



## Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer's Middle English

(To go directly to Index of Lessons [click here](#)).

### Introduction

The best way to learn to read Chaucer's Middle English is to enroll in a course with a good and enthusiastic teacher (as most teachers of Chaucer are). Though students enrolled in Chaucer courses may find some parts of this page useful, it is intended primarily for those who, for a variety of reasons, cannot take such a course but nevertheless want to increase their enjoyment of Chaucer's works.

The aim of this page is to provide the user with the means to learn to pronounce Chaucer's English and to acquire an elementary knowledge of Chaucer's grammar and vocabulary. It does not offer much on matters of style and versification and has almost nothing on the literary qualities of Chaucer's work. The user who works conscientiously through these materials should be ready to study such matters on his or her own

(beginning with the materials on the Harvard Geoffrey Chaucer Website, and exploring other sources both on and off the Web).

It is assumed that the user of the page has a printed text of *The Canterbury Tales*. There are texts on line, but none with the quality one finds in print (a printed edition, with a good glossary and notes, remains the most effective form of hypertext). The exercises on this page assume that the user has a copy of either the *Riverside Chaucer* or *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, based on the Riverside. Other well glossed editions may be used, though problems will arise in the self-tests provided, since they are co-ordinated with the glosses and Explanatory Notes in the recommended texts.

The lessons begin with Chaucer's pronunciation, often illustrated with sound (therefore you must have a computer with sound capabilities in order to get the full benefit of this page). Most of the sound clips are small and should offer no problems in loading; a couple of them are relatively long and will load slowly on a telephone modem. These are labelled with warnings and alternate sound clips are suggested. (Note too that on some browsers a new window will be opened for each sound clip; take care to close the window after you are finished with the sound clip, to prevent opening too many windows.)

In the early sections on Chaucer's language links are frequently provided to more detailed discussions of particular matters; it is not necessary to follow up every link. The user should be guided by his or her own interests.

Beginning with *The Shipman's Tale*, the texts used are interlinear translations, provided with quizzes -- self-tests for the users to check on their progress in learning Chaucer's language. The assumption is that the quizzes will encourage very close attention to the language; the goal is not to encourage the users to translate literally but rather to enable them to make Chaucer's language part of their own. For example, the word "hende," used so frequently in *The Miller's Tale*, has a great variety of meanings -- clever, tricky, courteous, handy -- all of which are implied in any single usage, lending these usages a richness in reference that is lost in any translation. The reader who has carefully considered the word in its various contexts can enjoy some of that richness.

The lessons take up the tales in this order: *The Shipman's Tale*, *The General Prologue*, *The Knight's Tale*, *The Miller's Tale*, *The Reeve's Tale*, and *The Cook's Tale*. This is the recommended order, but users are of course free to study the tales in whatever order they wish. Other tales are provided with [interlinear translations](#) and [quizzes](#) on their vocabularies, and users may, if they wish, construct their own course of instruction -- though they are strongly urged to follow the course as it is set out on these pages.

This page will frequently make use of the other materials on the [Geoffrey](#)

[Chaucer Website](#). If you have not already done so, take time to browse through that Website and get an idea of what sorts of materials it contains.

Links for navigation within these lessons are provided at the end of each page; to move from any one of the pages back to the Home page of the Geoffrey Chaucer Website, click on the large illuminated C at the top of the page, or the small one at the bottom of the page.

To begin, go to the [Index](#) and select Lesson 1 (on lines 1-18 of the General Prologue).

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# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 1: The General Prologue, Lines 1-18

Everyone knows the famous opening lines of The Canterbury Tales. Read carefully through the first eighteen lines of The General Prologue, going slowly and making full use of the interlinear translation ([Click here](#)).

When you are sure you understand the first eighteen lines of the General Prologue, listen to them read aloud ([click here](#)).

There is a very useful collection of passages read aloud on Alan Baragona's page "The Crying and the Soun: [The Chaucer Metapage Audio Files](#), compiled for the [Chaucer Metapage](#). This includes a number of different voices reading the opening lines of the General Prologue, including a female voice, that of [Jane Zatta](#) of Southern Illinois University, Edwardsville.

Then choose another reader and listen carefully. You will find slight differences in each version; that is to be expected. No two speakers of Middle English sounded just alike, and no two modern readers will sound exactly the same. For this reason, in the next set of exercises there are a number of different voices reading the words and lines.

Then try it yourself; read aloud the first 18 lines of the General Prologue. Your performance will not be perfect (none of the readers you have heard achieves perfection). It should improve after you have gone through the next lesson.

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## The General Prologue, lines 1-18, with translation:

- 1 **Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote**  
: When April with its sweet-smelling showers
- 2 **The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,**  
Has pierced the drought of March to the root,
- 3 **And bathed every veyne in swich licour**  
And bathed every vein (of the plants) in such liquid
- 4 **Of which vertu engendred is the flour;**  
By the power of which the flower is created;
- 5 **Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth**  
When the West Wind also with its sweet breath,
- 6 **Inspired hath in every holt and heeth**  
In every holt and heath, has breathed life into
- 7 **The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne**  
The tender crops, and the young sun
- 8 **Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,**  
Has run its half course in Aries,
- 9 **And smale foweles maken melodye,**  
And small fowls make melody,
- 10 **That slepen al the nyght with open ye**  
Those that sleep all the night with open eyes
- 11 **(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),**  
(So Nature incites them in their hearts),
- 12 **Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,**  
Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,
- 13 **And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,**  
And professional pilgrims (long) to seek foreign shores,
- 14 **To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;**  
To (go to) distant shrines, known in various lands;
- 15 **And specially from every shires ende**  
And specially from every shire's end
- 16 **Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,**  
Of England to Canterbury they travel,
- 17 **The hooly blisful martir for to seke,**  
To seek the holy blessed martyr,
- 18 **That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.**  
Who helped them when they were sick.

