

MINISTRY OF PUBLIC EDUCATION OF UZBEKISTAN

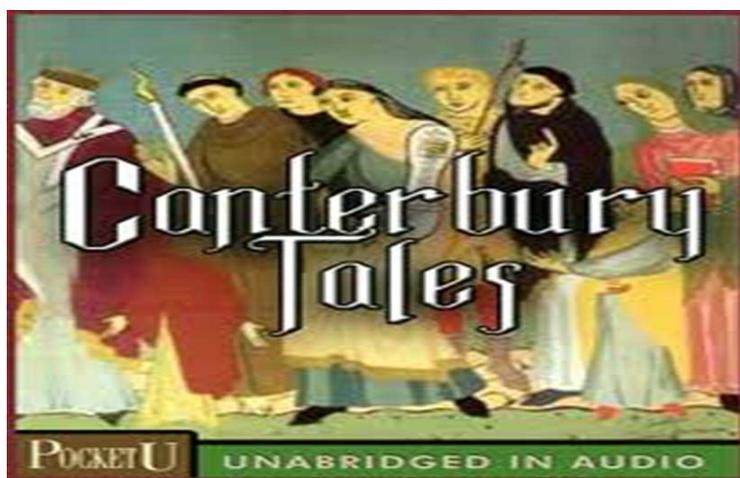
AJINIYAZ NUKUS STATE PEDAGOGICAL INSTITUTE

FACULTY OF PHILOLOGY

ENGLISH DEPARTMENT

# COURSE WORK

On the theme: *Features Geoffrey Chaucer's "Canterbury tales"*



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Nukus-2015

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## **Intoduction**

An interesting aspect of the famous literary work, "The Canterbury Tales," is the contrast of realistic and exaggerated qualities that Chaucer entitles to each of his characters. When viewed more closely, one can determine whether each of the characters is convincing or questionable based on their personalities. This essay will analyze the characteristics and personalities of the Knight, Squire, Monk, Plowman, Miller, and Parson of Chaucer's tale.

No other work prior to Chaucer's is known to have set a collection of tales within the framework of pilgrims on a pilgrimage. It is obvious, however, that Chaucer borrowed portions, sometimes very large portions, of his stories from earlier stories, and that his work was influenced by the general state of the literary world in which he lived. Storytelling was the main entertainment in England at the time, and storytelling contests had been around for hundreds of years. In 14th-century England the English Pui was a group with an appointed leader who would judge the songs of the group. The winner received a crown and, as with the winner of the Canterbury Tales, a free dinner.

The theoretical value of the five topic is the concern with the specific information and features in the Canterbury tales.

The practical value of the investigation is the benefit of examining the social concerns during the English lessons for learning a vast variety of traits, styles and ideas of the features of the tales transmission.

The object of the course work is literary and social concerns in the Canterbury tales

The subject of the corse work is the Canterbury tales by Geoffrey Chauser, The author's approaches and manners of the passing the social problems. The aim of the work is the theoretical and practical substantiation of the concerns with the peculiarities of the Canterbury tales by Geoffrey Chauser.

## **Chapter I**

### **1.1 Geoffrey Chaucer**

Chaucer known as the Father of English literature, is widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages and was the first poet to be buried in Poet's Corner of Westminster Abbey. While he achieved fame during his lifetime as an author, philosopher, alchemist and astronomer, composing a scientific treatise on the astrolabe for his ten year-old son Lewis, Chaucer also maintained an active career in the civil service as a bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. Among his many works, which include *The Book of the Duchess*, *the House of Fame*, *the Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, he is best known today for *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer is a crucial figure in developing the legitimacy of the vernacular, Middle English, at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were French and Latin.



Chaucer's long poem follows the journey of a group of pilgrims, 31 including Chaucer himself, from the Tabard Inn in Southwark to St Thomas à Becket's shrine at Canterbury Cathedral. The host at the inn suggests each pilgrim tell two tales on the way out and two on the way home to help while away their time on the road. The best storyteller is to be rewarded with a free supper on their return.

An interesting aspect of the famous literary work, "The Canterbury Tales," is the contrast of realistic and exaggerated qualities that Chaucer entitles to each of his characters. When viewed more closely, one can determine whether each of the characters is convincing or questionable based on their personalities. This essay will analyze the characteristics and personalities of the Knight, Squire, Monk, Plowman, Miller, and Parson of Chaucer's tale.

One of the most interesting of the characters is the unnamed first-person narrator, who meets the group at the inn on his way to Canterbury, decides to join their party, and describes them for the reader. Critics usually call the narrator "Chaucer the Pilgrim" to differentiate him from the author, whose point of view often seems to diverge considerably from that of his mouthpiece. While the naïve narrator approves of the worldly Prioress and Monk and is amused by the villainous Shipman, the reader is able to see beyond his uncritically approving point of view to their serious faults. The technique of the unreliable narrator leaves all direct storytelling and commentary to speakers whose point of view is suspect to various degrees and calls for the reader to infer the implicit truth from the information provided. If Chaucer did not originate this method of narration, he certainly developed it to a greater extent than any other writer before him. The device of the unreliable narrator has had an influence on later narrative writing, especially in the twentieth century, that would be difficult to overestimate, and much of this influence may be traced directly to Chaucer's own refinement of the technique.



