy.

Griselda was happily reunited with her children and they lived happily for many years. Eventually her daughter was married to the worthiest lord in Italy and her son ascended the throne after the marquis' death.

The tale ends with the Clerk's statement that it would be intolerable for women to imitate Griselda's patience and humility. But everybody should meekly accept God's will and face adversity with courage and fortitude. He then tells the Wife of Bath that he will sing a song in praise of Griselda.

Chaucer's Epilogue

Chaucer acknowledges here in six stanzas that the character of Griselda has been stylized to the point of impossibility and asks wives to show more independent spirit and assume control.

Notes

The Clerk's Tale is an indirect response to the Wife of Bath who stated that women desire complete sovereignty over their husbands and lovers. The Clerk puts forth a diametrically opposite view and draws the sketch of a totally submissive woman.

Chaucer's source for the Clerk's tale is Petrarch's 'Fable of Obedience and Wifely Faith' written in Latin that was in turn derived from Boccaccio's 'Decameron'. Chaucer closely follows Petrarch's text. Chaucer makes the Clerk candidly acknowledge that his tale is derived from "Frauncey's Petrak".

The Clerk's Tale is suited to his character as a serious student. His tale too has a scholarly theme and deals with the issue of genuine obedience and loyalty in a wife. Griselda's story upholds faith in goodness even in times of adversity. It is definitely a moral tale and the Clerk relates it with all seriousness and economy of words.

The Host's warning to the Clerk to keep his language simple and to tell an entertaining and adventurous tale were not needed. The tale proves that the Clerk was not an ossified academic. However the Clerk does not relate an adventurous tale and does make use of rhetoric and figures of speech. When the Clerk concludes his tale the Host commends him for relating his story in a sweet and wholesome manner.

Chaucer has invested, the folk tale Petrarchan version of the patient Griselda's story, with an amazing degree of realism. Griselda comes across as a real life human character. Her sincerity to her husband and affection for her children seem realistic. Her pathos is heart rending and earns the reader's compassion.

Griselda's story of long suffering may be unappealing to modern readers. But it is important to interpret the tale in the context of the fourteenth century. Griselda was simply acting in accordance with her roles as a loyal wife and a subject of the marquis. She was fulfilling her moral obligations.

One could perhaps interpret the tale as a homily on Christian humility and perseverance. The Clerk clarifies while concluding his tale that Griselda is not to be emulated as an example by women. Rather his tale simply advocates faith in the innate goodness of God and perseverance in times of adversity.

It is also possible to interpret the Clerk's tale as a comment on the exploitation of the governed class by the rulers. Griselda is a lowly village girl and suffers the cruelty of the marquis silently and is resigned to her

fate. Similarly the tale may also be seen as a comment on patriarchal domination.

The marquis Walter appears to be a sadistic man who derives intense pleasure from torturing his wife. His skepticism about his wife's loyalty and obedience is irremediable as he subjects poor Griselda to one inhuman test after another. During the entire period of his married life he does not exhibit an iota of remorse. However his character is redeemed by the fondness of his subjects and his choice of a poor girl for his bride.

The Merchant's Tale: Prologue

The Merchant says that he has had more than his share of weeping, worrying and mourning in his marital life. He rues the fact that his wife does not have Griselda's patience. He has only been married for two months but his wretched wife had made his life thoroughly miserable. The Host requests the Merchant to share his sorrow with them. But the Merchant says that his heart was too sore to speak about his own sorrow any more. He says that his tale will be of wives of a different kind.

The Merchant's Tale

There once lived a Knight named January in the town of Pavia in Lombardy. He had lived a life of wantonness for nearly sixty years and was suddenly overcome by a strong desire to marry. He believed that marriage was earthly paradise and wished to marry a beautiful young maiden who could beget him a son and heir. He accordingly began his search for a suitable wife.

The Merchant then sarcastically launches into an exaggerated praise of the divine institution of marriage. He ironically praises a wife as being a gift of God and then gives the examples of the wise counsel given by women such as Rebecca, Judith, Abigail, that had in actuality only caused destruction. While praising wives he ironically quotes Cato and Seneca.

January then discussed his problem with his friends and expressed his desire to marry a very young maiden of not more than twenty years old. This led to a great debate and a dispute between the Knight's brothers named Placebo and Justinus. While Placebo told January to take his own decision without taking anybody's opinion into consideration, Justinus counseled against marriage since women are fickle. January then decided to get married.

January looked over the young girls who lived nearby and finally decided to marry one of them named May. He again called his friends together and asked them something that had been troubling him since a long time. He asked them that it has been said that nobody is allowed perfect rapture on heaven as well on earth; and if marriage is perfect bliss would he be able to enter heaven after his death? At this Justinus disgustingly replied that God will ensure that he repents of marriage and married life before he dies. However seeing that he couldn't dissuade January from getting married, he left. January made the preparations for the wedding and finally married May. There was a lavish wedding feast and began to get impatient for his first night in bed with his ravishing wife. The feasting gained momentum and the guests sang and danced in happiness. The Knight's Squire named Damian was also present and he instantly fell in love with the young bride. He took to bed in despair of his unrequited love. Old January could not bear the waiting any longer and asked the guests to clear the house. After the priest had blessed the bridal bed everybody left the room and January clasped May in his arms and made love to her. At the approach of dawn he started singing with joy but May was not impressed and went off to sleep.

After the customary four days of solitary eating May joined January at the banquet table. It was then that January suddenly noticed Damian's absence and inquired about him. He was informed that Damian had fallen sick and he decided to pay him a visit. He also told May to visit Damian along with the ladies of the

Court after dinner to cheer him up. When May visited Damian he deftly slipped a letter declaring his love in her hand. After reading the letter May was overcome with pity and decided to reciprocate Damian's love and gave him a letter telling him the same. Thereafter Damian recovered quickly from his illness and resumed his normal duties.

January's happiness didn't last long and unfortunately he suddenly lost his eyesight. He became very sad and forlorn but also grew increasingly jealous of his young wife and feared that he would be deceived. He grew extremely possessive of her and would not let her go alone anywhere. This upset May who could not only send messages to Damian. Finally May contrived to get Damian into the January's personal garden and told him to hide in the pear tree.

In the meanwhile the God Pluto and his wife Prosperina were watching the entire scene from a far corner of the garden. There arose a dispute among them when Pluto denounced the treacherousness inherent in women. Pluto resolved to restore the old Knight's eyesight at the very moment that May betrays him while Prosperina resolved to provide May with the perfect answer for her misdemeanor.

May then climbed up into the tree herself to ostensibly pluck a pear. May and Damian then embraced each other and made love. At this moment Pluto restored January's eyesight and he saw his wife embraced by Damian. He at once created a hue and cry. However May replied that she was only struggling with Damian since she had been told that by doing so she could restore her husband's sight. When January said that it was more than a simple struggle, May told him that his eyes were weak and he had been deluded. January is convinced with May's reply and fondly embraces her.

Notes

The Merchant's Tale immediately follows the Clerk's ideal delineation of Griselda's patience. In stark contrast, the Merchant's Tale takes into account the bitter realities of life. The Merchant is cynical, bitter and disillusioned by his two month long marriage. His tale reflects the disgust that he feels with himself for getting married and he heaps scorn on old January's decision to marry after leading a carefree life as a bachelor.

The Merchant's Tale like the Miller's tale deals with the gulling of an old husband by a young wife. However one can notice the wide difference between their characters simply by the manner in which they deal with the same subject matter.

The Merchant's Tale has often been denounced as a bawdy tale about the deception of a jealous husband. However it is a serious discussion of the problem of marriage. To the Merchant, marriage is an undesirable state. In the course of his tale the Merchant lists out some points in favor of marriage. It is a means of securing an heir; it is a divine state sanctified by God; it is a sacrament. A wife is God's gift since woman was made for man's help. But the Merchant directs intense scorn towards every favorable opinion regarding marriage. This reflects his own bitterness and unhappy personal experience. In his tale old January is betrayed by his young wife, May, who has an affair with Damian. At the end of the story the reader sees January as a gulled husband, May as a slut and Damian as a traitor. Pluto restores January's sight and makes him see his wife's betrayal but Prosperina endows May with the ability to satisfy January with her smart answer. The point that the Merchant makes is that marital happiness can only be achieved by self-imposed blindness. When January's sight is restored, he allows himself to be blinded to the true facts. He can see May and Damian locked in an embrace and still lets himself believe that his wife is faithful. The resolution of the plot is thus ironic. The tale could have very well ended in a tragedy but Chaucer makes the conclusion comic. Chaucer allows January to live in a fool's paradise.

The Squire's Tale: Prologue

The Host requests the Squire to tell them a tale of love but the Squire refuses to do so. But not wishing to rebel against the Host's wish he says that he will tell a tale about something else and begs to be excused if he narrates it badly.

The Squire's Tale

Part 1

There once lived a king named Cambuscan at Tzarev, in Tartary. He was continually engaged in expeditions against Russia and was known far and wide for his excellent qualities. He was brave, rich, wise, lenient, just, gentle, honorable, young, strong, lively, handsome and strong of character. This great king had two sons named Algarsyff and Cambalo through his wife Elpheta. He also had an incredibly beautiful daughter named Canace who was the youngest of his children.

When king Cambuscan completed 20 years of his rule, he held a lavish feast in celebration. The king was seated at the head of the banquet table listening to melodious music when suddenly a strange Knight burst in upon the scene. He was seated upon a horse of bronze and carried a huge mirror in one hand. He wore a golden ring on his thumb and carried a naked sword at his side. He introduced himself as Gawain and revealed that he had come bearing gifts sent by the king of Araby and India in honor of the king's feast.

One of the gifts was a magic bronze horse that had the power to carry a man anywhere he wished to go, at an incredible speed, merely by twisting a pin. Another gift was a magic mirror that could reveal future misfortunes and the treacherous deeds committed by trusted ones. A magic ring was the third gift and it imparted to its wearer the power to understand the speech of birds. The Knight says that the mirror and the ring were presents for the king's lovely daughter. Finally the fourth gift the magic sword was capable of cutting through the thickest armors and could heal the most fatal wounds.

The Knight then dismounted and was asked to join the feast. The magic ring was gifted to Canace with due ceremony. The Squire then relates in some detail the excitement generated in the Court by the gifts. The Knight showed the king how to operate the magic horse. The feasting continued in a grand manner almost till dawn.

Part 2

The next morning Canace awoke early and wearing the magic ring went for a walk in the park. It was a beautiful morning and she could understand the meaning of the birds' songs. However she soon came upon a withered tree and saw a falcon that was crying miserably and inflicting wounds on itself. It was a terrible sight and moved Canace extremely. Since she was wearing the ring she could understand everything the falcon said. She climbed up the tree and asked the falcon the reason for her misery. The falcon then told Canace that her fickle and dissimulating lover, the hawk, had betrayed her for a vulgar kite. The falcon then fainted in Canace's lap after relating this tale of misfortune. Canace took the falcon to Court and nursed its wounds.

The Squire says that he will now describe the battles fought by Cambuscan, how Algarsyff overcame many hazards with the help of the magic horse, and how Cambalo won the joust with the magic sword. At this point the tale breaks off. The Franklin commends the Squire for having told a marvelous tale. The Host asks the Franklin to get on with his tale without wasting any time.