**The interlinear translation of these lines (and the other translations on this site) provide only a paraphrase of the words. There is no way they can convey the metaphoric force and allusive power of the lines. And of course a line-by-line translation cannot provide much in the way**

**of explanation of technical words (such as the astronomical references to the sun and the Ram in lines 7-8). For these matters consult the glosses on the text pages and the explanatory notes in *The Riverside Chaucer* or *The Canterbury Tales Complete* or a similar text.**

**Take your time on these lines to make sure you have a clear idea of the meaning of each word.**

[Back to Lesson 1.](#)

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# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 2: Pronouncing Chaucer's English

**Middle English is the form of English used in England from roughly the time of the Norman conquest (1066) until about 1500. After the conquest, French largely displaced English as the language of the upper classes and of sophisticated literature. In Chaucer's time this was changing, and in his generation English regained the status it had enjoyed in Anglo-Saxon times, before the Normans came. English was once again becoming the language of the royal court and of the new literature produced by Chaucer and his contemporaries. (For a more detailed account see the section on [Middle English](#) on the [Harvard Geoffrey Chaucer Website](#).)**

**The main difference between Chaucer's language and our own is in the pronunciation of the "long" vowels. The consonants remain generally the same, though Chaucer rolled his r's, sometimes dropped his aitches, and pronounced both elements of consonant combinations (such as "kn-" in knight or "wr-" in write) that were later simplified (to "n-" and "r-"). And the Middle English short vowels are very similar to those in Modern English (Chaucer's "short a" was more like the sound in "rot" than in modern "rat.") But the the Middle English "long" vowels are regularly and strikingly different from our modern forms.**

**These changes in the pronunciation of the "long vowels" are due to what is called The Great Vowel Shift. Between Middle English times and our own day, all of the long vowels changed in pronunciation in a regular manner, called "The Great Vowel Shift" (to learn more, [click here](#).)**

**Those changes are apparent in the following chart, which also provides a guide to the pronunciation of Chaucer's "long vowels":**

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Sounds like Modern</b>
<b>y, i</b> "myne, sight"	"meet"
<b>e, ee</b> "me, meet, mete" (close e)	"mate"
<b>e</b> "begge, rede" (open e)	"bag"
<b>a, aa</b> "mate, maat"	"father"
<b>u, ou</b> "hus, hous"	"boot"
<b>o, oo</b> "bote, boot" (close o)	"oak"
<b>o</b> "lof, ok" (open o)	"bought"

To hear these sounds [click here](#). (WARNING! This file may load very slowly unless you have a high speed connection to the internet. If it goes too slow, cancel the download and use instead the pronunciation exercises recommended below.)

For a thorough treatment of Chaucer's pronunciation take time to work your way slowly through the [pronunciation exercises](#) on the Language and Literature section of The Harvard Geoffrey Chaucer Website. (When you finish, use the backbutton to return to this page).

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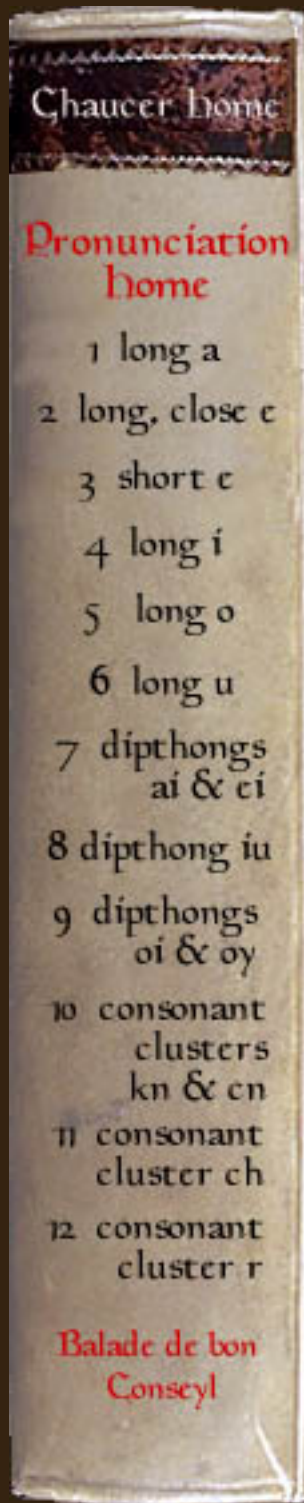
# Chaucer's Pronunciation, Grammar and Vocabulary

This version of the guide should play on Netscape 3.0 and higher without any modifications or additions to your browser as it was originally downloaded.



## Some Notes on Chaucer's Language (Elizabeth Rehfeld)

There are fifteen sections to this tutorial -- thirteen focusing on Chaucerian pronunciation and two which look at Grammar and Vocabulary. To the left, you will see a long narrow window, or frame, with section headings running down the spine of a medieval codex or book. When you click on the section you want to study, the section will appear in the main window, which is the area you are reading this text from right now. In order to return to the Chaucer home page, click on "Chaucer Home".



# Section 1

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

## Long "a" - as in "Father"

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
name	
caas	
harm	

## Short 'a' - as in 'patte' (In French)

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
can	

that	
------	--

## Long 'a' and Short 'a' Sentence Examples

*Now Certainly he **was** a fair **prelaat***

*He **was nat pale** as a *forpyned goost**

(GP 204-05)

*As **leene was** his **hors as is a rake***

*And he **nas nat right fat, I undertake.***

(GP 287-88)

## Section 2

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### Long, close "e" - as in "Fate"

Note. There is a phonetic distinction between "close" and "open" *e* in Middle English. In general, words that in Modern English are spelled with **ea** such as *meat*, were open in Middle English. Those spelled with *e* or *ee* in Modern English such as *meet*, were closed in Middle English. The word *great* is an unusual preservation of the open vowel in Modern English.

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
grene	
sweete	

### Long, open 'e' - as in 'fête' (In French)

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
teche	

heeth	
-------	--

## Long, open and Long, close 'e' Sentence Examples

<p><b>Wel loved he garleek, onyons, and eek lekes.</b></p>	
--	--

(GP 634)

<p><i>And seyde, "Fy! allas! what have I do?"</i></p>	
---	--

**"Teehee!" quod she, and clapte the window to**

(MilT 3739-40)

<p><i>My love-longynge, for yet I shal nat mysse</i></p>	
--	--

*That at the **leeste** wey I shal hire kisse.*

(MilT 3679-80)

## Section 3

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### Short "e" - as in "Bed"

Note. Short *e* is pronounced about as it is in Modern English; unstressed final *e* is ordinarily sounded before consonants and at the end of lines. It is not usually pronounced before vowels or the letter *h*. Unstressed *e* in inflectional endings is always sounded. Note that in the second example below the unstressed *e*'s are not pronounced in *yeldehalle* because the first precedes an *h* and the second the vowel *o* in *on*.