The Canterbury

Tales, Chaucer's best-known and most important literary achievement, consists of twenty-four tales, some with prologues and epilogues, which range over a wide variety of styles, subjects, and genres. The work avoids becoming merely a loose collection of unrelated stories because of Chaucer's ingenious development of the framing device of the pilgrimage and his ability to suit his diverse tales to the personalities of their tellers. Chaucer's ideas about the book apparently evolved over a period of decades, with some tales (the Second Nun's Tale, parts of the Monk's Tale) possibly written as early as the 1370's, and others (the Nun's Priest's Tale, the Parson's Tale) probably written in the later 1390's, not long before his death. The imaginative breakthrough that made the work possible—his conceiving of the framing narrative that lends coherence to the stories—seems to have occurred some time in the 1380's, when he must have written an early version of the General Prologue. The work is evidently unfinished, though the flexible nature of the framing device allows for considerable diversity of opinion as to Chaucer's final plans for the poem's overall structure.



inconsistent in their copying of final -e and this for many years gave scholars the impression that Chaucer himself was inconsistent in using it. It has now been established, however, that -e was an important part of Chaucer's morphology (having a role in distinguishing, for example, singular adjectives from plural and subjunctive verbs from indicative). The pronunciation of Chaucer's writing otherwise differs most prominently from Modern English in that his language had not undergone the Great Vowel Shift; pronouncing Chaucer's vowels as they would be pronounced today in European languages like Italian, Spanish or German generally produces pronunciations more like Chaucer's own than Modern English pronunciation would. In addition, sounds now written in English but not pronounced were still pronounced by Chaucer: the word <knight> for Chaucer was [kniçt], not [naɪt]. The pronunciation of Chaucer's poetry can now be reconstructed fairly confidently through detailed philological research; the following gives an IPA reconstruction of the opening lines of *The Merchant's Prologue*; it is likely, moreover, that when a word ending in a vowel was followed by a word beginning in a vowel, the two vowels were elided into one syllable, as seen here (with care and...):

No other work prior to Chaucer's is known to have set a collection of tales within the framework of pilgrims on a pilgrimage. It is obvious, however, that Chaucer borrowed portions, sometimes very large portions, of his stories from earlier stories, and that his work was influenced by the general state of the literary world in which he lived. Storytelling was the main entertainment in England at the time, and storytelling contests had been around for hundreds of years. In 14th-century England the English Pui was a group with an appointed leader who would judge the songs of the group. The winner received a crown and, as with the winner of the *Canterbury Tales*, a free dinner. It was common for pilgrims on a pilgrimage to have a chosen "master of ceremonies" to guide them and organise the journey. Harold Bloom suggests that the structure is mostly original, but inspired by the "pilgrim" figures of Dante and Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*.

The Decameron by Giovanni Boccaccio contains more parallels to the Canterbury Tales than any other work. Like the Tales, it features a number of narrators who tell stories along a journey they have undertaken (to flee from the Black Plague). It ends with an apology by Boccaccio, much like Chaucer's Retraction to the Tales. A quarter of the tales in Canterbury Tales parallel a tale in the Decameron, although most of them have closer parallels in other stories. Some scholars thus find it unlikely that Chaucer had a copy of the work on hand, surmising instead that he must have merely read the Decameron at some point. Each of the tales has its own set of sources which have been suggested by scholars, but a few sources are used frequently over several tales. These include poetry by Ovid, the Bible in one of the many vulgate versions it was available in at the time (the exact one is difficult to determine), and the works of Petrarch and Dante. Chaucer was the first author to utilise the work of these last two, both Italians. Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy appears in several tales, as do the works of John Gower, a known friend to Chaucer. A full list is impossible to outline in little space, but Chaucer also, lastly, seems to have borrowed from numerous religious encyclopaedias and liturgical writings, such as John Bromyard's *Summa praedicatorum*, a preacher's handbook, and Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*. Many scholars say there is a good possibility Chaucer met Petrarch or Boccaccio.

### **1.3.Style**

The variety of Chaucer's tales shows the breadth of his skill and his familiarity with countless rhetorical forms and linguistic styles. Medieval schools of rhetoric at the time encouraged such diversity, dividing literature (as Virgil suggests) into high, middle, and low styles as measured by the density of rhetorical forms and vocabulary. Another popular method of division came from St. Augustine, who focused more on audience response and less on subject matter (a Virgilian concern). Augustine divided literature into "majestic persuades", "temperate pleases", and "subdued teaches". Writers were encouraged to write in a way that kept in mind the speaker, subject, audience, purpose, manner, and occasion. Chaucer moves freely between all of these styles, showing favouritism to

none. He not only considers the readers of his work as an audience, but the other pilgrims within the story as well, creating a multi-layered rhetorical puzzle of ambiguities. Chaucer's work thus far surpasses the ability of any single medieval theory to uncover.

