



The Canterbury Tales, and Other Poems

Geoffrey Chaucer, David Laing Purves (Editor)

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LIFE OF CHAUCER

THE CANTERBURY TALES

The General Prologue

The Knight's Tale

The Miller's tale

The Reeve's Tale

The Cook's Tale

The Man of Law's Tale

The Wife of Bath's Tale

The Friar's Tale

The Sompnour's Tale

The Clerk's Tale

The Merchant's Tale

The Squire's Tale

The Franklin's Tale

The Doctor's Tale

The Pardoner's Tale

The Shipman's Tale

The Prioress's Tale

Chaucer's Tale of Sir Thopas

Chaucer's Tale of Meliboeus

The Monk's Tale

The Nun's Priest's Tale

The Second Nun's Tale

The Canon's Yeoman's Tale

The Manciple's Tale

The Parson's Tale

Preces de Chauceres

THE COURT OF LOVE

THE CUCKOO AND THE NIGHTINGALE

THE ASSEMBLY OF FOWLS

THE FLOWER AND THE LEAF

THE HOUSE OF FAME

TROILUS AND CRESSIDA

CHAUCER'S DREAM

THE PROLOGUE TO THE LEGEND OF GOOD WOMEN

CHAUCER'S A.B.C.

MISCELLANEOUS POEMS

The Canterbury Tales, and Other Poems Details

Date : Published March 24th 2011 (first published 1390)

ISBN :

Author : Geoffrey Chaucer , David Laing Purves (Editor)

Format : Kindle Edition 918 pages

Genre : Classics, Poetry, Fiction, Literature, Historical, Historical Fiction

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From Reader Review The Canterbury Tales, and Other Poems for online ebook

Andrew Dale says

Full disclosure, I did not read the entire book - I read the General Prologue, The Pardoners Tale and The Nun's Priest's Tale, in an old edition of the Norton Anthology of Poetry.

Chaucer is someone I've been wanting to read for a while, and it was just as interesting as people say it is. There were three aspects that stood out to me in particular.

First, the Tales were excellent ways of learning about period English society. The General Prologue, especially, introduces all the characters (the Knight, the Miller, the Pardoners, etc.) and gives you an idea of what the stereotypes of the day were, and how people spoke, and socialized. Although more religious on the surface - the Church is clearly a far more powerful and important figure in most people's daily lives than today - for the most part, the scene of travelers gathering at a pub to hear each other's tales is fairly universal.

Second, the language of the text itself is a real pleasure. I did not read it "in translation" - in fact, once you get used to the spellings and occasional French borrowings, most of the sentences are easily understood, and there should be glosses for anything else. It has a nice rhythm, and is obviously well suited to being read aloud. I was surprised, in fact, at how close to our time the language felt.

Third, the tales themselves are maybe not quite as interesting in and of themselves. The telling of them tends to meander, and it's easy to get lost in epic digressions. And the tales don't really seem to be about the plot, really, so don't expect Dan Brown or something. But they can be quite funny, with a biting, sarcastic wit and a keen insight into a human nature that remains familiar to anyone of our time.

Having read this portion of the Tales in the Anthology, I don't think I would go on to read the rest of the tales by myself, but I would definitely enjoy working through them as part of a course.

Nathan Hatch says

What I liked

It's a window into 14th century England. The cast of characters comes from all levels of society: everything from a nun to a miller to a "clerk" (i.e. scholar) to a "manciple" (apparently, a person charged with managing food provisions for an institution like a convent). It's especially interesting to see how these characters interact with each other in the "framing story" (the events along the journey to Canterbury, as opposed to the many stories that they tell along the way). There were many bizarre ways to make a living back in those days.

Although the book is very religious, it is also critical of religion. There are several stories denouncing religious authority figures for abusing their power.

It's got so many tales, at least one of them is bound to interest you. Topics include: a swindling miller, the virtuous martyr Saint Cecile, a corrupt judge, the Sultan of Syria, greed and betrayal, a bird-whispering ring,

the thing that women love the most, and alchemy.

Regarding this particular edition, I like that the editor (D. Laing Purves) translates a lot of the Middle English, but leaves it untranslated when necessary for meter or rhyme. This way, you can learn a bit of Middle English as you go along, rather than being completely overwhelmed diving headfirst into an untranslated version. You'll learn a lot about English etymology. (Middle English explains a lot of bizarre features of Modern English. For instance, the "silent e" at the end of a word used to be pronounced!)

Even better, you can get this e-book free in the Kindle store. (You know you're reading an old book when it has high-quality critical editions already in the public domain!)

What I did not like

Fair warning: Chaucer died before completing this book. You won't get to hear a tale from all of the characters, and a lot of the framing story is missing. Still, what does exist is plenty interesting.

Some of the tales are jarring to modern morals. There's one about "cursed Jews" murdering a Christian boy, and several that joke about rape.

The margin notes format was designed for 80-character-wide monospace text, and is sometimes a bit confusing on the Kindle. It's quite legible once you get used to it, though.