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
tendre	
bed	

### Unstressed 'e' - as in 'horses'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
sonne	



goode	
slepen	

## Short 'e' and unstressed 'e' Sentence Examples

<p><i>And smale foules maken melodye</i></p> <p><i>That slepen al the nyght with open ye</i></p> <p>(GP 9-10)</p>	
<p><b>Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys</b></p> <p><i>To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys.</i></p> <p>(GP 369-70)</p>	

## Section 4

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### Long 'i' - as in 'machine'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
shires	
ryden	

### Short 'i' - as in 'sit'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
this	
thyng	

### Short 'i' and short 'i' Sentence Examples

*But natheless, **whil I** have **tyme** and space*

*Er that **I** ferther in **this** tale pace*

(II. 35-36)

*But al be that he was a **philosophre***

*Yet hadde he but **litel** gold in cofre*

(II. 297-298)

Keep in mind that the letters 'i' and 'y' are freely interchangeable in Middle English.

## Section 5

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

Like the vowel *e*, Middle English long *o* has both open and closed values. The open *o* is pronounced like *caught*, while the closed *o* is pronounced like *coat*. Modern English words spelled with *oa* were usually open in Middle English.

### Long 'o' close, as in 'note'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
bootes	
good	

### Long 'o' open- as in 'broad'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
holy	
boot	

## Short 'o', as in 'hot'

### Single Word Breakdown

### Play the Word

oft

folk

## Long 'o' close, Long 'o' open and Short 'o' Sentence Examples

*And he was clad in **cote** and **hood** of grene,*

*A sheef of **pecok** arwes bright and kene*

*Under his belt he bar ful thriftily*

(GP 103-105)

*He never yet **no** vilenye ne sayde*

*In al his lyf **unto no** maner wight*

(GP 70-71)

## Section 6

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### Long 'u' - as in 'boot'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
flour	
fowles	
droghte	

### Short 'u' - as in 'put'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
but	

yonge	
sonne	

### 'u' umlaut, as in 'lune' (in French)

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
vertu	
nature	

### Long 'u', Short 'u' and 'u' umlaut Sentence Examples



**Aboute** *his nekke*, **under** *his arm adoun.*

*The hoothe somer hadde maad his hewe al **broun***

(GP 393-94)

*Of **double** worstede was his semycope,*

*that **rounded** as a belle **out** of the presse*

**Somewhat** *he lipped, for his wantonesse*

(GP 262-64)

# Section 7

## Diphthongs

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### 'a' + 'i' and 'e' + 'i'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
sayle	
dai	
wey	
heir	

### 'au'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word

cause	
lawe	

### 'a' + 'i' , 'e' + 'i' 'e' and 'au' Sentence Examples

<p><i>He was a <b>verray</b> parfit praktisour</i></p> <p><i>The <b>cause</b> yknowe, of his harm the roote</i></p> <p>(GP 422-23)</p>	
<p><i>He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;</i></p> <p><i>A bettre <b>felawe</b> sholde men noght fynde.</i></p> <p>(GP 647-48)</p>	

# Section 8

## Diphthongs II

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

**'i' + 'u'**

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
knewe	
newe	

**'e' + 'u'**

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
lewed	
fewe	

## 'i' + 'u' and 'e' + 'u'

*Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace*

*That swich a **lewed** mannes wit shal pace*

*The wisdom of an heep of learned men?*

(GP 573-75)

*Hir frendshipe nas not **newe** to bigynne.*

*Wel **knew** he the old Esculapius*

(GP 428-29)

## Section 9

### Diphthongs III

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

#### 'oi' and 'oy' , as in boy

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
coy	
joy	
anoint	

#### 'o' + 'u'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word

growen	
--------	--

### long 'o' + 'u'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
soule	

### 'o' + 'u'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
thoght	

foughte	
---------	--

## 'oi' and 'oy', 'o' + 'u' and long 'o' + 'u' Sentence Examples

<i>For hardily, she nas nat <b>undergrowe</b></i>	
---	--

(GP 156)

<i>Now by my fader <b>soule</b> that is deed</i>	
--	--

(GP 781)

<i>At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,</i>	
---	--

<i>And <b>foughten</b> for oure feith at Tramysse</i>	
---	--

(GP 61-62)

<i>For Frenssh of Parys was to hire <b>unknowe</b>.</i>	
---	--

(GP 126)



# Section 10

## Consonant Clusters

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

Note. Chaucer's consonants were mostly the same as those used in Modern English. The treatment of consonant clusters differed however, as did the customs regarding initial *h*, for example.

### 'kn' and 'cn', as in 'acne'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
knight	
knowen	
knyf	

### 'gn' (initial)

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word

gnawen

gnof

### 'ng'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
singen	
yonge	

### 'wh'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
what	

whan	
which	

## 'kn', 'cn', 'gn' (initial), 'ng', 'wh' Consonant Cluster Sentence Examples

<p><b>Whilom</b> <i>ther was dwellynge at Oxenford</i></p> <p><i>A riche <b>gnof</b>, that gestes heeld to bord</i></p> <p>(MilT 3187)</p>	
<p>With <b>knotty</b>, <b>knarry</b>, bareyne trees olde</p> <p>(KnT 1977)</p>	

# Section 11

## Consonant Clusters II

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### 'ch' always as in church

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
cherl	
chevysaunce	

### 'gh' as in loch (Ness monster)

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
bright	
fyght	

## 'ch' and 'gh' Sentence Examples

*And shortly whan the sonne was to reste ,*

*So hadde I spoken with hem **everichon***

(GP 30-31)

*And at a **knyght** then wol I first bigynne*

(GP 42)

# Section 12

## Consonant Clusters III

Play the word or sentence; pronounce it aloud, and play it again to check your pronunciation.

### 'r', trilled as in the Spanish "cara mia"

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
faren	
riden	

### 'wr' as in 'w' + 'r'

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
writen	
wrong	

**'l' (before consonants)**

Single Word Breakdown	Play the Word
folk	
half	
palmer	

**'e', 'wr' and 'l' (before consonants) Sentence Examples**

*At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram*

*He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre*

(GP 548-549)

## Section 13

# TRUTH

## Balade de bon Conseyl

Flee fro the prees and dwelle with sothfastnesse;

Suffyce unto thy thing, though it be small,

For hord hath hate, and climbing tickelnesse,

Prees hath envye, and wele blent overal.

Savour no more than thee bihove shal,

Reule wel thyself that other folk canst rede,

And trouthe thee shal deliver, it is no drede.

Tempest thee noight al croked to redresse

In trust of hir that turneth as a bal;

Gret reste stant in litel besinesse.

Be war therefore to sporne ayeyns an al,

Stryve not, as doth the crokke with the wal.