The Canterbury Tales was written during a turbulent time in English history. The Catholic Church was in the midst of the Western Schism and, though it was still the only Christian authority in Europe, was the subject of heavy controversy. Lollardy, an early English religious movement led by John Wycliffe, is mentioned in the Tales, as is a specific incident involving pardoners (who gathered money in exchange for absolution from sin) who nefariously claimed to be collecting for St. Mary Rouncesval hospital in England. The Canterbury Tales is among the first English literary works to mention paper, a relatively new invention which allowed dissemination of the written word never before seen in England. Political clashes, such as the 1381 Peasants' Revolt and clashes ending in the deposing of King Richard II, further reveal the complex turmoil surrounding Chaucer in the time of the Tales' writing. Many of his close friends were executed and he himself was forced to move to Kent to get away from events in London. In 2004, Professor Linne Mooney was able to identify the scrivener who worked for Chaucer as an Adam Pinkhurst. Mooney, then a professor at the University of Maine and a visiting fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, was able to match Pinkhurst's signature, on an oath he signed, to his lettering on a copy of The Canterbury Tales that was transcribed from Chaucer's working copy.[31] While some readers look to interpret the characters of "The Canterbury Tales" as historical figures, other readers choose to interpret its significance in less literal terms. After analysis of his diction and historical context, his work appears to develop a critique against society during his lifetime. Within a number of his descriptions, his comments can appear complimentary in nature, but through clever language, the statements are ultimately critical of the pilgrim's actions. It is unclear whether Chaucer would intend for the reader to link his characters with actual persons. Instead, it appears that Chaucer creates fictional characters to be general

representations of people in such fields of work. With an understanding of medieval society, one can detect subtle satire at work.

The Tales reflect diverse views of the Church in Chaucer's England. After the Black Death, many Europeans began to question the authority of the established Church. Some turned to lollardy, while others chose less extreme paths, starting new monastic orders or smaller movements exposing church corruption in the behaviour of the clergy, false church relics or abuse of indulgences. Several characters in the Tales are religious figures, and the very setting of the pilgrimage to Canterbury is religious (although the prologue comments ironically on its merely seasonal attractions), making religion a significant theme of the work. Two characters, the Pardoner and the Summoner, whose roles apply the church's secular power, are both portrayed as deeply corrupt, greedy, and abusive. A pardoner in Chaucer's day was a person from whom one bought Church "indulgences" for forgiveness of sins, but pardoners were often thought guilty of abusing their office for their own gain. Chaucer's Pardoner openly admits the corruption of his practice while hawking his wares. The Summoner is a Church officer who brought sinners to the church court for possible excommunication and other penalties. Corrupt summoners would write false citations and frighten people into bribing them to protect their interests. Chaucer's Summoner is portrayed as guilty of the very kinds of sins he is threatening to bring others to court for, and is hinted as having a corrupt relationship with the Pardoner. In *The Friar's Tale*, one of the characters is a summoner who is shown to be working on the side of the devil, not God.

The upper class or nobility, represented chiefly by the Knight and his Squire, was in Chaucer's time steeped in a culture of chivalry and courtliness. Nobles were expected to be powerful warriors who could be ruthless on the battlefield, yet mannerly in the King's Court and Christian in their actions. Knights were expected to form a strong social bond with the men who fought alongside them, but an even stronger bond with a woman whom they idealised to strengthen their fighting ability. Though the aim of chivalry was to noble action, often its conflicting values degenerated into violence. Church leaders often tried to place restrictions on jousts

and tournaments, which at times ended in the death of the loser. The Knight's Tale shows how the brotherly love of two fellow knights turns into a deadly feud at the sight of a woman whom both idealise, with both knights willing to fight the other to the death to win her. Chivalry was in Chaucer's day on the decline, and it is possible that The Knight's Tale was intended to show its flaws, although this is disputed. Chaucer himself had fought in the Hundred Years' War under Edward III, who heavily emphasised chivalry during his reign. Two tales, Sir Topas and The Tale of Melibee are told by Chaucer himself, who is travelling with the pilgrims in his own story. Both tales seem to focus on the ill-effects of chivalry—the first making fun of chivalric rules and the second warning against violence. The Tales constantly reflect the conflict between classes. For example, the division of the three estates; the characters are all divided into three distinct classes, the classes being "those who pray" (the clergy), "those who fight" (the nobility), and "those who work" (the commoners and peasantry). Most of the tales are interlinked by common themes, and some "quit" (reply to or retaliate against) other tales. Convention is followed when the Knight begins the game with a tale, as he represents the highest social class in the group. But when he is followed by the Miller, who represents a lower class, it sets the stage for the Tales to reflect both a respect for and a disregard for upper class rules. Helen Cooper, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin and Derek Brewer, call this opposition "the ordered and the grotesque, Lent and Carnival, officially approved culture and its riotous, and high-spirited underside." Several works of the time contained the same opposition.

Chaucer's characters each express different—sometimes vastly different—views of reality, creating an atmosphere of relativism. As Helen Cooper says, "Different genres give different readings of the world: the fabliau scarcely notices the operations of God, the saint's life focuses on those at the expense of physical reality, tracts and sermons insist on prudential or orthodox morality, romances privilege human emotion." The sheer number of varying persons and stories renders the Tales as a set unable to arrive at any definite truth or reality.

#### **1.4.Genre and structure**

Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories built around a frame narrative or frame tale, a common and already long established genre of its period. Chaucer's Tales differs from most other story "collections" in this genre chiefly in its intense variation. Most story collections focused on a theme, usually a religious one. Even in the Decameron, storytellers are encouraged to stick to the theme decided on for the day. The idea of a pilgrimage to get such a diverse collection of people together for literary purposes was also unprecedented, though "the association of pilgrims and storytelling was a familiar one". Introducing a competition among the tales encourages the reader to compare the tales in all their variety, and allows Chaucer to showcase the breadth of his skill in different genres and literary forms.