Notes

The Squire's Tale is an aristocratic verse romance of an unknown source and deals with the theme of love. The romance is perfectly suited to the Squire's character. It is puzzling as to why the Squire does not finish his tale. It is enticing to assume that the Franklin affably stops the Squire in the midst of his tale by pretending that it is over and praising the Squire for his eloquent story. But the reader cannot be certain that Chaucer meant this. Even though The Squire's Tale is a fragment yet it stands on its own and indeed does not need to be completed.

The Squire's Tale is replete with details of romantic chivalry and the pomp and splendor of court festivals. It contains a mysterious Knight and magical gifts. It is in the high style. There is mock – heroic treatment and the birds are gifted with the power of speech. The falcon finds herself in a situation atypical of courtly romance. She is the deserted lady who is pining for her fickle lover.

The Squire's Tale appears inferior in comparison with The Knight's Tale. But the Squire's enthusiasm and zestful energy is appealing. While he does not possess his father's narrative skills he more than compensates for it by his earnest efforts and even wins compliments from the Franklin.

The Squire's Tale is unique and introduces a new element of Oriental travel in The Canterbury Tales.

The Squire is a lovable character and tells the only kind of story that was currently fashionable in his day. But at the same time there is an implicit comment that such tales are superficial and vapid.

The Franklin's Tale: Prologue

The Franklin says that he will relate an old Breton Lay as best as he can. He asks the pilgrims to excuse his homely style and speech since he is a plain blunt man. He has no feeling for the colors of rhetoric and speech since the only colors that he has seen are those that are used for paint and the flowers that grow in the meadows.

The Franklin's Tale

There lived a noble Knight named Arveragus in Brittany who passionately loved a lady named Dorigen and undertook many great enterprises to win her. The lady's beauty was unsurpassable and she came of a very noble lineage. Arveragus thus didn't have the temerity to tell the lady of his longing and heart's desire. At last the lady compassionately agreed to accept him as her lord and husband. Arveragus was thrilled and promised to obey all her wishes. The lady was honored by the Knight's magnanimity and swore that they would always live in harmony and peace. They then got married and started living in perfect happiness.

After a year or so Arveragus decided to go to Britain to seek training in arms. He lived there for two years. In the meanwhile Dorigen who loved Arveragus more than her own life grew extremely melancholic and grief-stricken in his absence. Arveragus' absence tormented her so much that the entire world seemed meaningless to her. She lost her appetite and spent the whole day in sighs and tears. Her friends comforted her in every way possible. At last Dorigen took hold of herself and started going for walks with her friends to the seacoast. However the sight of ships only served to remind her of Arveragus. She would further get terrorized at the sight of the black forbidding rocks along the coastline that had been the cause of many unfortunate deaths. Her friends realized that roaming on the coast was only a source of more misery and they thus chose other spots for their amusement.

One day in May, Dorigen went to a picnic. A Squire named Aurelius who had been secretly in love with Dorigen for the past two years was also present. He had never revealed his feelings and suffered silently. It

so happened that they started talking. He finally mustered up enough courage to declare his love for her. Dorigen refused his advances resolutely. But seeing his sad countenance she jestingly added that she would consent to his love if he could remove all the rocks from the coast of Brittany to make her husband's return voyage safe. Aurelius despaired since this was an impossible task and implored her to reconsider. When she refused he went away with a heavy heart. He desperately prayed to Apollo to entreat his sister Lucina, goddess of the sea, to send such a massive tide that it would drown all the rocks on the coast of Brittany for two years. He then fainted and remained unconscious for a long time. Aurelius' brother who knew about his secret love then carried him to his bed and looked after him.

In the meanwhile Arveragus, to Dorigen's delight returned home safe and sound and they were happily reunited. However Aurelius was torn apart by distress and lay bed ridden for two years. Only his brother knew that he was afflicted by the sorrow of unrequited love. At last his brother recalled his young student days at Orleans where he had seen a book about white magic. He rejoiced that finally a solution had been found and that expert conjurers might be able to produce a illusion making it appear as if all the rocks had disappeared from the coast of Brittany. Accordingly he set off with Aurelius for Orleans and met an *(expert magician.) The magician demanded a sum of thousand pounds for the job. Aurelius readily agreed and the magician made the rocks disappear. Aurelius then went to meet Dorigen at the temple and demanded that she fulfill her end of the bargain. Dorigen who had been certain that the preposterous condition would never be met was horrified and went home in a miserable state of mind. She wept continuously for two days railing against fortune. When Arveragus returned home she told him the entire story. Arveragus told her that she must honor her promise even though it would hurt him deeply. He then sent Dorigen to Aurelius. Aurelius was extremely moved by Arveragus's nobility and Dorigen's love and loyalty to her husband that he released her from her obligation. Aurelius then found that he only had five hundred pounds to give to the magician and begged him to give him two years to pay the rest of the amount. When the magician learned what had happened he too acted like a gentleman and pardoned his fees. The Franklin ends his tale with an appeal to the pilgrims to say which character was the most generous.

Notes

The Franklin's Tale is similar to the French lays of Marie de France. The Franklin himself calls his story a lay. However scholars have not been able to trace any single source for the tale.

The Franklin's Tale is linked with The Squire's Tale. Although these two tales have been grouped together there is no thematic link between the two. What exists is only a structural similarity. The Franklin's praise of the Squire reveals his naivete. While he enthusiastically commends the Squire for his wit, eloquence and story-telling ability, he is unaware that the Squire has bungled his tale by rambling on about the same point.

The tale is set in Brittany and peopled with characters of noble birth. Moreover the characters act generously and in accordance with the highest ideals of conduct. The lovely lady Dorigen refuses to be unfaithful to her husband in his absence. Arveragus prevails upon Dorigen to honor her promise even though it would hurt him immensely. Aurelius is overwhelmed by Dorigen's love for her husband and Arveragus's supreme sacrifice and releases Dorigen from her obligation. The magician pardons his fees after learning the details of the entire episode. All the characters act nobly and in perfect accordance with gentlemanly ideals of behavior. The Franklin's teaser at the end asking the pilgrims to judge the most generous character among all cannot be answered. Many people will agree that Arveragus' decision, to make his wife agree to a promise made as a joke, was wrong. However one has to agree that it is his noble deed that lead to the noble deed of the others. The Franklin's question is on the lines of the aristocratic convention of asking a question to start a debate and reveals his aspiration to move up in society and be thought 'genteel'.

The Franklin's Tale however also appears to deal with the theme of marriage. The Franklin seems to provide

a compromise between the Clerk's advice of patience and submissiveness on the part of the wife, the Wife of Bath's demand of sovereignty over the husband, and the Squire's courtly or romantic idea of love. The Franklin evidently does not agree with the Merchant's view that marriage is undesirable and brings nothing but woe. The Franklin's solution is an amalgam of all the views expressed so far on the subject of marriage. But some critics hold that the tale does not form part of the marriage group simply because there is no way of ascertaining that Chaucer held the same view.

The Physician's Tale

The Physician mentions that the source of his tale is Titus Livius. There once lived a noble Knight named Virginius who had an extremely beautiful 14 year-old daughter. The girl was Nature's perfect creation. While her beauty was unsurpassable she was also chaste, modest, self-abnegating, patient, discreet, industrious and steadfast at heart. Her speech was marked with a characteristic simplicity. The Physician deviates from his story and addresses all governesses in charge of bringing up young girls, and tells them to set an example to their young wards by their own way of life.

Resuming his story the Physician says that one day the girl went with her mother to the town to visit the temple. It so happened that a judge named Apius saw her there and was captivated by her beauty. He resolved to have her by whatever means possible. He realized that bribery and violence wouldn't work since the girl was rich and famous. Finally he sent for Claudius, a crafty rascal and hatched a villainous plot. Apius made Claudius swear secrecy and then presented him with rich gifts in reward.

One day later, according to the plot, when Apius was seated in the judgement hall, the lying blackguard Claudius rushed in with a petition against Virginius. He accuses him of having abducted a female slave from his house when she was very young and of keeping her as his daughter all these years. He demanded that the girl be returned to him. Before the Knight could say a single word in defense, the corrupt judge ruled that the girl be immediately placed in the Court's custody and be eventually returned to Claudius.

Forced by the judgment to give up his dearest daughter to the judge, the Knight went home with a heavy heart. He told his daughter that she had to make a choice between death and shame at the hands of Apius. But since he could not bear shame, the Knight beheads his daughter with a sorrowful heart. He then seized her head by the hair and offered it to Apius who was still in court. In the meantime the people came to know of this treachery. They threw the judge and Apius into the prison where Apius killed himself. Claudius, who was to be hanged was sent to an exile on the knight's request. The Physician rounds off his tale with the moral that sin always reaps its rewards.

Notes

The Physician's Tale gives a version of the story adapted from Jean de Meun's 'Le Roman de la Rose' and not from Titus Livius' history as the Physician proclaims. However Chaucer has introduced many modifications and departures from the traditional story line. In Chaucer's story the focus is on the innocence and purity of the girl while in Roman de la Rose the emphasis was on the corrupt judge and his miserable end. Chaucer also introduces dialogue between the father and daughter instead of third person narration.

The moral of the tale is simple enough: sinners will be ultimately punished. The Physician's Tale is often simplistically thought of as a moral story. However the Physician praises virtue in a tale that is morally repugnant. The fact that a father protects his daughter's virtue by beheading her is nauseating. This brutal beheading in turn ensures that the culprits also get their just desserts. The operating principle is that of a revenge tragedy.

The Pardoner's Tale

Words of the Host to the Physician and the Pardoner

The Host was overcome by the Physician's distressing tale involving a lying rascal and a crooked judge. He laments that the girl's incredible beauty was the cause of her miserable end. He tells the Physician in a medical language that he almost had a heart attack by this sorrowful tale and demands a really cheerful tale from the Pardoner. The Pardoner agreed to do so after having a refreshing drink at the alehouse nearby. However the genteel folk of the company fearful that the Pardoner would tell a filthy tale, demanded a moralistic tale. The Pardoner agrees.

The Pardoner's Tale: Prologue

In the Prologue the Pardoner explains the methods that he employs in his sermons. He always starts with the text "Radix malorum est cupiditas" i.e. "Love of money is the root of all evil". He then shows his official certificates; his license, and adds spice and color to his sermon by saying a few words in Latin. This also serves to inspire devotion among the people. He next displays his fake relics such as the shoulder bone of Jacob's sheep that could cure sick cattle and also cure jealousy in men. He also shows his mitten that would bring prosperity to its owner once he parts with money to buy it. The Pardoner then warns the people that he will not sell his relics to sinners and only good people can be absolved by making an offering to him. He admits that this is the way in which he has earned a100 marks in a year. He says that he preaches from a pulpit like a priest only against avarice and thus induces people to give cash freely to him. He bluntly admits that profit is his only motive and he doesn't care a straw about rebuking sinners. He candidly acknowledges that while he preaches against all kinds of sin, he himself indulges in various vices and begs from the poor to make a fine living. He knows that while he himself is guilty, he knows how to preach against avarice and make people repent. The Pardoner says that although he is a vicious fellow he can tell a tale with a moral and bids the pilgrims to listen.

Notes

The Prologue shows that the Pardoner is fully conscious of his own immorality. He frankly confesses that while he preaches against all kinds of sins, he himself indulges in various vices. In short his actions do not accord with his words.

The Pardoner attempts to gain the sympathy of his audience through his Prologue by revealing the tricks of his trade and acknowledging his own villainy.