Two of the stories are prose, and the editor of this edition (D. Laing Purves) abridged about half of each of those stories. I was mostly fine with this, except that in the latter story (the Parson's sermon) he cut the discussion of Lechery. I guess, being a citizen of Victorian England, he didn't want to talk about sex. Anyway, you can find other translations of this "tale" online, which I recommend doing---it's quite interesting.

Stephen says

The Canterbury Tales are a true classic. They are a series of stories told by various on a journey. Some scholars now believe that Chaucer did not write them, but I choose to believe that he did. It is one of the best written pieces of classical writing.

Patricia Ferreira says

Good book, an interesting view of life in the middle ages, and although it is compared to Boccaccio's Decameron, in my opinion the latter is funnier.

Kelly Egan says

I want to say that I loved this, but it was such a long and difficult read. It took me about 6 months of reading and putting it down and picking it back up again to get through. Some of his Canterbury Tales were wonderful and amusing and others, like The Parson's Tale which almost killed me with boredom. I would

love to take a class on Chaucer's writing though, because it is very beautiful and I would love to hear what Chaucer experts have to say about his work.

Deanna Hoard says

I had a class in Chaucer and the Canterbury Tales. The professor read the Tales in the Middle English they were written in and we had the luxury of putting the stories into context. I had read the translations to modern English in high school and was not impressed, but hearing Chaucer in his own language was sublime and more than worthy of five stars.

Courtney says

Never can go wrong with the classics

Marren Haneberg says

Just read the Canterbury Tales

Daniel Pool says

Pretty great work. I am always inspired when I read this. It's so human even though it was written ages ago.

Lynn says

This is the first time I have read this book and I'm not sure I chose the right edition. The free edition from Amazon is apparently a 19th century translation which combined language from that period and Chaucer's period. I found it was truly a slog and if it wasn't for Wikipedia, I'm not sure I would have understood anything. I get points for trying!

Cory Briggs says

Alot to take in.

What started me to read Chaucer was the fact that he seemed to be close friends to John Wycliffe. Wycliffe translated the Bible into the English language of the time . Wycliffe was also a reformer who spoke against the abuses of the catholic church of the time. Contrast that to Chaucer's tales of blood y knights, greedy pardoner, farting shepherds, and fart reverting monks, and all; well what can you say? These stories give you a good picture of what life was like during the Middle Ages in England.. Moral tales that are gross, ribald,

serious, and some times hard to swallow. I gave the Tales 3 stars because it is tedious to read at times. They do a good job of translating the old English into modern words. However I think you would be better served if you read the Cliff Notes of "The Canterbury Tales" before you read the book.

Hiéroglyphe says

*« Non, non, que plutôt Christ me maudisse !
Laisse, dit-il, je n'en ferai rien, parbleu !
Tu voudrais me faire baiser tes vieilles chausses,
et me jurer que c'est une relique de saint,
fussent-elles barbouillées par ton fondement !
Mais, par la croix qu'a trouvée Sainte Hélène,
j'aimerais mieux avoir tes couilles dans ma main
au lieu de reliques et de saintetés ;
laisse-les moi couper, je t'aiderai à les porter ;
on les enchâssera dans un étron de porc. »*

Kristina says

Worth the long read

It takes a while to read, but it is worth it to skim past all the college level analysis to get back to the meat of the tales. I can't believe it took me this long to read it.

Noah says

If you've read the The Decameron you've probably read most of the same stories in the Canterbury Tales. I preferred Chaucer's original poems to his translations, but it seems that most of his famous work was translations from Italian, French, Greek and Latin. A classic is a classic, however, so that alone makes it worth reading.

Sonnet Fitzgerald says

Caveat: I *only* read the Canterbury tales out of this collection, for book club, but this edition was free online.

I remember reading the Canterbury Tales in high school and really enjoying it, but that was 25 years ago. It was time to give it another go!

So I started off eagerly, and got into the Knight's Tale, and found with joy that I still really, really like reading old texts in Middle English. The language is so fun, and the variant spellings and uses of words we don't see today give amazing insight to the story. I had a lot of fun with that. But I've always liked to read stuff like that: Chaucer, Beowulf, the Iliad, el Poema del Mio Cid.

That said, I got a bit farther in and also remembered what I hated about medieval works: The long, pointless rambling, irrelevant details, and sermons. I'm sure they were the height of excitement in their day, but my modern ear can't tolerate all the unnecessary text. Skim, skim, skim.

Some stories like the Miller's Tale or the Pardoner's Tale read nice and tight, with comedy and twist endings much like you'd see today. Others? Not so much.

If you are reading this for the first time, I would definitely encourage you to experience this great work of English literature, but with some advice: Get a more modern translation unless you have a background in medieval language, and don't feel bad about skimming through or skipping the parts that drag on and on pointlessly. You'll understand and enjoy the text much more, and that's worth making some adjustments for.