While the structure of the Tales is largely linear, with one story following another, it is also much more than that. In the General Prologue, Chaucer describes, not the tales to be told, but the people who will tell them, making it clear that structure will depend on the characters rather than a general theme or moral. This idea is reinforced when the Miller interrupts to tell his tale after the Knight has finished his. Having the Knight go first, gives one the idea that all will tell their stories by class, with the Knight going first, followed by the Monk, but the Miller's interruption makes it clear that this structure will be abandoned in favour of a free and open exchange of stories among all classes present. General themes and points of view arise as tales are told which are responded to by other characters in their own tales, sometimes after a long lapse in which the theme has not been addressed. Lastly, Chaucer does not pay much attention to the progress of the trip, to the time passing as the pilgrims travel, or specific locations along the way to Canterbury. His writing of the story seems focused primarily on the stories being told, and not on the pilgrimage itself.

While Chaucer clearly states the addressees of many of his poems (the Book of the Duchess is believed to have been written for John of Gaunt on the occasion of his wife's death in 1368), the intended audience of The Canterbury Tales is more difficult to determine. Chaucer was a courtier, leading some to believe that he was mainly a court poet who wrote exclusively for the nobility. He is referred to as a

noble translator and poet by Eustache Deschamps and by his contemporary John Gower. It has been suggested that the poem was intended to be read aloud, which is probable as this was a common activity at the time. However, it also seems to have been intended for private reading as well, since Chaucer frequently refers to himself as the writer, rather than the speaker, of the work. Determining the intended audience directly from the text is even more difficult, since the audience is part of the story. This makes it difficult to tell when Chaucer is writing to the fictional pilgrim audience or the actual reader.

Chaucer's works may have been distributed in some form during his lifetime in part or in whole. Scholars speculate that manuscripts were circulated among his friends, but likely remained unknown to most people until after his death. However, the speed with which copyists strove to write complete versions of his tale in manuscript form shows that Chaucer was a famous and respected poet in his own day. The Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts are examples of the care taken to distribute the work. More manuscript copies of the poem exist than for any other poem of its day except *The Prick of Conscience*, causing some scholars to give it the medieval equivalent of "best-seller" status. Even the most elegant of the illustrated manuscripts, however, is not nearly as decorated and fancified as the work of authors of more respectable works such as John Lydgate's religious and historical literature.

John Lydgate and Thomas Occleve were among the first critics of Chaucer's *Tales*, praising the poet as the greatest English poet of all time and the first to show what the language was truly capable of poetically. This sentiment was universally agreed upon by later critics into the mid-15th century. Glosses included in *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts of the time praised him highly for his skill with "sentence" and rhetoric, the two pillars by which medieval critics judged poetry. The most respected of the tales was at this time the *Knight's*, as it was full of both. The incompleteness of the *Tales* led several medieval authors to write additions and supplements to the tales to make them more complete. Some of the oldest existing manuscripts of the tales include new or modified tales, showing that even

early on, such additions were being created. These emendations included various expansions of the Cook's Tale, which Chaucer never finished, The Plowman's Tale, The Tale of Gamelyn, the Siege of Thebes, and the Tale of Beryn.

The Tale of Beryn, written by an anonymous author in the 15th century, is preceded by a lengthy prologue in which the pilgrims arrive at Canterbury and their activities there are described. While the rest of the pilgrims disperse throughout the town, the Pardoner seeks the affections of Kate the barmaid, but faces problems dealing with the man in her life and the innkeeper Harry Bailey. As the pilgrims turn back home, the Merchant restarts the storytelling with Tale of Beryn. In this tale, a young man named Beryn travels from Rome to Egypt to seek his fortune only to be cheated by other businessmen there. He is then aided by a local man in getting his revenge. The tale comes from the French tale Bérinus and exists in a single early manuscript of the tales, although it was printed along with the tales in a 1721 edition by John Urry.

John Lydgate wrote The Siege of Thebes in about 1420. Like the Tale of Beryn, it is preceded by a prologue in which the pilgrims arrive in Canterbury. Lydgate places himself among the pilgrims as one of them and describes how he was a part of Chaucer's trip and heard the stories. He characterises himself as a monk and tells a long story about the history of Thebes before the events of the Knight's Tale. John Lydgate's tale was popular early on and exists in old manuscripts both on its own and as part of the tales. It was first printed as early as 1561 by John Stow and several editions for centuries after followed suit.

There are actually two versions of The Plowman's Tale, both of which are influenced by the story Piers Plowman, a work written during Chaucer's lifetime. Chaucer describes a Plowman in the General Prologue of his tales, but never gives him his own tale. One tale, written by Thomas Occleve, describes the miracle of the Virgin and the Sleeveless Garment. Another tale features a pelican and a griffin debating church corruption, with the pelican taking a position of protest akin to John Wycliffe's ideas.

The Tale of Gamelyn was included in an early manuscript version of the tales, Harley 7334, which is notorious for being one of the lower-quality early manuscripts in terms of editor error and alteration. It is now widely rejected by scholars as an authentic Chaucerian tale, although some scholars think he may have intended to rewrite the story as a tale for the Yeoman. Dates for its authorship vary from 1340 to 1370.

Many literary works (both fiction and non-fiction alike) have used a similar frame narrative to The Canterbury Tales as an homage. Science fiction writer Dan Simmons wrote his Hugo Award winning novel *Hyperion* based on an extra-planetary group of pilgrims. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins used The Canterbury Tales as a structure for his 2004 non-fiction book about evolution titled *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution*. His animal pilgrims are on their way to find the common ancestor, each telling a tale about evolution.