It must be said that the Pardoner's confession never loses interest. It is evident that the Pardoner derives immense pleasure from his role as a preacher. He is proud of his oratory skills whereby he can hold an entire congregation under his sway and extract money from them. He describes his method of preaching to demonstrate its power - how he speaks loudly, shows his certificates and speaks a little Latin to impress the congregation. He readily confesses that the text in his preaching is always 'Radix malorum est'. He always preaches against avarice only to satisfy his own avarice. He then shows the assembled people his spurious relics. The Pardoner is amused at the thought that his sermons unintentionally inspire devotion in people.

The Pardoner's Tale

There was once a group of three debauched men in Flanders who whiled away their entire time in gambling, drinking, dancing, and visiting brothels. The Pardoner then digresses to castigate gluttony and says that lechery springs from wine. He reminds the pilgrims that Lot had unknowingly committed incest because he was drunk. A drunk Herod had ordered the innocent John the Baptist to be killed. Gluttony had caused the

first transgression and the fall of mankind. He then quotes St. Paul's injunction against excessive eating and assails cooks who give a better appetite by their exquisite dishes. The Pardoner then attacks wine as the cause of lechery and alludes to the story of Samson who revealed his secret because he was drunk. He also mentions several Biblical examples to strengthen his point that drinking destroys a man's wit, judgment and discretion. Gambling is his next target of attack since it engenders perjuries, manslaughter, and blasphemies and is moreover a waste of time and money. He then relates various historical incidents denouncing gambling. He rounds off his digression by castigating swearing, blasphemy and perjury.

The Pardoner then returns to his story of the three debauched men. One night they were drinking in a tavern when they heard the clinking of a hand bell which meant that a corpse was being carried to the grave. One of the men asked his servant to find out whose corpse it was. The servant replied that he already knew and that the dead man was an old friend of theirs who had been suddenly killed last night by a sneaky thief named Death, who was killing everybody in a nearby plague ridden village. The three debauchees then pledged to seek out Death and kill him. In a drunken rage they then set off in the direction of the plague ridden village.

When they had traveled about half a mile they met a poor old man. One of the debauchees insultingly remarked about his advanced age. The man replied that he was cursed to roam around the earth in search of someone who would exchange his youth for old age and that even Death refused to take his life. The three men thereupon suspected that the old man was in league with Death and demanded to know where they could find Death. The old man said that he had last seen Death under an oak tree round the bend of the lane. The three men rushed to the spot and to their surprise found eight bushels of gold coins. They were extremely happy at their stroke of luck and resolved to keep the gold for themselves. But they decided to move the treasure at night to avoid being accused of robbery. They drew straws to decide who would go to the town to buy food provisions and wine for them while the other two would guard the gold. The youngest of the men drew the shortest straw and set off towards the town. As soon as he had gone the other two conspired to kill him when he returned and divide his share amongst them. In the meanwhile the youngest man also grew greedy and desired to keep the entire treasure for himself. He thus bought a strong rat poison and three bottles of wine. He mixed the poison in two bottles and kept the third one clean. When he returned to the spot, the other two men killed him and then sat down to drink their wine that had been poisoned. They also died on the spot. Thus all of them died through trickery and treachery born of their greed. The Pardoner ends his story by castigating wickedness, greed, gambling, lechery and lust. He tells the pilgrims to desist from avarice and displays his pardons that can save their souls. He promises to put down their names on his prayer roll and absolve them by his holy power. He calls upon them to buy his relics and pardons and immediately get absolution. He suggests that the Host who is the most sinful should make his offering first. The Host grew extremely angry at this suggestion and hinted that the Pardoner was a eunuch. The Pardoner grew so angry that he didn't say a single word in response. The worthy Knight then resolved the quarrel and restored normalcy and the party of pilgrims rode on their way.

Notes

The Pardoner's Tale is an exemplum used by preachers to dissuade people from falling into vices. The Pardoner reveals excellent oratory skills in his narrative. His tale moreover fulfills all the standard criteria of a good short story.

The Pardoner's physical appearance is revolting. He is a beardless man with a thin goat-like voice. Moreover he has waxy yellow hair, which hang from his head like strands of flax. He rides 'dischevelee' and his hood is in his bag. He sings a repulsive song about love along with the Summoner. Chaucer suggests in the "General Prologue" that the Pardoner is a eunuch. Yet he is able to hold his audience captive. The fact that this corrupt Pardoner tells a moral tale is itself ironic.

The Pardoner's Tale moralizes that the three debauchees brought death upon themselves by their avarice. The tale's agenda is against avarice. The riotous living and dissolute habits of the three men are only incidental sins. The Pardoner's central point of concern is avarice and denounces greed as the root of all evil.

However it is possible to see the three debauchees as projections of the Pardoner's own twisted personality. Like the three men of his story the Pardoner is self-deluded. The tale reflects his own inner turmoil and its tragic outcome is a forewarning of his own future end. The Pardoner however does not pay attention to this fact. As the greed of the debauchees resulted in their death, the Pardoner's avarice will result in his spiritual death.

The Pardoner is thus not only physically impotent but also spiritually impotent. He cannot see what is most apparent.

The Old man in the story has been the object of much interpretation. Critics have seen him variously as a mystic figure or even a symbol of death. However the old man represents age. He is in contrast with the boy at the tavern who represents youth. The old man symbolizes experience. He expresses an intense longing for death but cannot find release. The old man appears suddenly and also disappears suddenly. He tricks the debauchees by sending them up a crooked path that has ominous implications of the fall of mankind. In the case of the Pardoner who is a hypocrite, the old man is a symbol of hypocrisy as he deceives the three rogues who ultimately meet with their death.

Chaucer was a master of irony. The Pardoner's Tale is an excellent example of his irony. It is ironical that the Pardoner does not get the point of his own story.

The way the Pardoner ends his story is appropriate to his character. He tells the pilgrims to buy relics and pardons from him and absolve themselves of their sins. He further says that it is their good fortune that he is present among them for the salvation of their souls. This is a cheeky challenge to the pilgrims since they know his true colors. Moreover the Pardoner addresses the Host and asks him to lead his gang of pilgrims by setting the example himself. This angers the Host who humiliates the Pardoner by his cruel taunts about his sexual impotency and violation of his monastic vows. The Pardoner's angry silence can only be interpreted as an acceptance of defeat.

The Second Nun's Tale: Prologue

The Second Nun begins by saying that idleness nourishes vice. Idleness is ever vigilant and rapidly springs a trap to ensnare people. The only antidote to this vice is industriousness. With the aim of countering idleness the Second Nun proposes to tell the story of St. Cecilia's life.

The Second Nun then invokes the Virgin Mary to help her relate St. Cecilia's tale – the maiden who overcame Satan and won eternal life through her good deeds. She then praises the Virgin for her goodness, mercy and pity. She also apologizes for the bare simplicity of her tale and asserts that she isn't making any attempt at ornamentation.

The Second Nun also furnishes an interpretation of the name of Cecilia as expounded in the "Legenda Aurea". The name Cecilia connotes many things: it signifies heaven's lily for her purity, freshness of conscience and virginity. It may also mean path for the blind since her good teachings set an example for others to emulate. Cecilia is made up of two words – "Heaven" and "Leah" – thus it means holiness and unceasing activity. It means a lack of blindness because of the brightness created by her virtues and wisdom. Her name could also mean heaven of the people, because of the radiance of her wisdom and the perfection in her perseverance and good works.

Notes

The Second Nun's Tale relates the story of St. Cecilia from the 'Legenda Aurea', which was later translated by Caxton as 'The Golden Legend'. The Second Nun begins by condemning idleness because idleness lead to sin. The Prologue also has an invocation to the Virgin Mary based on lines from Dante's 'Paradiso'. The invocation to the Virgin was a familiar device but is particularly appropriate here because the tale is about the martyrdom of a virgin maiden Cecilia. Thus the invocation stresses on virginity and good works. The Second Nun's interpretation of the name 'Cecilia' also focuses on the virtues of chastity, virginity, and good works. Thus the Second Nun accentuates the highest Christian standards of conduct. It has been noted that the Second Nun improperly refers to herself as a 'son of Eve'. This has led critics to speculate that the tale was written much earlier and allotted to the Second Nun for lack of anything better.

The Second Nun's Tale

There was a young noble Roman woman named Cecilia who unceasingly prayed to Christ to guard her virginity. When she came of age she was married to a young man named Valerian. However on her wedding day she earnestly prayed to God to protect her chastity. On her first night with her husband she told him that a guardian angel protected her body at all times and if he touched her or made carnal love to her the angel would kill him in the act. Valerian asked to see the angel with his own eyes, and agreed to do as she wished, if the angel were real. However he warned that if he found that Cecilia loved another man he would kill both of them. Cecilia told him that he must first convert to Christianity. She directed him to go to the Appian Way and get baptized by St. Urban.

When Valerian arrived at the designated spot and told St. Urban the purpose of his visit, the saint raised his hands in joy and marveled at Cecilia's power to induce her husband to convert to Christianity. At this moment an old man wearing white clothes appeared in a vision and read out from a golden book that there is one omnipotent God and one faith alone. The man in the vision then asked Valerian whether he believed in this and when Valerian answered in the affirmative the vision disappeared into thin air and St. Urban baptized Valerian.

On his return home Valerian found Cecilia standing beside her angel in his room. The angel carried two crowns of roses and lilies and gave them to Cecilia and Valerian. The garlands had come from Paradise and would never decay. Moreover only the chaste, that do not harbor any unclean thoughts, would be able to see them. The angel then granted Valerian a boon. Valerian wished that his brother whom he loved very much should also be converted to the great faith of Christianity.

However Valerian's brother – Tiburce – objected to being baptized by Pope Urban since he did not wish to be involved with an outlaw and risk being burnt at the stake. Cecilia convinced Tiburce that this earthly life is only a prelude to the next life of the soul entrusted by the Holy Ghost. Tiburce questioned Cecilia about the validity of her assertion that only one God exists when she believes in three gods embodied in the Holy Ghost. Cecilia explained that just as man had the three faculties of imagination, memory and reason, similarly three persons could be incorporated into the one Being of the Deity. Tiburce was finally convinced and allowed himself to be baptized by Pope Urban. Thereafter Tiburce could also see the angel and was blessed with boons.

The Roman legal officers soon arrested them and produced them before Almachius, the magistrate. When Almachius found out that they believed in Christianity, he ordered them to perform sacrifice to Jupiter or risk being beheaded. However Valerian and Tiburce refused to do so and were sentenced to death. Maximus, the magistrate's clerk was so moved by their staunch refusal that he too converted to Christianity. Maximus helped to convert many others and was mercilessly flogged to death by Almachius.

Almachius lost no time in ordering Cecilia to honor the pagan gods. When Cecilia was brought before him in court he questioned her about her faith and religion. Cecilia answered him rudely and denounced him as an ignorant official and worthless judge. She ridicules his belief in the pagan idols. Infuriated, Almachius ordered that Cecilia be burnt to death by being sealed in a boiling hot bath. However the intense heat of the fire had no effect upon her. Then the evil Almachius sent an executioner to murder Cecilia in the bath. This killer struck three times on Cecilia's neck but failed to behead her. He left her half dead with a slit neck in the bath. Cecilia continued to live for three days and her preaching succeeded in winning more converts to Christianity. She then entrusted the Christians to Pope Urban and died after expressing the wish that her house be turned into a church. Pope Urban secretly buried her corpse at night and named her house St. Cecilia's Church.