Daunte thyself, that dauntest otheres dede,  
And trouthe thee shal deliver, it is no drede.  
That thee is sente, receyve in buxumnesse;  
The wrastling for this world axeth a fal.  
Her is non hoom, her nis but wildernesse;  
Forth, pilgrim, forth! Forth, beste out of thy stal!  
Know thy countree, look up, thank God of al;  
Hold the heye wey and lat thy ghost thee lede,  
And trouthe thee shal deliver, it is no drede.

*Envoy*

Therefore, thou Vache, leve thyn old wrecchedness;  
Unto the world leve now to be thral.  
Crye him mercy, that of his hy goodnesse  
Made thee of noght, and in especial  
Draw unto him, and pray in general  
For thee, and eek for other, hevenlich mede;  
And trouthe thee shal deliver, it is no drede.





# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 3: Chaucer's Final *-e*

For Chaucer's poetry, the most important difference between Chaucer's language and our own is due to the fact that in the change from Middle to Modern English the language lost the inflectional or "final e" (see its [history](#)). In Chaucer's language, the inflectional endings (*-e*, *-ed*, *-en*, *-es*) were pronounced in almost all cases. In Modern English the final *-e* has become the "silent e" (so Modern English "tale" has but one syllable, whereas in Chaucer's English *tale* usually had two syllables). And the inflectional endings remain only in a few specific environments (*-ed* remains after *t* or *d* -- *wanted*, *-es* remains after *s*, *sh*, *z* -- *glassés*, *dishés*, etc.). The inflectional endings were disappearing in Chaucer's own time, and his language (and that of others of his generation, such as John Gower) may have sounded a bit old-fashioned to some younger speakers of English in late fourteenth-century London.

The rhythm of Chaucer's verse is dependent on this final *-e*. In the *Canterbury Tales* Chaucer customarily writes a five-stress, ten-syllable line, alternating unstressed and stressed syllables (what would later be called iambic pentameter):

The **dróghte** of **Márch** hath **pérced** **tó** the **róte**.  
[Click for sound](#) .

The word *perced* must have two syllables (rather than the one it has in modern "pierced"). Note that the final *-e* on *droghte* is not pronounced; this is because a vowel follows. Final *-e* is not pronounced when the following word begins with a vowel (or often *h-* and *w-*). Incidentally, the final *-e* on *rote* at the end of the line is pronounced but not counted as metrical (that is, stands aside from the ten syllables ordinarily required).

It is as important to omit the final *-e* when a vowel, *h-*, or *w-* follows as it is to pronounce it in other contexts:

Why artow angry with my **tale** now?  
(MilPro (1).3157) ([click for sound](#))  
Telle of a somonour swich a **tale** or two  
(WBPro (3).842) ([click for sound](#))

In the first example, *tale* has two syllables; in the second a vowel follows *tale* and the *-e* is elided. This may seem complicated, but it is not; if you read the text aloud your ear will soon become accustomed to the rhythms of Chaucer's verse, and observing these rules becomes almost automatic. In *tale or two* it is impossible to say the two vowels *e* and *o* together without a slight pause; the meter is harmed and one's ear (quickly trained to Chaucer's rhythm) detects this.

Likewise the meter is ruined if one fails to pronounce the inflectional endings (*-ed*, *-en*, and *-es*):

But if I telle **tales** two or thre  
(WBPro III.846) ([click for sound](#))  
Save unto yow thus mucche I **tellen** shal  
: (ShipT VII.169) ([click for sound](#))  
Ye sholde han **warned** me, er I had gon,  
(ShipT VII.388) ([click for sound](#))

As said above, your ear will soon become your best guide to pronunciation. In the meantime, follow the rule that final *-e* is always pronounced unless a vowel (or *h-* or *w-*) follows, and inflectional *e* in *-ed*, *-es*, *-en* is always pronounced.

Words of three syllables and more are frequently slurred in pronunciation, as often happens in modern English. We almost never pronounce the word "every" with three full syllables (we say "evry"). Chaucer did the same:

Inspíred háth in évery hólt and héeth  
[Click for sound](#).

If a syllable is not elided in such words it may be pronounced very lightly ("resolved") or may indeed be part of an eleven-syllable line (not all lines in Chaucer are regular). Indeed, there are many variations on the basic iambic pentameter pattern, since Chaucer, like any poet, uses the meter as a norm against which variations can play. The first line of the General Prologue reverses the stress pattern in the first two words:

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
[Click for sound](#).

The stress is on *Whan* (since *that* is a weak intensifier), and this forces a

trochaic movement on the whole line, so that the final -e on *roote* is necessary to the meter, even though a final -e at the end of a line is usually not counted. These and other such variations are common in Chaucer, and they keep the lines from degenerating into complete regularity.

With all this in mind, read the following lines in Middle English. Those final e's that are to be pronounced are underlined; those that are to be omitted are enclosed in parentheses, as are vowels that should be slurred in words of more than two syllables. The final -e's in lines 7-8 and 15-16 are marked for omission, but they may be pronounced (especially if one is reading very slowly).

- 1 Whán that Áprill wíth his shóures sóote
- 2 The dróght(e) of Márch hath pérced tó the róote,
- 3 And báthed év(e)ry véyn(e) in swích licóur
- 4 Of wích vertú engéndred ís the flóur;
- 5 Whan Zéphirús éek wíth his swéete bréeth
- 6 Inspíred háth in év(e)ry hólt and héeth
- 7 The téndre cróppes, ánd the yónge sónn(e)
- 8 Hath ín the Rám his hálf cours yrónn(e),
- 9 And smále fów(e)les máken mélodye,
- 10 That slépen ál the nyght wíth ópen ye
- 11 (So príketh hem Natúr(e) in hír coráges),
- 12 Thanne lóngen fólk to góon on pílgrimáges,
- 13 And pálm(e)res fór to séken stráunge stróndes,
- 14 To férne hálwes, kówth(e) in sóndry lóndes;
- 15 And specially from évery shíres énd(e)
- 16 Of Éngelónd to Cáunterb(u)ry they wénd(e),
- 17 The hóoly blísful mártir fór to séke,
- 18 That hém háth hólpen whán that they were séeke.

You may want to listen to these lines read aloud; choose one of the readings on Alan Baragona's page "The Crying and the Soun: [The Chaucer Metapage Audio Files](#), compiled for the [Chaucer Metapage](#).

For a more detailed treatment of Chaucer's versification see the relevant section in *The Riverside Chaucer* (pp. xlii-xlv) or *The Canterbury Tales Complete* (pp. xxxvi-xxxviii).