Henry Dudeney's book *The Canterbury Puzzles* contains a part reputedly lost from what modern readers know as Chaucer's tales.

Historical mystery novelist P.C. Doherty wrote a series of novels based on The Canterbury Tales, making use of the story frame and of Chaucer's characters.

Canadian author Angie Abdou translates The Canterbury Tales to a cross section of people, all snow sports enthusiasts but from different social backgrounds, converging on a remote backcountry ski cabin in British Columbia in the 2011 novel *The Canterbury Trail*.

## Chapter II

### 2.1. Summary of the Poem

In the beauty of April, the Narrator and 29 oddly assorted travelers happen to meet at the Tabard Inn in Southwark, London. This becomes the launching point for their 60-mile, four-day religious journey to the shrine of St. Thomas à Becket at the Cathedral in Canterbury. Great blessing and forgiveness were to be heaped upon those who made the pilgrimage; relics of the saint were enshrined there, and miracles had been reported by those who prayed before the shrine. Chaucer's pilgrims, however, are not all traveling for religious reasons. Many of them simply enjoy social contact or the adventure of travel.

As the travelers are becoming acquainted, their Host, the innkeeper Harry Bailley, decides to join them. He suggests that they pass the time along the way by telling stories. Each pilgrim is to tell four stories—two on the way to Canterbury, and two on the return trip—a total of 120 stories. He will furnish dinner at the end of the trip to the one who tells the best tale. The framework is thus laid out for the organization of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer, the Narrator, observes all of the characters as they are arriving and getting acquainted. He describes in detail most of the travelers which represent a cross-section of fourteenth-century English society. All levels are represented, beginning with the Knight who is the highest ranking character socially. Several levels of holiness and authority in the clergy are among the pilgrims while the majority of the characters are drawn from the middle class. A small number of the peasant class are also making the journey, most of them as servants to other pilgrims.

As the travelers begin their journey the next morning, they draw straws to see who will tell the first tale. The Knight draws the shortest straw. He begins the storytelling with a long romantic epic about two brave young knights who both fall in love with the same woman and who spend years attempting to win her love. Everyone enjoys the tale and they agree that the trip is off to an excellent start. When the Host invites the Monk to tell a story to match the Knight's, the Miller,

who is drunk, becomes so rude and insistent that he be allowed to go next that the Host allows it. The Miller's tale is indeed very funny, involving several tricks and a very dirty prank as a young wife conspires with her lover to make love to him right under her husband's nose.

The Miller's fabliau upsets the Reeve because it involves an aging carpenter being cuckolded by his young wife, and the Reeve himself is aging and was formerly a carpenter. Insulted by the Miller, the Reeve retaliates with a tale about a miller who is made a fool of in very much the same manner as the carpenter in the preceding rendition.

After the Reeve, the Cook speaks up and begins to tell another humorous adventure about a thieving, womanizing young apprentice. Chaucer did not finish writing this story; it stops almost at the beginning.

When the dialogue among the travelers resumes, the morning is half gone and the Host, Harry Bailley, urges the Man of Law to begin his entry quickly. Being a lawyer, the Man of Law is very long-winded and relates a very long story about the life of a noblewoman named Constance who suffers patiently and virtuously through a great many terrible trials. In the end she is rewarded for her perseverance.

The Man of Law's recital, though lengthy, has pleased the other pilgrims very much. Harry Bailley then calls upon the Parson to tell a similar tale of goodness; but the Shipman, who wants to hear no more sermonizing, says he will take his turn next and will tell a merry story without a hint of preaching. Indeed, his story involves a lovely wife who cuckolds her husband to get money for a new dress and gets away with the whole affair.

Evidently looking for contrast in subject matter, the Host next invites the Prioress to give them a story. Graciously, she relates a short legend about a little schoolboy who is martyred and through whose death a miracle takes place.

After hearing this miraculous narrative, all of the travelers become very subdued, so the Host calls upon the Narrator (Chaucer) to liven things up. Slyly making fun of the Host's literary pretensions, Chaucer recites a brilliant parody on knighthood

composed in low rhyme. Harry hates Chaucer's poem and interrupts to complain; again in jest, Chaucer tells a long, boring version of an ancient myth. However, the Host is very impressed by the serious moral tone of this inferior tale and is highly complimentary.

Since the myth just told involved a wise and patient wife, Harry Bailley takes this opportunity to criticize his own shrewish wife. He then digresses further with a brief commentary on monks which leads him to call upon the pilgrim Monk for his contribution to the entertainment.

The Monk belies his fun-loving appearance by giving a disappointing recital about famous figures who are brought low by fate. The Monk's subject is so dreary that the Knight stops him, and the Host berates him for lowering the morale of the party. When the Monk refuses to change his tone, the Nun's Priest accepts the Host's request for a happier tale. The Priest renders the wonderful fable of Chanticleer, a proud rooster taken in by the flattery of a clever fox.

Harry Bailley is wildly enthusiastic about the Priest's tale, turning very bawdy in his praise. The earthy Wife of Bath is chosen as the next participant, probably because the Host suspects that she will continue in the same bawdy vein. However, the Wife turns out to be quite a philosopher, prefacing her tale with a long discourse on marriage. When she does tell her tale, it is about the marriage of a young and virile knight to an ancient hag.