Notes

The Second Nun's Tale is an adaptation of an earlier Latin version. It is believed that Cecilia was martyred in the reign of Severus who ruled from AD 222 – 235. The Second Nun's Tale is the only saint's legend in the entire book. It is also the final story dealing with the themes of love and marriage. Cecilia submits to marriage but attains 'maistrie' by her husband's consent. But Cecilia's marriage is on a higher plane of existence. Neither she nor her husband achieves sovereignty over each other. Rather both subjugate themselves to the will of God. She converts him to Christianity. They remain chaste and dedicate their lives to the cause of the Church. Eventually they become martyrs and Cecilia is rewarded with sainthood.

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale: Prologue

After the Second Nun's tale, the group of pilgrims had barely ridden five miles, when a man dressed in black and his servant caught up with them. Chaucer guesses that the man was a Canon and was accompanied by his Yeoman. Both the Canon and his Yeoman seemed friendly and courteous. The Host welcomed them into the group and asked them whether they had any tale to entertain the pilgrims. The Yeoman replied that his master knew lots of fun and games. The Yeoman then launched into a huge praise of his master and proclaimed that he was a man of superior intellect. The Host then pressed the Yeoman to reveal more about his master's arts. The Yeoman readily answered that they lived in the suburbs and lived in anonymity like robbers. On being questioned by the Host about the discoloration of his face the Yeoman replied that probably the constant blowing into a hot furnace was the cause. When the Yeoman proceeds to reveal dark secrets about alchemy, the Canon threatened him of dire consequences. But the Host tells the Yeoman not to care about the Canon's threats. When the Canon realized that the Yeoman was going to reveal all his secrets he flees away in shame. The Yeoman then goes on to bare all the foul secrets about alchemy and vows that he shall never have anything to do with the Canon.

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

Part 1

In the first part the Canon's Yeoman tells about his own experiences with his master while he is practicing alchemy. He expresses regret at having wasted seven years with the Canon since he hasn't gained anything. Rather his once fresh complexion has become sickly and his eyes have become weak. The wretched science of alchemy has stripped him bare and plunged him into such a deep debt that he will never be able to repay it. The Canon's Yeoman gives a detailed account of the alchemy processes and the abstract technical jargon involved. He denounces the vocation of alchemy and warns everybody from entering into it. He describes how when every experiment fails the blame is apportioned to some insignificant cause while the Philosopher's stone (the precious metals) remains elusive.

Part 2

There once lived a deceitful Canon in London who was unsurpassed at double-dealing. One day this Canon entreated a chantry priest to lend him a certain sum of gold and promised to repay him by a certain date. The priest promptly lent him a gold mark. When the Canon returned the sum on the third day the priest was extremely pleased and said that he hadn't expected to ever see the money again. The Canon offered to repay the priest's kindness by demonstrating his expertise in alchemy. He told the priest to fetch him some mercury and charcoal. He then tricked the priest into believing that the mercury had been transformed into silver. He asked the priest to pile the charcoal for the experiment in the crucible. While the priest was thus occupied the sly Canon slipped in a piece of counterfeit beech wood charcoal in which he had placed an ounce of silver fillings. When the charcoal was burnt the silver fillings fell into the crucible. The poor unsuspecting priest had no idea that he was being duped. The Canon asked the priest to fetch a piece of chalk - stone to fashion a mould and went with the priest to convince him of the veracity of the experiment. The Canon then deftly took out a thin sheet of silver from his sleeve folds and cut the chalk stone to its size. He then hid the silver back in his sleeve. Then he took hold of the burnt beech charcoal and poured it into the mould and threw it into a vessel filled with water. He asked the priest to look for silver in the mould. The gullible priest was only too happy to find a bar of silver. To remove any trace of doubt whatsoever the Canon then offered to let the priest have a second try. He asked the priest to get another ounce of mercury and to repeat the experiment. The deceitful Canon in the meanwhile took out a hollow stick filled with one ounce of silver and tightly sealed with wax and threw it into the fire. The heat melted the wax and the silver ran out into the crucible. The Canon then told the priest to get some copper and tricked him for the third time into believing that it had been transformed into silver. The priest was extremely overjoyed and had the silver tested by a goldsmith. The priest then begged the Canon to sell him the formula. The Canon promptly sold him the fraudulent formula for 40 pounds and requested the priest to keep the matter a secret and cunningly left town the next day. The poor priest could not do anything when he realized that he had been duped by the Canon.

The Canon's Yeoman then proceeds to denounce the wretched vocation of alchemy and the complicated jargon involved and says that it only transmutes happiness into misery.

Notes

The Canon and his Yeoman arrive panting and gasping for breath after the main group of pilgrims when the journey is nearing its end. Their arrival is an attempt by Chaucer to introduce a new dimension in the relationships that have already been established among the pilgrims. The Canon practices alchemy. The main idea of alchemy is that certain basic metals lying in the ground for several years would eventually become higher metals. The alchemists claimed that they could accelerate this process.

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale is by and large an autobiography of his own experiences with his master practicing alchemy. The tale is in the form of a dramatic monologue. The Canon's Yeoman gives details of alchemy processes that may seem complex to the modern reader. However this also reveals that the Yeoman is extremely knowledgeable about alchemy. He knows all the technical terms and jargon. The Yeoman then relates a series of anecdotes about how another Canon cheated a priest into believing that he could transmute mercury into silver. It is evident that the Yeoman is disgusted with alchemy.

The Yeoman hates to be involved in such a hopeless occupation. He is incensed that he has lost his money and his good complexion. His wrath tends to increase by degrees as he tells his story. But it is important to note that the Yeoman does not condemn the science of alchemy itself. He only castigates greed and false crooked alchemists. He believes that one day they would learn the secret and discover the Philosopher's stone but only when God wishes them to do so. The story does not hold much appeal for the readers today as this concept of alchemy became outdated within a very short period of time.

The Manciple's Tale: Prologue

The group of pilgrims continued on their way to Canterbury and the Host began to crack jokes at the Cook who had fallen asleep and was swaying dangerously on his saddle. The Host's efforts to wake him up were unsuccessful. Suddenly the Cook's horse threw him off. The pilgrims had to stop and with great effort they managed to put him back on his saddle. The Host then requested the Manciple to tell a story.

The Manciple's Tale

There once lived a handsome young Knight named Phoebus who was an accomplished archer. He was also a skilled singer and could play any instrument. He was a model of flawless nobility and honor. Phoebus had a snow-white crow that could imitate anybody's speech and sing more sweetly than a nightingale. Phoebus had a wife who was dearer to him than his own life. He did his very best to keep her satisfied and treated her with respect. But Phoebus was also extremely jealous and kept a strict vigilance over his wife to ensure that he would not be deceived.

However Phoebus' wife had a secret lover. One day when Phoebus went out of town on business, his wife sent for her lover and made passionate love with him. The crow witnessed this event but kept quiet.

When Phoebus returned home the crow revealed that his wife had betrayed him and gave ample proof to substantiate the charge. Phoebus was heart-broken and in a fury killed his wife. But soon enough he was filled with remorse and began to repent that he had acted hastily on flimsy evidence. He angrily spurned the crow calling it a betrayer and a villainous wretch for telling a false tale. In a fit of rage Phoebus plucked out all the white feathers of the crow and replaced them with black ones. He also took away the crow's power of speech and song. Further he cursed the crow that all its descendants would be black and would have a harsh voice.

The Manciple warns the pilgrims that great evil springs from verbosity when a few words are sufficient. Nothing that has already been said can ever be made unsaid. He advises the pilgrims to restrain and exercise control over their tongues and to think before they spread malicious stories.

Notes

The Manciple tells the familiar story of the tattle - tale bird found in 'The Seven Sages of Rome'. However Chaucer has adapted his tale from the tale of Apollo and Coronis in Ovid's 'Metamorphoses'.

The Manciple's Tale is the last tale before the Parson's sermon. The moral of the story is quite clear: one must keep one's mouth shut and not spread malicious scandal.

The Tale suits the Manciple's character perfectly. In the 'General Prologue' the readers are told that the Manciple was able to hoodwink his thirty-odd masters who were learned lawyers and financial wizards. Hence the Manciple has a lot to hide and the tale's moral is equally applicable to him.

The Manciple's Tale is interwoven with lively digressions in which he makes philosophical observations. In the first digression after the reader has been informed of Phoebus's jealousy and fear of being deceived, Chaucer remarks that it is vain to keep wives under observation. In the second digression after the Manciple has related Phoebus' efforts to please his wife and keep her satisfied, Chaucer comments philosophically that nobody can destroy a creature's natural instincts. Thus one can give a caged bird all the comforts but it will still prefer the forest. Similarly humans cannot derive any pleasure from a virtuous life. The third digression comes after the Manciple informs the reader that Phoebus' wife sleeps with her secret lover. The Manciple apologizes for his bawdy speech and goes on to say that there is no difference between a noble woman and a

poor woman if they are unfaithful and lecherous. But still one is called lady in love while the poor woman is insultingly called a wench. The Manciple makes an important point here that there should not be any class distinctions in moralistic considerations. In the fourth and final digression after Phoebus has slain his wife and angrily spurns the crow, the Manciple moralizes that it is best to keep quiet and hold one's tongue.

The Parson's Tale: Prologue

By the time the Manciple's tale had ended it was already afternoon and the pilgrims were entering a village. The Host then calls upon the Parson to tell a lively story since he was the only person left who hadn't told a tale. But the Parson tartly replies that the Host wouldn't get any stories out of him since St. Paul reproved of romances, fables and similar ideas. He could only provide them with a moral and edifying homily. He also says that he can't rhyme and alliterate and would tell a pleasing thing in prose and promises that he will guide them on their glorious pilgrimage to the Celestial City of Jerusalem. The pilgrims agree to hear the Parson and the Host bids him to hurry up with his homily since the sun would soon set.

The Parson's Tale

The Parson's Tale starts by defining (as the Parson had promised in the Prologue to his tale) "the right way to Jerusalem the Celestial". The Parson states that God is loving and merciful and does not wish the damnation of any man. The proper way to gain admittance into the celestial city is by contrition or repentance for one's sins and a determination to lead a good life. The first cause of contrition is the sorrowful remembrance of one's sins. The Parson adds later in the tale that another cause of contrition is the sorrowful remembrance of the good that one has left undone on earth. The Pardoner then launches into a long sermon about the Seven Deadly Sins of Pride, Envy, Anger, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony, and Lechery. The Parson says that repentance for one's sins may be made through voluntary confessions and also by giving charity and fasting. The Parson ends his tale with a reminder that no matter how long a person has lived his life in sin the mercy of God is always ready to receive him. Thus a sinner can attain salvation and divine bliss through the love and grace of God.

Notes

The Parson's Tale is the longest one in the poem. It is written in prose. In fact it isn't a tale but a sermon on penance and a long treatise on the seven deadly sins. It is far from a pleasing thing that the Parson promised in his Prologue. The repentance theme is taken up again by Chaucer's 'Retracciouns'. The source for the Parson's tale is attributed to two thirteenth century religious tracts namely: 1) *De Poenitentia* by Raymond de Pennafort, and 2) *Summa de Vitiis* by Guilielmus Peraldus.

The Parson's Tale is in contrast with all the tales. It is a treatise on sin and repentance and shows the pilgrims the right way or the true pilgrimage. It is thus a suitable ending for the book. It provides the reader with a vision of the celestial city of Jerusalem and examines human experience in its entirety. The underlying moral of the tale is that self-awareness is a pre-requisite for the way to salvation.