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## The Loss of Final -e

*[When you click for sound note that on some browsers the small tape player that appears on the upper left hand side of the screen will open a new window; when you are through listening to the word, click on the x to delete that window.]*

Old English (or Anglo-Saxon) was, compared to Modern English, a heavily inflected language. That is, the function of a word in a sentence was indicated by the endings: **Se hund biteþ Þone ealdan mann** (the dog bites the old man) means exactly the same as **Þone ealdan mann biteþ se hunda** (the "þ" stands for "th") or (the more common syntax) **Þone ealdan mann se hunda biteþ**. In Modern English the position of the words determines their meaning; "The old man bites the dog" differs considerably from "The dog bites the old man." In Old English the *-ne* on *Þone* and *-an* on *ealdan* indicate that "mann" is the object of the action, no matter in what order they appear, and the forms of *Se* and *hund* indicate that the "hund" does the biting.

However, even in late Old English times word order was becoming dominant and in the following years the grammatical endings became less important. For whatever reason a regular change took place: Final unstressed vowels moved first to schwah (the sound in the middle of "telephone") and then to zero, when they became silent. The ending of the word "tale," for example moves through these stages, from the sound "oo" to schwah to silence:

Old English: talu > Middle English tale > Modern English  
"tale" ([Click](#) for sound.)

Vowels within inflected endings (such as *-ode* and *-as*) moved the same way:

Old Eng.: lufode > Mid. Eng. lovede, loved > Mod. Eng.  
"loved" ([Click](#) for sound.)

**Old Eng.: stanas > Mid. Eng. stones > Mod. Eng. "stones"**  
[\(Click for sound.\)](#)

A final *-n* slowed the process somewhat, and so *-an* survives from Old English in Middle English as both *-en* and *-e*:

**Old Eng. bringan > Mid. Eng. bringen, bringe > Mod. Engl. bring** [\(Click for sound.\)](#)

The relative tenacity of the final *-n* (which survives in Mod. Eng. past participles ("broken promises")) accounts for Chaucer's final *-e* in weak (or definite) adjectives; the *-e* was lost on strong (or indefinite) adjectives, but retained on the weak (which are used after an article, possessive, and such):

**Old Eng. Strong: geonge cniht > Mid. Eng.: yong knight >**  
[\(Click for sound.\)](#)

**Old Eng. Weak: pone geongan cniht > Mid. Eng. The yonge knight** [\(Click for sound.\)](#)

There are many more complications in the history of the loss of final *-e*. However, this may be sufficient to show that there is an orderly process in the evolution of the forms Chaucer used.

It is worth noting that this aspect of Chaucer's verse was unknown for centuries. By Shakespeare's time the final *-e* had been lost. That is why, though Shakespeare's pronunciation differed from our own, it is possible to read his works in a modern pronunciation: the rhythm of his lines remains the same, no matter how the vowels are pronounced, because except for a few exceptions ("Out *damnéd* spot!"), Shakespeare treated what had become in his time the "silent e" in the same way we do. Consequently, when Shakespeare read Chaucer he omitted the final *-e*, treating it as silent. The meter was ruined; though Shakespeare greatly admired Chaucer, he and his contemporaries thought that Chaucer was an archaic poet who could not write a smooth and pleasing meter in those distant early times. So too did John Dryden, who idolized Chaucer but thought he wrote in "[the infancy of our Poetry](#)". Not until the late eighteenth century did scholars discover and demonstrate the importance of the final *-e* for Chaucer's versification.

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# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 4: Chaucer's Vocabulary

The great majority of the words Chaucer uses are the same in meaning and function as their Modern English counterparts. They usually differ greatly in spelling. But this initial difficulty soon disappears as one reads through the text -- especially if one reads the text aloud. It is soon apparent that "y" and "i" are interchangeable and no one can have much difficulty with a phrase such as "*the Frenssh of Paris*." Indeed, in some ways Chaucer's vocabulary may be easier for a modern reader than it would have been for many unsophisticated Middle English readers.

This is because one of the most important characteristics of his language and style is his practice of "borrowing" from mainly French and Latin. (Click [here](#) if you want a more detailed discussion of borrowing.) He and his contemporaries introduced ("borrowed") words into the English language, moving them practically unchanged from Latin or French into English. The words in bold face in the following passage are derived from French or Latin:

Whan that **Aprill** with his shoures soote  
The droghte of **March** hath **perced** to the roote,  
And bathed every **veyne** in swich **licour**  
Of which **vertu engendred** is the **fleur**;  
Whan **Zephirus** eek with his sweete breeth  
**Inspired** hath in every holt and heeth  
The **tendre** croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his half **cours** yronne,  
And smale foweles maken **melodye**,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
(So priketh hem **Nature** in hir **corages**),  
Thanne longen folk to goon on **pilgrimages**,  
And **palmeres** for to seken **straunge** strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And **specially** from every shires ende

Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blisful **martir** for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.

Some of these words -- *Aprill, March, pilgrimage* -- had been in the language for centuries and seemed pure English to Chaucer's first hearers; others first appear in the fourteenth century and may still sounded a bit "literary" to the hearers. The word *inspired* appears here for the first time in English, and its meaning (lit. "breathe into") was clear only to those who knew French or Latin and could realize its metaphoric force (the Latin Vulgate Bible has "inspiravit" for The King James' "breathed into" in Gen. 2:7, the account of the creation of man). A first-time modern reader may miss the metaphor, but the word "inspire" is now familiar, as are almost all the borrowings in this passage. Such borrowings are part of the "high style" that Chaucer introduced into English literature. (Click [here](#) if you want a more detailed discussion of style.)

However, the beginning reader should spend more of his or her time on the very common words, which do indeed differ from modern English, and which one must know to read Chaucer with ease. Special care must be taken with words which look like Modern English but often have meanings that have been lost (Stephen A. Barney calls them "false friends"; they seem familiar and often have the modern meanings we expect, but they frequently do not and may mislead the reader).

Read through a list of very [common Chaucerian words](#); do not try to memorize them, but read slowly and note the meanings well.

These are basic Middle English words that will appear frequently in Chaucer's works and offer the greatest difficulty to beginning readers; time spent on these lists will amply repay its expenditure.

Pay special attention to the conjunctions (repeated here):

al                    although, even if

for, for that    because

als, al so        as

for to            in order to

and, and if      if

other, outhor or

but, but if      if, unless

or... or          either... or

eek/eke          also

sin/syn          since

forthy	therefore
sithe(n)	since
forwhy	because
ther(as)	where
wher	whether; also used to introduce a question

**The auxiliary ("helping" or "modal") verbs should also be considered carefully:**

**Do, did** have their modern meanings but they are also used as causative verbs: **And for oure owne tresor doon us hange** (And have us hanged for our own treasure).