When the Wife has concluded, the Friar announces that he will tell a worthy tale about a summoner. He adds that everyone knows there is nothing good to say about summoners and tells a story which proves his point.

Infuriated by the Friar's insulting tale, the Summoner first tells a terrible joke about friars and then a story which condemns them, too. His rendering is quite coarse and dirty.

Hoping for something more uplifting next, the Host gives the Cleric his chance, reminding the young scholar not to be too scholarly and to put in some adventure. Obliging, the Cleric entertains with his tale of the cruel Walter of Saluzzo who tested his poor wife unmercifully.

The Cleric's tale reminds the Merchant of his own unhappy marriage and his story reflects his state. It is yet another tale of a bold, unfaithful wife in a marriage with a much older man.

When the Merchant has finished, Harry Bailley again interjects complaints about his own domineering wife, but then requests a love story of the Squire. The young man begins an exotic tale that promises to be a fine romance, but Chaucer did not complete this story, so it is left unfinished.

The dialogue resumes with the Franklin complimenting the Squire and trying to imitate his eloquence with an ancient lyric of romance.

There is no conversation among the pilgrims before the Physician's tale. His story is set in ancient Rome and concerns a young virgin who prefers death to dishonor.

The Host has really taken the Physician's sad story to heart and begs the Pardoner to lift his spirits with a happier tale. However, the other pilgrims want something more instructive, so the Pardoner obliges. After revealing himself to be a very wicked man, the Pardoner instructs the company with an allegory about vice leading three young men to their deaths. When he is finished, the Pardoner tries to sell his fake relics to his fellow travellers, but the Host prevents him, insulting and angering him in the process. The Knight has to intervene to restore peace.

The Second Nun then tells the moral and inspiring life of St. Cecelia. About five miles later, a Canon and his Yeoman join the party, having ridden madly to catch up. Conversion reveals these men to be outlaws of sorts, but they are made welcome and invited to participate in the storytelling all the same.

When the Canon's Yeoman reveals their underhanded business, the Canon rides off in a fit of anger, and the Canon's Yeoman relates a tale about a cheating alchemist, really a disclosure about the Canon.

It is late afternoon by the time the Yeoman finishes and the Cook has become so drunk that he falls off his horse. There is an angry interchange between the Cook and the Manciple, and the Cook has to be placated with more wine. The Manciple then tells his story, which is based on an ancient myth and explains why the crow is black.

At sundown the Manciple ends his story. The Host suggests that the Parson conclude the day of tale-telling with a fable. However, the Parson preaches a two-hour sermon on penitence instead. The Canterbury Tales end here.

Although Chaucer actually completed only about one-fifth of the proposed 120 tales before his death, The Canterbury Tales reflects all the major types of medieval literature. They are defined for the reader as follows:

The length of time necessary to read the entire work will depend on whether it is being read in Modern or Middle English. The reading in Modern English will go much faster; probably an hour for the prologue and an hour for The Knight's Tale, with the remainder of the tales requiring 30 to 45 minutes each.

If the student is required to read the work in Middle English, with all the footnotes for interpretation, each part named above will take about twice as long. The reader can estimate a total of 14 hours for the Modern English version, or 28 hours for the Middle English.

It is strongly suggested that the book be divided by the reader into manageable units for sittings of no more than two hours.

The Canterbury Tales Overview (Literary Essentials: Christian Fiction and Nonfiction)

In the "General Prologue" of The Canterbury Tales, Geoffrey Chaucer describes the assembling of a group of pilgrims at the Tabard Inn near London. They plan to journey to Canterbury to visit the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket, archbishop of Canterbury, murdered by agents of King Henry II of England in 1170. A pilgrimage to this spot was one of the favorite religious exercises in medieval England, but Chaucer's work does not deal with an actual pilgrimage. It would have been an impossible feat for about thirty people traveling on horseback to tell a series of tales, mostly in verse. In "The Knight's Tale," one character says: This world nys but a athurghfareful of wo, And we been pilgrymes, passinge to and fro, Deeth is an ende of every worldly soore.

(This world is but a thoroughfare of woe/ And we be pilgrims passing to and fro/  
Death is the end of every worldly sore.) This pilgrimage, then, is a symbol of the life of human beings.

## **2.2.Plot structure analysis**

Their host at the Tabard, Harry Bailey, proclaims that he will accompany the pilgrims and judge the effectiveness of the tales. The scope of the completed work, two tales by each pilgrim on the way out, two more on the way back, would have amounted to about 120 tales. Like Edmund Spenser's *The Faerie Queene* (1590, 1596) and other grandiose literary schemes, the work falls far short of its goal. The pilgrims, in fact, do not reach Canterbury. Chaucer may have run out of time or energy—or he may never have intended to write so many tales. In the symbolic sense, Canterbury represents death, the end of the earthly journey. It is fitting that the pilgrims remain on their pilgrimage of life toward death.

Most of the pilgrims come alive in the descriptions in the "General Prologue." Several colorful ones are in holy orders or are functionaries of the medieval church. These include priests (at least two, possibly four), two nuns, a monk, a friar, a pardoner who sells papal indulgences, and a summoner who issues summonses to an ecclesiastical court. The majority of these officials hardly live up to their vocational ideal. The Prioress is a rich, extravagant woman, the Friar gives very easy penances to confessors to encourage personal gifts, the Monk spends little time in his cloister, and the Pardoner and Summoner are scoundrels. The Parson, however, performs his duties admirably; he preaches well and, more important, obeys the rules himself. He is patient, diligent, generous, a true shepherd of souls.