Critics have argued that Chaucer designed the entire structure of *The Canterbury Tales* in order to illustrate the Parson's theme of the Seven Deadly Sins. Hence The Parson's Tale can be seen as providing a serious comment on what has gone before.

Chaucer's Retractions

Chaucer addresses the readers and tells them to thank Christ if they find anything pleasurable in the book since He is the source of all wisdom and goodness. However if the readers find something that they do not like in the book, he begs them to ascribe the fault to his incompetence and not to his will. He proclaims that

he has written with the intention of teaching.

He entreats the reader to pray for God's mercy on him and asks forgiveness for the trespasses he has made especially his translations and writing of works dealing with worldly vanity. In this retraction he denounces *Troilus and Cressida*, *The House of Fame*, *The Nineteen Ladies*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and also *The Canterbury Tales* which he believes are sinful. He also refers to *The Book of the Lion* and many other books which he now cannot remember. But he asks for Divine Grace for his translations of Boethius and other books of legends of the saints and prays for his soul's salvation.

Notes

In 'Retracciouns' Chaucer renounces all his previous works apart from the Christian pieces. Scholars have been locked in a stormy debate over the significance of this final part of the text. Although it is a part of *The Canterbury Tales* it begs forgiveness for "the tales of Canterbury" --- those that deal with immorality. It is indeed puzzling why Chaucer wrote this retraction. Possibly the retraction could be merely conventional, or sincere, or ironic. It is also possible that it was not written by Chaucer and only added to the text at a later date.

OVERALL ANALYSES

CHARACTERS

The Knight - Chaucer describes an ideal Knight, a "verray parfit, gentil knyght", who conscientiously follows all the social, moral, chivalric, and religious codes of conduct. Chaucer does not have any particular individual in mind but casts the Knight as an idealistic representative of his profession. Although the institution of chivalry had become decadent in the fourteenth century Chaucer withholds his criticism and instead endows the Knight with all the gentlemanly qualities that are in keeping with his character. Thus the Knight possesses all the traditional chivalric virtues of politeness in speech, consideration for others, righteousness, generosity, helpfulness, and loyalty. He also loves truth, honor, freedom, and courtesy. Moreover he is not only brave and worthy but also wise. Although the Knight rides on a good horse, he isn't ostentatiously dressed himself. He has come straight from his expedition and is still wearing his armor. His simple coarse sleeveless tunic made out of fustian bears the stains of his armor. This minute detail serves to impart a certain degree of realism to the portrait and also serves to underline the Knight's religious devotion and his eagerness to go on the pilgrimage. The Knight's ascetic clothing thus stands to his credit and highlights his integrity and honor. Chaucer also describes the Knight's participation in several battles and campaigns. Scholars have pointed out that the majority of the Knight's campaigns are religious in nature and are by and large crusades against the heathens.

The Squire - The young Squire with his fashionably curled locks and stylish short gown is the embodiment of the romantic chivalric tradition and provides a stark contrast to the religious chivalric tradition represented by his father, the Knight. His short coat with long wide sleeves is exquisitely embroidered with red and white flowers. This provides a stark contrast to the Knight's ascetic clothing. In the medieval chivalric hierarchy a Squire ranked immediately below a Knight. A Squire had to serve as an attendant to several Knights and their ladies before he himself received Knighthood. Chaucer's Squire possesses all the socially desirable accomplishments that were expected of young men in his position. He is an excellent horseman and also knows how to draw. Moreover he is fond of singing, dancing and composing lyrics. He also likes to joust. A joust was a trial of strength and expertise in which one individual fought another. This sport was strictly restricted to the nobility. Chaucer states that the Squire had been on cavalry expeditions to Flanders, Artois, and Picardy with the hope of winning his lady's favor. The desire to win a lady's favor is one of the main motivations for chivalric action in the tradition of courtly love. Thus unlike his father the Squire, he is not

motivated by religious feelings but by love. The Squire is strong and extremely agile. Further he is courteous and considerate towards others. He willingly serves his lords and carves before his father at the table. Carving was considered to be a very strenuous task. Chaucer is indulgent of the Squire's romantic fervor and carefree attitude. His singing and playing upon the flute all day long are perfectly in accordance with his cavalier sensibility. On the whole one is convinced that the Squire would make a worthy Knight like his father.

The Yeoman - A Yeoman was an attendant to an official and ranked above a 'garson' or groom in the medieval hierarchy. The modern meaning of a small landowner came about much later. Chaucer makes it clear that the Yeoman was also a 'forester' i.e. thoroughly proficient in hunting and woodcraft. He is a robust individual with closely cropped hair and tanned complexion that bear testimony to a hectic outdoor life. His apparel of a green hunting coat and hood is brightened by a sheaf of sharp peacock arrows that he carries carefully under his belt. He carries all the equipment necessary for his occupation as a Yeoman and a hunter: a mighty bow, a bracer, sword, buckler, a well-sharpened dagger and a hunting horn. A St. Christopher medal that dangles on his breast provides the finishing touch to his physical appearance. Chaucer indicates that the Yeoman is proficient in his work by his statement that he carried his equipment in true Yeomanly fashion. There are no ironic notes in the Yeoman's portrait. Rather the gay and colorful Yeoman wins a positive response of unrestrained appreciation from Chaucer.

The Prioress - Chaucer has painted an utterly charming and elegant portrait of the Prioress. She is named Eglentyne or Sweetbriar. She has a broad forehead, perfect nose, blue-gray eyes, and thin red lips. Her smile is simple and coy. Her appearance conforms to the contemporary ideal of a beauty. She only swears by 'St. Loy' which is to say that she hardly swears at all. She sings the divine service very well with a pleasant nasal intonation and can speak French elegantly. She is obviously a lady who has not forgotten her past of extravagance and fine living. She strives to imitate courtly manners which is evident in her precise table manners where she even takes care not to wet her fingers too deeply in sauce. Her tender heart runs over with pity at the sight of dead or bleeding mice caught in a trap. She is fond of animals and feeds her three dogs with roasted meat and expensive fine bread. Chaucer criticizes the Prioress by praising her very faults. The Prioress's kindness to her pet dogs is seen as a weakness. Her charity should extend towards needy people rather than animals. Moreover in the medieval world animals were not thought to possess souls and were as such outside the scheme of salvation. As a nun she cannot strictly follow the rules of simplicity and poverty. This is seen in her love of jewelry as she possesses a red-coral rosary and an elegant gold brooch with the vague motto 'Amor vincit Omnia' i.e. love conquers all. Keeping her ecclesiastical background in mind the inscription should rather have been 'Amor Dei', i.e. concerned with divine love instead of worldly profane love. She is elegantly dressed in a cloak and her wimple is neatly pleated. Thus Chaucer combines strokes of irony with unconcealed appreciation in his presentation of the gentle, demure, aristocratic and worldly Prioress.

The Monk - Chaucer presents a corrupt Monk who loves the good life and finds more pleasure in hunting than studying in the cloister. The Monk's weakness for good food and expensive clothing and his love for hunting violate the monastic vows of poverty and simplicity. He is riding a sleek berry brown horse on his way to Canterbury. The bells attached to his horse's bridle tinkle pleasantly with the wind. Chaucer ironically pronounces that the Monk is perfectly suitable for the office of abbot. The Monk, Daun Piers, is an outrider; i.e. he takes care of the monastery's estates. He spends more time outside his cloister than he should. He does not care at all about the rules laid down by St. Benedict and bears no guilt about the fact that he rides out instead of devoting himself to his monastic duties. Chaucer ironically agrees with the Monk's point of view and innocently asks why should the Monk make himself mad by pouring over a book in a cloister. The Monk's pleasure in hunting is a fitting object of satire. In the Middle Ages Monks who took

delight in hunting were severely condemned by the reformers. In fact hunting itself was considered an immoral activity. Chaucer's Monk is a perfect hunter and one who takes extreme interest and pleasure in tracking and hunting wild rabbits. He thus keeps fine horses and well bred hunting hounds in his stable. The Monk is a worshipper of materialism. The sleeves of his coat are trimmed with the finest gray fur in the land. His hood is fastened under his chin with an exquisite gold love knot. His boots are supple and expensive. His bald - head and face shine radiantly as if anointed with oil. His large eyes roll in his head and gleam like a furnace under a cauldron. He is healthy and well fed and loves to eat a plump roasted swan. Chaucer ironically concludes that the Monk is certainly a "fair prelat". Chaucer's subtle ironic portraiture of the 'manly' Monk and repeated approbation of the Monk's abilities only arouses the reader's derision.

The Friar - The Friar, Brother Hubert, is among Chaucer's portraits of the corrupt clergy. The Friar is a gay, merry, wanton man. He is a seeker of pleasure. He is a limiter; i.e. he is licensed to solicit alms within certain assigned limits. He is a grand imposing man and the only member in all the four orders of the Dominicans, Franciscans, Carmelites, and Augustinians, who was so well-versed in the language of dalliance and flattery. In contrast to the Monks, Friars had the liberty to preach outside the monastery walls and they followed the ideal of active as opposed to contemplative service. The prime objective of the Friars however was to attack evil and sinners by preaching among the people. However this mendicant life soon degenerated into a pleasurable way of life. Friars transformed begging into an extremely profitable business proposition. Moreover Friars who were supposed to guard people against evil themselves committed venal sins like seducing village girls and married women by their sweet talk and gifts. Chaucer's lecherous Friar too has arranged marriages of many young girls whom he had seduced. He is thoroughly familiar with the tricks of the trade and his hood is always stuffed with trinkets cherished by gullible women. Chaucer ironically commends the Friar as a strong pillar of the church.

The Friar is very familiar with the rich and powerful men of his town. He claims to have more power to hear a confession than a parson does and his absolution is pleasant since he easily grants pardon whenever he is certain of a good offering. He argues that many hard-hearted men could not weep even if they are truly repentant for their sins. In such cases charity to friars is equivalent to tears and prayers. The Friar has a merry voice and could sing well to the accompaniment of a rote (a stringed instrument). He always won the best prize in ballad singing competitions. His musical ability helps in his seduction of women. He has a lily-white neck although he has an athletic constitution. This corrupt Friar is well acquainted with all the innkeepers and barmaids but avoids the poor beggars and lepers like the plague. Chaucer sarcastically comments that it is neither fitting nor profitable for the Friar to associate himself with such poor people. Chaucer then commends the Friar for his humility, virtuousness, and courtesy. He is indeed the best beggar of his order and has the ability to extract money from even the poorest of the poor. For even if a poor widow did not have a shoe / sou (French coin), the Friar's recitation of "In principio" was so pleasant that he would extort a farthing from her before he left. The proceeds of his begging were far greater than the rent that he paid to the church. Moreover the Friar was actively involved in settling secular matters on love-days. Love days were days appointed for out of court settlement of disputes under the arbitration of the clergy. Gradually the practice degenerated and the church forbade the clergy to arbitrate except in case of the poor. Chaucer's comment that the Friar actively participated on love days is an indirect criticism since the readers know that the Friar does not associate with the poor. The Friar is not like an ascetic wearing threadbare clothes. Rather he is wearing a well pressed double worsted coat. Hubert lisps in order to make his speech sound sweet. His eyes twinkle in his head like stars in a frosty night. Chaucer's ironic portrait of the merry, sweet, pleasant and worthy Friar is an excellent satire against the corrupt clergy.