**Gan, gone** are used for periphrastic plurals somewhat like modern "do" and "did": **And homward gone they ride**.

**Kan, koude** Most often means "can, know how to" but it can also be a transitive verb meaning "know" **She knew muchel of wandryng** (She knew much of wandering)."

**Let, leet** usually means "allow, permit" but it is also used as a causative" **duc Theseus leet crye** (Duc Theseus had [caused to be] announced).

**May, mighte** usually have their modern meanings but they often carry the older meaning of "can, could": **"I se," quod he, "as wel as ever I mighte** ("I see," he said, "as well as I ever could.")

**Mot(e), moot** have two contrary senses, "may" and "must": **Also moote I thee** ("As I may prosper"), **A man moot nedes love** (A man must by necessity love).

**Shal, shullen** have their modern meaning (**How shal the world be served?** but they are also used with a sense of obligation ("must"): **Whoso shal telle a tale** (Whoever must tell a tale). **Shal, shullen** are also sometimes used with an understood verb of motion: **for I shal to Surrye** (For I must go to Syria).

**Wol, will, wolde** usually mean "will" or "would" but they may also carry the meaning "desire, want to": **He wolde the see were kept** (He wanted the sea to be guarded), **That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?** (That I want to live in voluntary poverty?).

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## Chaucer's Vocabulary

The following is a list of Chaucerian words you should find helpful. They are arranged within their parts of speech.

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## **NOUNS**

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
array	condition, arrangement
lust	pleasure, desire
bane	destruction, killer
lym	limb
boote	remedy
mete	food
conseil	counsel, advice
paas	slow walk, pace
deel	part, bit
rede	advice
degree	rank, social condition
routh	pity
devyse	trick, device
sleighte	trick
drede	doubt, fear

sooth	truth
ensample	example
vilenye	churlishness
estaat	condition in life, rank
viage	expedition, voyage
forward	agreement
werre	war
foule/fowel	bird
jape	joke, trick

[\*End of Section; Return to Index\*](#)

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## **ADJECTIVES**

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
-----------------------	-----------------------



certeyn	sure, certain
povre	poor
fer, ferrer, ferrest	far, farther, farthest
siker	certain, trusty
fetis	well made, graceful
verray	true
feyn	glad, willing
wode/wood	mad, crazy
gentle	noble
hye/heigh	high
ny, near, next	near, nearer, nearest
hende	handy, tricky, courteous
leef	dear
looth	hateful, loath

*[End of Section; Return to Index](#)*

## VERBS

Middle English	Modern English
axe	ask
helpen, heelp/help, yholpe	help, cure
brenne	burn
lesen	lose
bresten, braste, ybrest	burst
reknen	to reckon
chesen, chees, ychose	choose
rennen, ran, yronne	run
clepen	call
rekne	reckon
deme(n)	judge, consider
wene	suppose, consider

dighten, dighte	prepare, adorn, equip
wedden	pledge, marry
duren	endure, last
wilnen	desire, want
fallen, fil/fel, yfalle	happen, befall
yeven/yiven, yaf, (y)yeven	give
gyen	guide, direct
witen, wot, wiste	know
highte	be called [also p.p of hoten, to promise]

[\*End of Section; Return to Index\*](#)

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## **ADVERBS**

*\*notice that many adverbs retain an old -s, -es genitive ending*

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
after	according to
nedes	by necessity
agayns	towards
ones	once
agon	ago, long ago
overal	everywhere
atones	at once, immediately
owher	anywhere
ay	ever, forever
unethe(s)	hardly
blyve	quickly
there	where
certes	truly, certainly
yliche	alike
eft	again
yond	yonder

er	ere, before, earlier
whilom	once, formerly
erst	first, at first

[End of Section; Return to Index](#)

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-  
-  
-  
-

## **DEMONSTRATIVES**

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
ech, iche	each
everich	each
everichon	every one
ilk	each
swich	such, some
thilke	the same, that same

[End of Section; Return to Index](#)

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## ***CONJUNCTIONS***

*Be aware that a number of Chaucer's conjunctions do not survive in Modern English, and those that do often have different meanings.*

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
al	although, even if
for, for that	because
als, al so	as
for to	in order to
and, and if	if
other, outhur	or
but, but if	if, unless
or... or	either... or
eek/eke	also
sin/syn	since
forthy	therefore
sithe(n)	since
forwhy	because
ther(as)	where
wher	whether; also used to introduce a question

*[End of Section; Return to Index](#)*

## **PREPOSITIONS**

*These are the most common Chaucerian prepositions that differ in form or meaning from Modern English.*

<b>Middle English</b>	<b>Modern English</b>
after	according to. after
maugree	despite
agayn, agaynes	against, toward
of	by (when used as the agent of a passive)
at	of, from, at
atte	at the
thurgh	through
biforn	before
til	toward



bitwix, bitwinen	between
up	upon
fro	from
with	by (when used as agent of a passive)
inwith	within
withouten	without (also as an adverb "outside" )

[\*End of Section; Return to Index\*](#)

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[\*End of Section; Return to Index\*](#)

# Dryden on Chaucer's Meter


'Tis true, I cannot go so far as he who publish'd the last Edition of him; for he would make us believe the Fault is in our Ears, and that there were really Ten Syllables in a Verse where we find but Nine: But this Opinion is not worth confuting; 'tis so gross and obvious an Errour, that common Sense (which is a Rule in everything but Matters of Faith and Revelation) must convince the Reader, that Equality of Numbers, in every Verse which we call Heroick, was either not known, or not always practis'd, in Chaucer's Age. It were an easie Matter to produce some thousands of his Verses, which are lame for want of half a Foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no Pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say, that he liv'd in the Infancy of our Poetry, and that nothing is brought to Perfection at the first. we must be Children before we grow Men. There was an Ennius, and in process of Time a Lucilius, and a Lucretius, before Virgil and Horace; even after Chaucer there was a Spencer, a Harrington, a Fairfax, before Waller and Denham were in being: And our Numbers were in their Nonage till these last appeared.

(From Dryden's [Preface to the Fables](#)).