Another group of pilgrims contributes tales on the subject of marriage. Of these, the most fascinating, though not the most exemplary, is that of the Wife of Bath. She has had five husbands and is now seeking a sixth. Her tale, designed to prove that wives should have sovereignty over their husbands, shocks several of the men and provokes several more marriage tales. The Clerk, a university student who will probably become a cleric, tells of a lord who subjects his wife to years of

abuse, all to prove that if she submits patiently to it all, she will be rewarded. The Merchant offers a tale of a young wife who betrays her senile husband. The Franklin, who clearly does not approve of most of what he has heard and seen, offers a romance of two devoted—and married—lovers. Arveragus, the husband, resembles the Clerk's lord in expecting more or less blind obedience from his Dorigen, but extends her torment only minutes instead of years. All these men reject utterly the Wife of Bath's treatise on sovereignty, but Averagus, while no incipient feminist, understands that women, like men, enjoy liberty and temperate behavior from their mates.

The Canterbury Tales exists as a group of ten fragments, containing from one to six tales each. Although some fragments are clearly meant to precede or follow others, no one knows what Chaucer's complete order might have been, but that he wanted the Parson's Tale to come last is obvious. This man's lesson on penance and on the Seven Deadly Sins amounts to a resolution of the points of conflict seen in the marriage tales, for instance, and of controversies that erupt among the pilgrims themselves.

These controversies, for the medieval Christian mind, reflect the Seven Deadly Sins: pride, greed, lust, anger, gluttony, envy, and sloth. The Nun's Priest's Tale is a medieval favorite, the beast fable. A fox invades a barnyard and captures Chauntecleer, a cock, who has wit enough to know that the fox, successfully fleeing from the owner's pursuit, is too proud of his own cleverness to avoid bragging to his pursuers. To brag is to open the mouth in which he clutches Chauntecleer, allowing his escape to the nearest tree. The Pardoner's proposition is simply that greed is the root of all evil. Three men fall victim to their own greed by killing one another, each obsessed with being the possessor of gold coins found under a tree.

Sin breaks out not only in the tales but also in the links between them, in which the pilgrims interact. One prominent sin is anger. Some of the pilgrims either already know and dislike their fellow travelers or quickly learn to dislike them. The Miller tells a tale in which a carpenter is betrayed by his wife and a

parish clerk. The Reeve, employed as a foreman on a manor, is a carpenter by trade who sees the Miller's carpenter as a caricature of himself. His response is to retaliate by telling a tale featuring a miller who is humiliated even further. There is no reconciliation between these two or in a similar exchange of tales between the Friar and the Summoner, but in a stormy clash between the Pardoner and the Host, occasioned by the Pardoner's charge that the Host is the greatest sinner of the group, the Knight intervenes and literally makes them kiss and make up.

The fact that sin is not always punished and sometimes might seem to be at least tacitly approved in *The Canterbury Tales* raises the question of the sincerity of Chaucer's insistence that all his writing reflects Christian doctrine. The tale of the Parson goes far in answering this question. The Parson is not Chaucer's most interesting character, and up to the time of his tale, he is an observer. Someone else, the Knight or the Host, steps forward to make peace. The Parson is presented as a man of great integrity in the "General Prologue," but he is silent throughout most of the work. When the Host introduces him rather rudely, he rejects the latter's suggestion of a "fable." The Host then suggests a quick tale; the Parson replies with the longest one of all. His tale, though far from the most popular among today's readers, has qualities that Chaucer's contemporaries surely would have recognized. It would have struck them as less dull than we find it. This tale would have helped the medieval audience understand the entire *Canterbury Tales* more clearly than today's typical reader. It is one of only two tales composed in prose rather than verse, but the prose clearly and vigorously resolves the moral issues posed by the waywardness of the pilgrims and of the characters in their tales. It explains penitence, the process of contrition, confession, and satisfaction that each sinner must undergo. Also, it explains thoroughly the Seven Deadly Sins, which all good pilgrims must strive to avoid.

### **2.3. Influence on literature**

It is sometimes argued that the greatest contribution that this work made to English literature was in popularising the literary use of the vernacular, English, rather than French or Latin. English had, however, been used as a literary language

for centuries before Chaucer's life, and several of Chaucer's contemporaries—John Gower, William Langland, and the Pearl Poet—also wrote major literary works in English. It is unclear to what extent Chaucer was responsible for starting a trend rather than simply being part of it.[citation needed] It is interesting to note that, although Chaucer had a powerful influence in poetic and artistic terms, which can be seen in the great number of forgeries and mistaken attributions (such as *The Flower and the Leaf* which was translated by John Dryden), modern English spelling and orthography owes much more to the innovations made by the Court of Chancery in the decades during and after his lifetime.