The Merchant - The Merchant with his forked beard is a representative of the rising middle classes. He is well dressed with fashionable motley colored clothes, stylish Flemish beaver hat and expensive boots. He

gives his opinion on English trade policies in a pompous manner and always bases it on what would be favorable to his own trade. He manages his financial affairs so cleverly that nobody knows that he is actually in debt. He never loses any money in his bargains and is extremely knowledgeable about the business of borrowing and lending money. Chaucer says that the Merchant is a worthy man but declines knowing his name.

The Clerk - The Oxford clerk is among Chaucer's idealized portraits. The Clerk is a serious student who had long ago devoted himself to the study of logic. Perhaps he is studying for a Master's degree. He is very thin, hollow and pale and his horse is as thin as a rake. He does not have any benefice and is extremely poor which is evident from his threadbare short upper coat. He prefers to single-mindedly pursue his insatiable quest for knowledge and learning rather than mindlessly run after wealth and riches. He would rather have twenty books of Aristotelian philosophy at his bedside than fine clothes, fiddle or a gay harp. Although he is a philosopher he has little gold in his coffer. He is a man of few words and does not speak more than necessary. But whatever he does say tends to increase moral virtue in the listeners. The scholarly Clerk religiously prays for the welfare of his friends and benefactors. Chaucer seriously appreciates the Clerk's solemnity and openly praises him. There are no ironic overtones in the Clerk's portrait apart from the pun on his being a philosopher and yet being poor. In the Middle Ages, a philosopher also implied an alchemist who claimed to transform base metals into silver and gold. Chaucer's Clerk does not have gold in his coffer. He is a serious student of logic and philosophy and has willingly forfeited worldly pleasures for intellectual enrichment.

The Sergeant at Law - The Sergeant at Law is an expert lawyer and a man of considerable importance. He has often functioned as a judge at the assizes. He has often been at the 'parvys'; i.e., porch of St. Paul's church where lawyers often met for consultations. He was highly renowned for his knowledge and knew all the statutes by heart. He commanded high fees for negotiating the purchase of land and could draft his legal documents so well that nobody can find any fault with them. Therefore he has attained mastery in his profession. The Sergeant at Law is also very discreet and cautious in his speech. He was a very busy man but he always pretended to be busier than he really was. Chaucer here ironically comments on the tendency of humans to pretend. The Sergeant at Law has misconceptions about his importance and holds a high opinion of himself.

The Franklin - The Franklin with his daisy white beard and sanguine complexion is an excellent portrait of a hedonist. He owns a big house in the countryside and pretends to be a noble landlord for which he is respected by the country folk. He is a true Epicurean who delights in the pleasures of life. He is a social climber and greatly values everything connected with nobility. He has often served as Member of Parliament for his county and is a man of authority. He is extremely fond of fine food, good wine and jovial company. In fact Chaucer states that it rained food and drink in his house. His hospitality is evident from the fact that his table is always laid with food. He has the best cellar in the county and changes his menus in accordance with the seasons. Chaucer completes his portrait with the comment that the Franklin is a worthy sub-vassal.

The Physician - The peerless Physician is the master of his profession. Chaucer says that the Physician is "a verrey, parfit praktisour". He is trained in astronomy and would observe his patients carefully through the astrological hours and place the waxen figures of his patients when a beneficent planet was ascendant. He knew the cause of every disease – whether it was hot or cold or moist or dry – and also which humor was responsible for it. It was believed during the Middle Ages that physical diseases as well as mental temperaments were the result of the relationship of one humor with another. The term humor refers to the four fluids of the human body: blood, phlegm, yellow bile, and black bile. An imbalance would result in the dominance of one humor and affect the health of the person accordingly. An excess of black bile for instance resulted in melancholy, brooding and gluttonous temperament. When the humors were in balance, an ideal

temperament prevailed. However the Physician was in league with the apothecaries and each worked to increase the other's profits. Although he was well read in all the medical texts, he devoted little time to read the Bible. He had made a lot of money during the plague and clung to it as if his very life depended on it. He is very conscious of his health and eats moderately. Chaucer suggests that the Physician was greedy by commenting on his fondness for gold. The Physician truly represents the fourteenth century doctor.

The Wife of Bath - The Wife of Bath is Chaucer's most delightful character. She is a skilled weaver who even surpasses the weavers of Ypres and Ghent. She thinks highly of herself and loses all patience if anybody dares to precede her in making an offering. She is garishly dressed. She wears scarlet red stockings and supple new shoes. Her handkerchiefs are of the finest weave and weigh over ten pounds. Chaucer mentions that she has been married five times and has had innumerable affairs in her youth. She has traveled widely and has been on pilgrimages to Jerusalem, Rome, Bologna, Galicia and Cologne. She is gap-toothed and rides her gentle ambling horse easily. It was believed in the Middle Ages that a gap-toothed person would be very lucky and travel far and wide. The lengthy description of her travels indicates that she has led a fairly comfortable life. She wears a riding skirt round her large hips and a pair of sharp spurs on her heels. She knows how to enjoy herself in company and her special forte lies in her knowledge of all the cures of love. Her knowledge about the remedies of love is probably a reference to Ovid's "Amor Remedia". The irony lies in her knowledge of "Amor Remedia" rather than "Ars Amatoria". Chaucer comments that it is a pity that the good Wife of Bath is somewhat deaf. The reader learns in the Prologue to her Tale that this is a result of her dominating character. Her fifth husband had struck her angrily on the head in response to her attempt to dominate him. But ultimately the Wife of Bath had governed him for the rest of his life. The Wife of Bath is a happy daughter of Venus from whom she gets her lecherous temperament and Mars from whom she gets her fiery temper. She is frank and forthright in her opinions and believes in leading an enjoyable life. She is the first feminist character in English Literature and appeals for the liberation of women in her tale. She is a charming, lively, energetic character. Although some readers are offended by her coarseness, one must concede that her bold face and domineering spirit make her portrait immensely vivid.

The Parson - The Parson, like the Knight, is an idealized figure. The Parson's portrait is totally devoid of any ironical undertones or satire. He is a truly virtuous, devout, conscientious, pious, diligent and patient individual. However Chaucer's description of this ideal Parson in turn serves to indicate the sins of the average priest in the fourteenth century. He is a learned man, a clerk, and devoutly teaches his parishioners the tenets of Christianity. It was unusual for a Parson to be learned and scholarly during the Middle Ages. In fact the majority of the parish ecclesiastics were totally uneducated and incompetent men. The Parson retains his faith in God even in times of adversity. Further he is benign, wonderfully hardworking and bears his troubles patiently. He is very generous and gives his sparse income to the needy parishioners even when there is scarcely enough left for himself. He is opposed to excommunicating poor parishioners for the non-payment of tithes (taxes paid to the church). The Parson would also give away the offerings made by the parishioners to the very poor and needy. His parish is far flung but, the Parson nevertheless trudges along religiously with a staff in hand to provide solace to those who are sick or needy. Chaucer uses the biblical imagery of a shepherd tending to his flock of sheep to describe the Parson's activities. Indeed the Parson sets a noble example before his flock or people as he practices what he preaches. Unlike other mercenary priests, Chaucer's Parson does not hire out his benefice and run off to St. Paul's in London, in pursuit of an endowment by singing masses for the dead or to be retained by a gild. Rather, he stays at home in his parish and guards his flock against all kinds of evil. Although the Parson is holy and virtuous he isn't contemptuous of sinners and nor is he overbearing and haughty in his speech. But if some sinner proved to be obstinate he would reprove him sharply without regarding whether he belonged to the high or low estate. Chaucer asserts that he does not know a better priest than this Parson who preached Christ's gospel but first followed it himself. The Parson is obviously meant to be an ideal stereotype and a reflection of what priesthood should

be like.

The Plowman - The Plowman is the Parson's brother and another idealized portrait. Chaucer emphasizes the Plowman's industriousness by stating that he is a good and true laborer. The Plowman lives in peace and perfect charity and willingly helps out his neighbors. He would thresh, carry dung, dig, and make ditches to help a poor neighbor. He loves God with all his heart and promptly pays his tithes to the Church. Chaucer here negates the commonly held perception of the peasant's supposed hatred of the church. The Plowman not only loves God but also pays his tithes without any grudges. Chaucer's Plowman follows Christ's both commandments: to love God and to love one's neighbor as one's self. The Plowman rides an inferior mare and is humbly dressed in a laborer's coat. Many feel that Chaucer's Plowman is modeled on the allegorical ploughman of Langland's poem, Piers Plowman, who always serves Truth. Chaucer has portrayed the humble Plowman sympathetically and admires his pride in his calling and true Christianity.

The Miller - The Miller, named Robin, is a stereotypical representation of a dishonest man. He is a rich villager whose prime concern is the augmentation of his own profits. Professor Curry has provided a scientific explanation of the Miller's character based on Aristotle, Rhazes, and the Secreta Secretorum. His physical characteristics are a reflection of his personality and temperament. His broad-shouldered, stocky built, his huge plump face with luxuriant red beard, and squat nose with an ugly black wart on top --- is symptomatic of his shameless, loquacious, quarrelsome, deceitful and lecherous character. Chaucer states that the Miller is quite an expert in stealing grain and charging thrice the amount and yet has a golden thumb. Chaucer uses the common saying, "An honest miller hath a golden thumb" as a pun, to ironically suggest that this Miller's golden thumb only serves to increase his own profits. The Miller is very strong and can heave the strongest door off its hinges by battering it with his head. He comes across as a repulsive buffoon who likes to joke about sin and scurrilous tales. He plays the bagpipe very well, and leads the company of pilgrims out of the town, to its soulful music.

The Manciple - A Manciple is an attendant who purchases provisions for a college, an inn of court, or the like. Chaucer's Manciple serves the lawyers and students at the temple that is the Inner or Middle Temple near the Strand. The Manciple is as dishonest as the Miller and always makes a profit on his purchases. Chaucer ironically praises his financial wisdom that enables him to hoodwink his masters comprising of the best-learned lawyers in the country. Chaucer has drawn a satiric portrait of the Manciple's professional malpractice.

The Reeve - Chaucer's Reeve named Oswald is a slender choleric man. Professor Curry has scientifically interpreted the Reeve's physical attributes. There is a traditional connection between choleric temperament and thinness. Further a choleric man always has thin pipe like legs which indicates a lecherous character. Chaucer's Reeve is also close shaven that is an indication of his inferior position in the social hierarchy. The Reeve occupies a position between that of the steward or seneschal and a bailiff. He was a carpenter in his youth. Oswald is a typical presentation of a deceitful Reeve. He has managed his lord's account since his lord was twenty years old and cheats him to fill his own coffers. Moreover he also knows all the secrets of the bailiffs and laborers and blackmails them. He is thus feared by all and nobody dares to expose him. He is richer than his lord and often lends him his own money. This treacherous Reeve lives in a pleasant house upon a heath, shadowed by green trees. The Reeve rides a farm horse named Scot and wears a long coat tucked in like a friar's. Throughout his portrayal of the Reeve, Chaucer highlights his deceitful malicious and reprehensible character.