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# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 5: Chaucer's Grammar

Middle English grammar is very much like our own. Except for a few unfamiliar forms, it offers few problems to the beginning reader, and what follows is therefore a very brief treatment of a few matters that may prove difficult in a first reading. Advanced students may wish to consult the section on Language in *The Riverside Chaucer*, pp.xxxiv-xlii, or *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, pp.xxix-xxxvi). A more extended treatment is also available in the section on [Language](#) on the Harvard Geoffrey Chaucer Page (once there click on "Grammar" in the upper left corner and use the back button to return to this page.) These resources should prove helpful to students whose primary interest is in the language, and they will prove interesting at a later stage of your study (when you are beginning to feel comfortable with Chaucer's language). Right now, all one needs is a brief treatment of the inflections.

## Nouns

Middle English nouns have the same inflections as modern English -- Nominative: *freend* ("friend"), Possessive: *freendes* ("friend's"), Plural: *freendes* ("friends"). Aside from the spelling and the fact that in Middle English the -es is always pronounced, the inflections are the same as ours.

Exceptions to the rule are much the same in both forms of the language. Some plurals are formed by a change in vowels ("men," "geese," "mice," etc.) The word *keen* is the only one of these plurals that does not survive in Modern English.

In Modern English we have a few old plurals with "-en" ("oxen," "brethren"); Chaucer has more of these forms:

**asshen** ("ashes") **been** ("bees") **doghtren** ("daughters") **eyen** ("eyes") **hosen** ("hose") **sustren** ("sisters") **toon** ("toes")

The word "children" in both Middle and Modern English is a combination of the "-en" plural with an older plural in "-r."

## Pronouns

The pronouns are about the same in Modern English as in Middle English. The only exception is the third person plural (*hir* = "their," *hem* = "them"):

### Singular

Case	First Person	Second Person	Third Person
Nominative	I, ich	thou	he, she, hit (it)
Possessive	my, mine	thy, thine	his, hire, his (its)
Objective	me	thee	him, hire, hit (it)

### Plural

Case	First Person	Second Person	Third Person
Nominative	we	ye	they
Possessive	oure	your	hire, hir(e)
Objective	us	you	hem

Note that "his" is the possessive form of both the masculine and the neuter pronoun; in *Aprill with his shoures soote* the pronoun *his* means "its."

Chaucer often uses pronouns in the French manner -- singular pronouns (*thee*, *thou*, etc.) used for addressing children, servants, or intimates, the plural (*ye*, *you*, etc.) used as "the pronoun of respect," for addressing superiors (like French "tu" and "vous"). Chaucer is not completely consistent in this usage, but it is worth noting, since often the choice of pronoun defines the social relationships of the speakers.

# Verbs

The Middle English verb forms largely survive in archaic and biblical usages, and forms such as "doth" and "goest" are therefore familiar to modern readers. So too is the distinction between regular (or "weak") conjugations, which signal the preterite with "-ed," and irregular (or "strong") verbs, with the past signalled by a change in the root vowel (like Modern "sang," "ran," etc.) The following forms should therefore present few problems. Note that the forms on the chart are the most common ones; variants with omission of final n or doubling of vowels (*be*, *ben*, *been* are not shown:

	Regular Verbs	"Strong" Verbs	"To be"
<b>Infinitive</b>	loven	singen	ben, been
I	love	sing	am
thou	lovest	singest	art
he, she, it	loveth	singeth	beth
we, you, they	loven	singen	ben
I	loved	song	was
thou	lovedest	songe	were
he, she	lovede	songe, soong	weren
we, they	loveden	songen	weren
<b>Past Participle</b>	(y)loved	songe(n)	(y)been
<b>Imperative Sing.</b>	(y)love	sing	be
<b>Imperative Pl.</b>	loveth	singeth	be, beth
<b>Subjunctive</b>	love	singe	be, were

The subjunctive survives in Modern English ("If I were king") and has the same forms, but it is used far more often in Middle English.

Two sets of contracted forms are common in Chaucer but completely lacking in Modern English. The first combines the negative *ne* with a following verb beginning with a vowel, *h-*, or *w-*:

**nam** = *ne* + *am* ("am not")

**nam** = *ne* + *art* ("art not")

**nis** = *ne + is* ("is not")  
**nas** = *ne + was* ("was not")  
**nerre** = *ne + were* ("were not")

**nath** = *ne + hath* ("has not")  
**nadde** = *ne + hadde* ("had not")

**nil** = *ne + wil* ("will not")  
**nilt** = *ne + wil* ("will not")  
**noilde** = *ne + wolde* ("would not")

**noot** = *ne + wot* ("know not")  
**niste** = *ne + wiste* ("knew not")

In representations of speech some of these forms (singular second person) are further contracted with a following *thou*, as in *niltow* ("will thou not"). A similar contraction occurs in forms such as *artow* ("art thou") and in forms such as *ridestou* ("do you ride").

The other very common contracted forms are those in which the stem ends with *-t*, *-d*, *-th*, or *-s* and *-eth* follows:

**bit** = *biddeth* ("asks")  
**rit** = *rideth* ("rides")  
**rist** = *riseth* ("rises")  
**fint** = *findeth* ("finds")  
**halt** = *holdeth* ("holds")  
**stant** = *stondeth* ("stands")  
**worth** = *wortheth* ("gets on")

Somewhat similar is the form *lixt* for *liest* ("lies").

## Modifiers

Adjectives and Adverbs are much the same in Middle English as in Modern. The only notable difference is the use of final *-e* in the "strong" (or "definite") and "weak" ("indefinite") declensions of the adjective. In the "strong" declension there is no *-e* in the singular; the final *-e* is used in all other cases: the "weak" declension has *-e* in all cases. This is not a matter that you need much bother with; it is useful merely as a way of explaining why sometimes an *-e* appears on an adjective and sometimes it does not:

A **yong** knight ("strong")  
Two **yonge** knightes ("weak")

**For a more detailed treatment of Chaucer's grammar see the sources suggested in the first paragraph above.**

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# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 6: The Shipman's Tale

**One might think that the next step should be to go on to the General Prologue. However, the General Prologue is rather difficult compared to some of the tales themselves and one can best enjoy it when he or she has a full control of the basic elements of Middle English. Working one's way through a shorter and simpler tale is the best way of attaining that control. The Shipman's Tale is brief and easily accessible to modern sensibilities (and it is fun). It is therefore a good work with which to begin. Here is a summary of the plot:**

A rich merchant of Saint Denis (near Paris) has a beautiful wife and maintains a splendid household. The monk Dan John, who claims he is a cousin, is a frequent visitor. One day Dan John comes to call when the merchant is busy in his counting house. He makes advances to the wife, who says her wretched husband will not give her a hundred franks, which she needs to pay a debt; if he can give her that amount, she will show her gratitude. He says he will bring them, and he "caught her by the flanks." When the merchant must go on business to Flanders the monk borrows a hundred franks from him. He gives the money to the wife, and he takes his pleasure of her. When the merchant returns and asks for his money, Dan John says he repaid it to the wife. When the Merchant later asks his wife for the money (which she has spent), she turns the tables, telling him she spent it on clothing, since it is to his honor to have her richly dressed. She will pay him back in bed -- "score it upon my tail."