While Chaucer clearly states the addressees of many of his poems (the *Book of the Duchess* is believed to have been written for John of Gaunt on the occasion of his wife's death in 1368), the intended audience of *The Canterbury Tales* is more difficult to determine. Chaucer was a courtier, leading some to believe that he was mainly a court poet who wrote exclusively for the nobility. He is referred to as a noble translator and poet by Eustache Deschamps and by his contemporary John Gower. It has been suggested that the poem was intended to be read aloud, which is probable as this was a common activity at the time. However, it also seems to have been intended for private reading as well, since Chaucer frequently refers to himself as the writer, rather than the speaker, of the work. Determining the intended audience directly from the text is even more difficult, since the audience is part of the story. This makes it difficult to tell when Chaucer is writing to the fictional pilgrim audience or the actual reader.

Chaucer's works may have been distributed in some form during his lifetime in part or in whole. Scholars speculate that manuscripts were circulated among his friends, but likely remained unknown to most people until after his death. However, the speed with which copyists strove to write complete versions of his tale in manuscript form shows that Chaucer was a famous and respected poet in his own day. The Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts are examples of the care taken to distribute the work. More manuscript copies of the poem exist than for any other poem of its day except *The Prick of Conscience*, causing some scholars to give it

the medieval equivalent of "best-seller" status. Even the most elegant of the illustrated manuscripts, however, is not nearly as decorated and fancified as the work of authors of more respectable works such as John Lydgate's religious and historical literature.

John Lydgate and Thomas Occleve were among the first critics of Chaucer's Tales, praising the poet as the greatest English poet of all time and the first to show what the language was truly capable of poetically. This sentiment was universally agreed upon by later critics into the mid-15th century. Glosses included in Canterbury Tales manuscripts of the time praised him highly for his skill with "sentence" and rhetoric, the two pillars by which medieval critics judged poetry. The most respected of the tales was at this time the Knight's, as it was full of both. The incompleteness of the Tales led several medieval authors to write additions and supplements to the tales to make them more complete. Some of the oldest existing manuscripts of the tales include new or modified tales, showing that even early on, such additions were being created. These emendations included various expansions of the Cook's Tale, which Chaucer never finished, The Plowman's Tale, The Tale of Gamelyn, the Siege of Thebes, and the Tale of Beryn.

The Tale of Beryn, written by an anonymous author in the 15th century, is preceded by a lengthy prologue in which the pilgrims arrive at Canterbury and their activities there are described. While the rest of the pilgrims disperse throughout the town, the Pardoner seeks the affections of Kate the barmaid, but faces problems dealing with the man in her life and the innkeeper Harry Bailey. As the pilgrims turn back home, the Merchant restarts the storytelling with Tale of Beryn. In this tale, a young man named Beryn travels from Rome to Egypt to seek his fortune only to be cheated by other businessmen there. He is then aided by a local man in getting his revenge. The tale comes from the French tale *Bérinus* and exists in a single early manuscript of the tales, although it was printed along with the tales in a 1721 edition by John Urry.

John Lydgate wrote The Siege of Thebes in about 1420. Like the Tale of Beryn, it is preceded by a prologue in which the pilgrims arrive in Canterbury.

Lydgate places himself among the pilgrims as one of them and describes how he was a part of Chaucer's trip and heard the stories. He characterises himself as a monk and tells a long story about the history of Thebes before the events of the Knight's Tale. John Lydgate's tale was popular early on and exists in old manuscripts both on its own and as part of the tales. It was first printed as early as 1561 by John Stow and several editions for centuries after followed suit.

There are actually two versions of The Plowman's Tale, both of which are influenced by the story Piers Plowman, a work written during Chaucer's lifetime. Chaucer describes a Plowman in the General Prologue of his tales, but never gives him his own tale. One tale, written by Thomas Occleve, describes the miracle of the Virgin and the Sleeveless Garment. Another tale features a pelican and a griffin debating church corruption, with the pelican taking a position of protest akin to John Wycliffe's ideas.

The Tale of Gamelyn was included in an early manuscript version of the tales, Harley 7334, which is notorious for being one of the lower-quality early manuscripts in terms of editor error and alteration. It is now widely rejected by scholars as an authentic Chaucerian tale, although some scholars think he may have intended to rewrite the story as a tale for the Yeoman. Dates for its authorship vary from 1340 to 1370.

## Conclusion

No other work prior to Chaucer's is known to have set a collection of tales within the framework of pilgrims on a pilgrimage. It is obvious, however, that Chaucer borrowed portions, sometimes very large portions, of his stories from earlier stories, and that his work was influenced by the general state of the literary world in which he lived. Storytelling was the main entertainment in England at the time, and storytelling contests had been around for hundreds of years. In 14th-century England the English Pui was a group with an appointed leader who would judge the songs of the group. The winner received a crown and, as with the winner of the Canterbury Tales, a free dinner. It was common for pilgrims on a pilgrimage to have a chosen "master of ceremonies" to guide them and organise the journey. Harold Bloom suggests that the structure is mostly original, but inspired by the "pilgrim" figures of Dante and Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*.

Having said about Geoffrey Chaucer's works we dare to say that it is the most important milestone in the creative activity of his. But even amongst his immortal works of this kind the Canterbury tales stands on the highest degree. The first reason of this lies in the period of writing of it. The tales referred to the second, period of creative activity, it is seemingly summarizes the whole life of the characters.

My work aimed to say that Canterbury tales are very useful on branch of teaching and learning the history of English literature, we tried to prove that even being the narration does not lose the real character. We made our conclusion that fairy tales cannot but link with the real life and the problems of life, love, happiness, sadness, revenge exist in both at the Heavens and the Earth.

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