The Summoner - The Summoner was a church official who was responsible for summoning the sinners before the ecclesiastical courts. Chaucer shows his extreme loathing and hatred for the two characters of the corrupt Summoner and Pardoner. He groups them together as joint partners in spiritual crime and makes the

Pardoner accompany his brother the Summoner in a bawdy song about lustful love. The Summoner possesses disgusting physical features that reflect the sordid state of his soul. His fiery red pimped cherubic face is the direct result of his sinful and lecherous activities. His food habits are far from sober. His delight in eating garlic, onions and leek and his fondness for wine further aggravates his physical condition. He suffers from some kind of leprosy. The Summoner appears extremely repulsive with suppurating blotches on his cheeks, black scabby eyebrows and scanty beard. It is hardly surprising that innocent children are afraid of his gruesome appearance. Chaucer sarcastically approves of the Summoner saying that there wasn't a friendlier rascal to be found. The Summoner would allow a sinner to keep a mistress for an entire year just in return for a quart of wine. He is sympathetic to such people because in all likelihood he commits the same sin himself. The Summoner is also illiterate and broadcasts his ignorance by repeating a few Latin phrases when drunk. The extent of his entire knowledge lies in the refrain, "Questio quid iuris?" (The question is what is the law?). The Summoner's moral depravity can be glimpsed from his views on excommunication. He is ever ready to forgo excommunicating a sinner if he is sure of a hefty bribe and proclaims that purse is the archdeacon's hell. This means that the punishment is to the sinner's purse rather than to his soul. This corrupt Summoner extorts protection money from every gullible sinner by threatening them of excommunication. At this point Chaucer directly speaks and states that every man should fear the archdeacon's curse

"of excommunication since it will certainly kill his soul just as absolution will save it. This gluttonous Summoner carries a shield of cake or loaf and his head is garlanded with flowers. There is a consistent strain of moral disgust, outrage and loathing throughout the Summoner's portrait."

The Pardoner - If the Summoner received Chaucer's unmitigated disapproval, the Pardoner is a personification of absolute evil. A Pardoner sells papal indulgences and relics. He preached that Papal indulgences pardoned the sins committed in one's life and ensured a place in purgatory instead of hell. Pardoners made a commercial business out of sale of indulgences as they made them easily available through payment of money. Chaucer's Pardoner has come straight from Rome with a bag overstuffed with indulgences. He also carries false relics to cheat naïve people. These include a pillow case which had served as the Virgin's veil, the piece of sail with which St. Paul went to sea until Christ caught him, and a glass jar filled with pig's bones. He has duped many innocent parsons and his parishioners by selling them false indulgences and relics. He confesses in the Prologue to his Tale, that, he knows the exact method of extorting money from people by preaching against the avarice of money. The hypocritical Pardoner has repulsive physical features. His sparse waxy yellow hair hangs limply by the sides like strands of flax. His glaring hare like eyes, small goat like voice and absence of facial hair indicates that he is a eunuch. He rides 'dischevelee' and his hood is in his bag. He wears a vernicle on his cap to indicate his official authority. His special skill lies in singing at the offertory to extract maximum money from the people. The Pardoner does not invite Chaucer's gentle irony but harsh sarcasm. There is an outright condemnation of the Pardoner's mal-practices and moral corruption.

Chaucer - Chaucer is the author of "The Canterbury Tales" and also appears as one of the pilgrims throughout the entire book. He functions as the naïve narrator and the reader's guide on the way to Canterbury and his ironic comments as the poet reveals the true color of this assorted group. Chaucer's cheeky presence as one of the pilgrims lends an air of realism and immediacy to the book and the reader feels that he is reading an eyewitness account. He tells the tales of Sir Topas and Melibee during the course of the journey. He finally identifies himself as the poet at the end in "Retracciouns". The reader first meets him in the "General Prologue" where he describes the pilgrims that he encounters at the Tabard inn. He poses as a naïve first person narrator and claims to be objective in his appraisal of the pilgrims' appearance but it is seen that he seems to possess the knowledge of an omniscient narrator. The reader thus learns not only about the pilgrims' physical appearance but also details about their personal lives and careers. Chaucer, the observer

and recorder of events as one of the pilgrims, frequently pronounces his judgement as the poet. He openly condemns the corrupt Summoner and the evil Pardoner. This intrusion of the poet's voice does not effect the narrative. Rather it helps the story to achieve immediacy.

The Host - The Host, named Harry Bailey, is not included among the twenty-nine pilgrims who gathered at the Tabard Inn. He is introduced at the end of the "General Prologue". The character of the Host is not fully developed. He appears to be a friendly, agreeable and sensible man. His genial warmth is his most outstanding characteristic. Chaucer comments that the Host is the fairest burgess in the whole of Cheapside and is fit to serve as a marshal in a lord's house. He is frank and forthright in his speech. The Host proposes the story telling competition for the long journey to Canterbury and says that each pilgrim is to tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two tales on the way back. The others will reward the pilgrim who tells the best tale by a supper at the Tabard Inn. The Host then proposes to join the group of pilgrims himself. The pilgrims immediately accept him as the guide, judge, manager and reporter. Thus thirty people set off towards the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket in Canterbury the next evening. The Host frequently provides the link between the various stories and decides the order in which the pilgrims narrate their tales. After each tale the Host provides his opinions and comments which reveal his intelligence. The Host for instance stops Chaucer's Tale of Sir Topas in the middle because he senses that it is mindless rhyming. Critics believe that the Host was modeled on a certain Harry Bailly who actually lived in Southwark in Chaucer's time.

The Guildsmen - The guildsmen are sketchily portrayed in the "General Prologue". The reader learns very little about them apart from the fact that they are wearing fine clothes and are financially well off. Chaucer ironically says that they are able men and worthy to serve as aldermen. They are members of a guild, and wear the distinctive dresses of their occupations. The Guildsmen include a haberdasher, a dyer, a carpenter, a weaver, and a tapestry-maker. Their trade appears to have been randomly chosen by Chaucer and do not have any significance. The guildsmen are treated as a group and no individual importance is given to them. Chaucer's intention seems to be to satirize the self-importance of the guildsmen and their wives who are addressed as 'madam' and have their trails carried behind them just as the royalty.

PLOT(STRUCTURE)

Chaucer uses the framework of a springtime pilgrimage to the sacred shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury for his most popular work *The Canterbury Tales*. In the General Prologue a group of around thirty odd pilgrims come together in a fellowship and genially agree with the Host's suggestion of a story – telling contest whereby each of them shall tell two tales on the way to Canterbury and two tales on the way back. There is an additional condition that the tales must either be entertaining or instructive in character. The winner shall be treated to a grand dinner by the rest of the pilgrims. This ingenious device enables Chaucer to combine numerous narratives of diverse literary styles and genres ranging from courtly romance, Breton Lay, fabliaux, saint's legend, tragedy, exemplum, and sermon to a beast fable into a holistic work of art. The pilgrimage device also provides Chaucer with a vast range of characters. From the Knight who is a zealous crusader for the Church to the Monk who loves hunting and the good life, from the Wife of Bath who is an expert on marital troubles to the Pardoner whose bag is stuffed with sermons hot from Rome. In fact Chaucer presents the microcosm of medieval society through these thirty odd pilgrims.

All the three basic traditional strata of medieval society have ample representation: the Knighthood represented by the Knight and the Squire, the spiritual clergy idealized in the figure of the Parson and the Clerk, and the agricultural represented by the Plowman. These were the three pillars of medieval society. The Plowmen were honest laborers who worked hard with their hands to provide sustenance for all; the clergy protected everybody's souls; and the Knight upheld justice and protected civilian life and property. Further Chaucer also represents the genteel nobility through the Prioress and the Monk, the medieval manor through

the Miller and the Reeve, and the rapidly rising middle classes through the London Merchant, Harry Bailey the innkeeper, the Manciple, the Cook, and the guildsmen. Provincial England too finds its representative in the Wife of Bath and the Sea captain. The frame of the Prologue is very essential to the structural design of the whole poem. Chaucer captures the reader's interest from the opening lines and also introduces the themes that are later explored in detail through the individual Tales. The General Prologue describes portraits that proceed to become life-like vibrant characters.

While *The Canterbury Tales* contains a huge cast of characters sufficient for a novel of epic proportions, it has been often noted that it lacks plot, in the sense that it lacks a continuous linear story line. But one could reasonably argue that the sequence of the stories narrated by the different pilgrims, resembles the events of a regular plot. Also the characters are so stimulated as to make their actions i.e. their tales appear credible. The stories comprising are short, diverse and exceedingly humorous. Chaucer skillfully provides connecting links between the different tales. The quarrel between some of the characters like the Miller and the Reeve, and the Friar and the Summoner leads to tales in retaliation. The roguish churls tell bawdy tales. These links often transcend their primary function of providing connection between the tales and become dramatic. Also the characters of the pilgrims develop during these links as they talk, criticize and quarrel amongst themselves. The outer framework of the 'General Prologue' thus contains the inner form of the tales.

The Knight tells the first tale that is admirably suited to his character. Romantic in nature it focuses on the conflicting love of two young men named Arcite and Palamon for the same lady. Both the young wooers revere the lady. Their love is honorable and its ultimate aim is marriage. A dramatic tournament decides the fate of the lovers. All the pilgrims appreciate the Knight's Tale and everybody concedes that it is a noble story. In the meanwhile the Miller has become drunk and he insists on telling his story. Chaucer warns the readers that the tale might be bawdy and apologizes to the reader while reminding the reader that it is his duty to record everything. He also innocently advises the reader that he may skip the tale altogether and go ahead to the moralistic stories. The Miller's Tale provides a stark contrast to The Knight's Tale and angers the Reeve because of its unjust portrayal of a carpenter. This leads him to retaliate with a bawdy tale about a Miller. The narrative links impose some kind of sequential order to the tales. The essential source of drama and action thus comes from the inter linking and inter play of stories and from the interaction between characters.

The book does not mention a return journey. It seems as if the story-telling game has been lost and no prize will be awarded to the winner. There is no concrete model for structure. Each tale grows into the other and modifies our perception about the earlier tale. The ideas that one has after reading the Knight's Tale appear in an altogether different perspective after reading the Miller's Tale. Similarly the Parson's Tale modifies our experience of the entire book. This change in our perception may reasonably be regarded as the promised return journey. Seen in this light the book does not appear to be open-ended and unfinished but a holistic work of art.

THEME(S)

"The Canterbury Tales" is a complex work with several overlapping thematic concerns. The poem represents the English society of the fourteenth century. All the three fundamental strata of medieval society- the Knighthood, the spiritual clergy and the toiling agricultural classes - have ample representation in the portraits of the Knight, Parson and Plowman. The well - born gentility is represented through the Prioress and the Monk. The medieval manor is depicted through the Miller and the Reeve. The Merchant, the innkeeper Host, the Manciple, the Cook, and the five guildsmen represent the middle classes. The professional class is depicted through the Sergeant at Law and the Physician. Provincial England is also represented through the Wife of Bath and the Sea captain from Dartmouth.

Another prominent theme is Chaucer's critique of the church of medieval England. *The Canterbury Tales* provides the reader with a picture of a disorganized Christian society in a state of decline and obsolescence. Chaucer is aware of the corruption of the clergy and draws an ironic portrait of the Prioress and presents satiric portrayals of the Monk, the Friar, the Summoner, and the Pardoner. The ideal portrait of the Parson counterbalances the moral depravity and corruptness of the other ecclesiastics and represents what should be. Chaucer's ironic praise of the Prioress's affectations, classical beauty, and attachment to worldly concerns only serves to highlight her inappropriateness as the head of a religious convent. Her achievements would have been more suitable for a fashionable lady of the society. Similarly Chaucer's approbation of the Monk's delight in the finer things of life and passion for hunting is aimed at eliciting the reader's disapproval as they go against his monastic vow of poverty. His frequent hunting expeditions contravene the monastic vow of leading a cloistered life and devoting oneself to studies.

The irony is intensified when Chaucer commends the Monk's refusal to follow the rules laid down by St. Benedict and reminds the reader that, "And I seyde his opinion was good." The Friar is first praised for his humility, courtesy, virtuousness, and ability to extract money from the poor. Chaucer approvingly says that the worthy Friar had arranged the marriage of many young women at his own cost. The readers only realize a moment later the Friar's motive for doing so and are filled with derision at his lechery. Similarly Chaucer praises the Friar's knowledge of the taverns and bars in town and agrees that it is unprofitable to associate with the poor. Thus in the portraits of the ecclesiastics Chaucer praises those qualities which are diametrically opposed to their profession. There is a sort of ascending scale of moral depravity and corruption from the indulgent portrait of the worldly Prioress to the portrait of the dissolute Friar. But Chaucer reserves his maximum acrimony for the Summoner and the Pardoner. The Summoner's main function was to summon sinners before the ecclesiastical courts for justice. It is extremely ironic for a corrupt Summoner who is himself guilty of committing sins, to bring sinners to justice. His repulsive physical appearance is an indicator of his diseased soul. Chaucer strongly condemns the Summoner's acceptance of bribes and the philosophy that the purse is the archdeacon's hell, which implies that the only punishment is to the purse of the sinner. The 'gentil' Pardoner is the representation of evil. He sells indulgences and dupes naïve people by selling them false relics. Moreover the hypocritical crook always preaches against avarice even while he himself is guilty of the same sin. *The Canterbury Tales* thus constitutes a passionate attack on the decadence and corruption of the medieval church. Chaucer exposes the evils attacking the very root of Christianity. Chaucer's portrait of the ideal Parson, indicates his desire for reform and revitalize Christianity.

The problem of the position of women and the issue of marriage relationships constitutes yet another strand of thematic concern. Critics have labeled the Fragments 3,4, and 5 (or Groups D, E, and F) as the 'Marriage Group'. They hold the tales told by the Wife of Bath, Clerk, Merchant, and Franklin. These consist of a serious debate on what constitutes the ideal marital relationship. The Wife of Bath presents a strong case for the emancipation of women. In the Middle Ages marriage was considered as inferior as celibacy was highly prized. The sexual act was considered dishonorable even within marriage. The Wife of Bath argues in favor of marriage and points out that virginity was only for those who wanted to lead a perfect life. Moreover she argues that the sexual organs were made for both procreation as well as pleasure. She argues through her Prologue and Tale that women desire sovereignty in marriage. In the Middle Ages women were expected to be subservient and were expected to love, honor and obey their husbands. The Wife of Bath's assertion that women should have sovereignty in marriage thus amounts to a heresy. The Clerk's Tale is an indirect response to the Wife of Bath's argument. The Clerk puts forth a diametrically opposite view and draws the sketch of a totally submissive woman in the character of Griselda. The Merchant in distinct contrast to the Clerk's ideal depiction of the submissive Griselda, opines that marriage is basically an undesirable state. The Merchant puts forth the view that happiness in marriage can only be achieved by self-imposed blindness. When old January's sight is restored, he allows himself to be blinded to the true facts and lets himself believe

that his wife is faithful to him. The Franklin takes the middle path between the Clerk's insistence on patience and submissiveness and the Wife of Bath's demand of sovereignty. The Second Nun's Tale is the final tale dealing with the themes of love and marriage. Cecilia submits to marriage but attains sovereignty by her husband's consent. Cecilia's marriage is on a higher plane of existence and upholds saintliness in love. Neither she nor her husband achieves sovereignty over each other. Rather both subjugate themselves to the divine will.

The Canterbury Tales may be allegorically interpreted as a book about the way or life of man in the world. The book metaphorically represents human life as a one way journey on earth, to the heavenly city of Jerusalem, through the device of the pilgrimage. The pilgrimage is thus not merely a physical journey to an actual place but also a metaphor or symbol of an inner journey of the soul towards God. This interpretation is supported by the Parson's Prologue where he expresses a desire to lead the pilgrims to the celestial city of Jerusalem: "And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende / To shewe you the way, in this viage, / Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage / That highte Jerusalem celestial". Thus the journey from one city to another may be seen as the journey from the worldly city to the city of God.

The Canterbury Tales also uphold the highest ideals of conduct - 'trouthe' and honor in duty, constancy, faith and patience in times of adversity, purity and saintliness in love. These themes recur in several tales told by the noble characters. For instance the thematic concern of the Knight's Tale is the chivalric code of conduct. The tale praises courage and valor in war and also courtesy, truth and honor. It represents Arcite and Palamon's idealized love for Emily. Their love is pure and untainted by any unchaste thoughts. The only possible end for their love is marriage. Arcite and Palamon fight a joust to retain their honor and seek a solution for their conflicting love for Emily. The theme of honor and truth in relationships is continued in the Franklin's Tale. Here Arveragus leaves Dorigen for an extended period to acquire skills required in warfare. This is the traditional conception of honor being gained through fighting battles. But in the Franklin's Tale 'honor' is not accorded so much importance as 'trouthe'. Arveragus is ready to give his wife to Aurelius for the sake of truth. He tells Dorigen to honor her promise even though adultery was the most dishonorable thing in the Middle Ages. The Sergeant at Law's Tale takes up the thematic concern of the Christian virtue of constancy and patience in times of adversity. The Sergeant at Law tells the tale of Constance who retains faith in the goodness of the Blessed Virgin even in the most excruciating circumstances of her life. This theme is continued in the Clerk's Tale of the exemplary patience of Griselda. During the Middle Ages saintliness and purity in love was emphasized. The Second Nun's Tale of St. Cecilia takes saintliness in love as its thematic concern. Cecilia converts her husband to Christianity and both surrender themselves to the will of God.

The problem of predestination and foreknowledge had always intrigued Chaucer. He treats this serious subject in the most frivolous manner in the Nun's Priest's Tale by making a cock and hen discuss this metaphysical issue. Chaucer believed that dreams were visions and forewarnings of future events and thus had metaphysical importance. This view established that God determines the future in some way. The cock Chanticleer holds that his dream is prophetic and supports his argument with weighty references to Cato, St. Kenelm, Daniel and Joseph from the Old Testament, Andromache and Hector.

OTHER ELEMENTS

CHAUCER'S STYLE - Chaucer uses several stylistic devices to liven his portraits of the tellers of the tales. One such device was the use of what the Medieval people termed "the colors of rhetoric". This merely meant the devices by which an artist varied and elaborated his usage of words. Chaucer followed the rhetorical principles laid down by Gaufred de Vinsauf in his "Nova Poetria". These include the description whereby a character is described from the top to the bottom right down to the toe - nail. An example is Chaucer's

description of the magnificent cock Chauncleer in the Nun's Priest's Tale. The second principle is exclamation whereby the emotional importance of the situation is highlighted. This is Chaucer's favorite device. The third device is digression, which involves digressions to develop a point of view within the story. There are numerous examples of such digressions. Chauncleer in the Nun's Priest Tale for instance cites classical authorities to support his argument that dreams are forewarnings of the future. Another device is collation or the introduction of comparisons of moderate length. Chaucer frequently adds color to his tales through the use of comparisons. Yet another device is interpretation which enlarges and reinterprets an already stated opinion. The circumlocution amplifies a simple idea by a long - winded description. The opposite is another device whereby a fact is stated by denying its opposite. For instance the Parson's character is established in the General Prologue by stressing what he does not have in common with the average parish priests who let out their benefices on hire and run off to London in search of money by singing masses for the dead. Yet another device is occupation which is a method of cutting a tale short. For instance the Knight does not describe Duke Theseus's heroic battles by saying that it will make the tale too long and cumbersome. There are many other principles of rhetoric but these are the main ones used by Chaucer to add vibrancy and life to his magnificent book, *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer's Language - Chaucer wrote in Middle English which extended from 1100 AD to 1500 AD His English is a kind of mongrel language enriched by extensive borrowing of French words. While Chaucer's language sounds strange to the modern ear, surprisingly his South- East Midland dialect is the closest to Modern English. Chaucer's language evolved from Old English which extended from 597 AD to 1100 AD Middle English thus has certain peculiar attributes which it acquired from its source language. Old English was an inflected language; that is, the endings of several words changed in accordance with their semantic function. Much of this difficult intricacy disappeared by Chaucer's time. But many words retained an -e ending, which is not pronounced in Modern English. For example, 'ende', 'newe' and the like have inflectional endings, which are simply not pronounced in Modern English. Words also retained the ending 's' or 'es' in the plural and in the possessive.

QUESTIONS

1. Analyze the pervading themes of "The Canterbury Tales".
2. Comment on the structural unity of "The Canterbury Tales".
3. Analyze the "General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales" as providing the framework for the tales.
4. Write character sketches for the main group of pilgrims.
5. Write a critical note on the dual role of Chaucer as the narrator and the poet of "The Canterbury Tales".
6. Attempt a critical appreciation of the female characters in the "General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales".
7. Comment on Chaucer's portraiture of the ecclesiastic characters and the state of the church in the fourteenth century.
8. Analyze the good and idealized characters in the "General Prologue To The Canterbury Tales".
9. Comment on Chaucer's representation of the fourteenth century English society.
10. Write a critical essay on Chaucer's use of the pilgrimage as a structural device in "The Canterbury Tales".

11. Write a note on Chaucer's use of irony.
12. Analyze the plot structure of "The Canterbury Tales".
13. Which is the best tale according to you and why?
14. Write a note on the marriage group of tales.
15. Attempt an allegorical interpretation of "The Canterbury Tales".
16. Discuss Chaucer's ironic portraiture of the Prioress.
17. What is the main theme of the Wife of Bath's Tale?
18. Is the Parson's Tale an appropriate ending for "The Canterbury Tales"?
19. Does "The Canterbury Tales" appear as an unfinished fragment or does it have narrative cohesiveness and wholeness expected of a work of art?
20. Analyze "The Nun's Priest's Tale" as a mock - heroic beast fable.
21. Which is the most interesting character among the assorted group of pilgrims? Why?
22. Write a biographical sketch of Chaucer and life in the Middle Ages.

COMMENT ON THE STUDY OF LITERATURE

The study of literature is not like the study of math or science, or even history. While those disciplines are based largely upon fact, the study of literature is based upon interpretation and analysis. There are no clear-cut answers in literature, outside of the factual information about an author's life and the basic information about setting and characterization in a piece of literature. The rest is a highly subjective reading of what an author has written; each person brings a different set of values and a different background to the reading. As a result, no two people see the piece of literature in exactly the same light, and few critics agree on everything about a book or an author. In this set of PinkMonkey® Literature Notes for a well-known piece of literature, we at PinkMonkey.com have tried to give an objective literary analysis based upon the information actually found in the novel, book, or play. In the end, however, it is an individual interpretation, but one that we feel can be readily supported by the information that is presented in the guide. In your course of literature study, you or your professor/teacher may come up with a different interpretation of the mood or the theme or the conflict. Your interpretation, if it can be logically supported with information contained within the piece of literature, is just as correct as ours. So is the interpretation of your teacher or professor.

Literature is simply not a black or white situation; instead, there are many gray areas that are open to varying analyses. Your task is to come up with your own analysis that you can logically defend. Hopefully, these PinkMonkey® Literature Notes will help you to accomplish that goal.

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