**An interlinear translation of The Shipman's Tale provides a way to begin your study. But before you begin note the limitations of such translations provided on this page:**

**These translations are for occasional reference for those beginning the study of Chaucer's language. They supply**



merely a pony and by no means can they serve as a substitute for the original, nor even for a good translation. Often the syntax of the interlinear translation will be awkward in Modern English, since the aim is to supply a somewhat literal translation to make clear the meaning of the Middle English words.

For the same reason there is no attempt to reproduce in Modern English the spirit and tone of the original (even if that were possible). The translation is more often "word for word" than "sense for sense."

You may find that some of the lines remain obscure even in translation, since more explanation may be needed than a bare translation can supply. This is especially true of passages dealing with technical matters such as astronomy or medicine. In such cases, consult the Explanatory Notes in an edition such as *The Riverside Chaucer*, or *The Canterbury Tales Complete*.

These translations should be used for a first reading; go carefully through the text, concentrating on the Middle English and checking your reading against the translation. Then move on to the original in whatever printed text you are using, and refer back to this text only when you encounter difficulties.

For such quick reference, once you have opened a translation use the "Find" utility on your browser (Control F in Netscape) to search for the line numbers of the words or phrases you want to see.

A nice demonstration of the limitations of any translation of The Shipman's Tale is apparent in its final lines:

Thus endeth my tale, and God us sende  
Thus ends my tale, and God send us  
Tailyngne ynough unto oure lyves ende. Amen  
Tallying (Tailing) enough unto our lives' end. Amen

The outrageous pun on "Tailyngne" (which involves "tally," "tale," and "tail") is almost completely lost in any translation.

With this caveat in mind, [click here](#) to begin your study of The Shipman's Tale.

After you have gone through the interlinear text and have returned to this

page, read the Shipman's Tale once more, this time in your printed text, and this time for pleasure rather than a drill on vocabulary. Read at least parts of it aloud (if you want more instruction on reading aloud, though it repeats some materials, [Click here](#)). When you read it note especially Chaucer's good ear for conversation.

If you wish, browse through the page on [The Shipman's Tale](#) on The Geoffrey Chaucer Website. Look at the way some other authors handled the same material, and you will be impressed with the richness of Chaucer's characters and the subtlety with which he modifies and complicates the simple story as it appears in other works.

Return to [Index](#). | Or go on to the [Lesson 7](#), The General Prologue. | Or use your browser's back button to return to the previous page.

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# The Shipman's Tale

## An Interlinear Translation Part I, lines 1-157

The Middle English text is from Larry D. Benson., Gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*,  
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(How to use the [interlinear translations.](#))

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*Heere bigynneth the Shipmannes Tale.*

- 1 **A marchant whilom dwelled at Seint-Denys,**  
A merchant once dwelled at Seint-Denis,
- 2 **That riche was, for which men helde hym wys.**  
Who was rich, for which men considered him wise.
- 3 **A wyf he hadde of excellent beautee;**  
He had a wife of excellent beauty;
- 4 **And compaignable and revelous was she,**  
And she was sociable and fond of revelry,
- 5 **Which is a thyng that causeth more dispence**  
Which is a thing that causes more expense
- 6 **Than worth is al the chiere and reverence**  
Than is worth all the good cheer and reverence
- 7 **That men hem doon at festes and at daunces.**  
That men do to them at festivities and at dances.
- 8 **Swiche salutaciouns and contenaunces**  
Such salutations and courtesies
- 9 **Passen as dooth a shadwe upon the wal;**  
Pass away as does a shadow upon the wall;
- 10 **But wo is hym that payen moot for al!**  
But woe to him that must pay for all!
- 11 **The sely housbonde, algate he moot paye,**

- The poor (hapless) husband, always he must pay,  
12 **He moot us clothe, and he moot us arraye,**  
He must clothe us, and he must adorn us
- 13 **Al for his owene worshiþe richely,**  
Richly, all for the sake of his own reputation,  
14 **In which array we daunce jolily.**  
In which finery we dance merrily.
- 15 **And if that he noght may, par aventure,**  
And if he can not pay, by chance,  
16 **Or ellis list no swich dispence endure,**  
Or else desires to endure no such expense,  
17 **But thynketh it is wasted and ylost,**  
But thinks it is wasted and lost,  
18 **Thanne moot another payen for oure cost,**  
Then another must pay for our costs,  
19 **Or lene us gold, and that is perilous.**  
Or lend us gold, and that is perilous.
- 20 **This noble marchaunt heeld a worthy hous,**  
This noble merchant held a worthy house,  
21 **For which he hadde alday so greet repair**  
For which he always had so many guests  
22 **For his largesse, and for his wyf was fair,**  
Because of his generosity, and because his wife was  
fair,  
23 **That wonder is; but herkneþ to my tale.**  
That it is a wonder; but listen to my tale.
- 24 **Amonges alle his gestes, grete and smale,**  
Among all his guests, high ranking and low,  
25 **Ther was a monk, a fair man and a boold --**  
There was a monk, a handsome man and a bold one --  
26 **I trowe a thritty wynter he was oold --**  
I believe he was about thirty years old --  
27 **That evere in oon was drawyng to that place.**  
Who continually was drawing to that place.
- 28 **This yonge monk, that was so fair of face,**  
This young monk, who had so handsome a face,  
29 **Aqueynted was so with the goode man,**  
Was so acquainted with the good man,  
30 **Sith that hir firste knoweliche bigan,**  
Since their first acquaintance began,  
31 **That in his hous as famulier was he**  
That in his house as intimate was he  
32 **As it is possible any freend to be.**  
As it is possible for any friend to be.
- 33 **And for as muchel as this goode man,**  
And in view of the fact that this good man,  
34 **And eek this monk of which that I bigan,**  
And also this monk of whom I began (to tell),

- 35 **Were bothe two yborn in o village,**  
The two of them, were both born in one village,
- 36 **The monk hym claymeth as for cosyngage,**  
The monk claims him as a kinsman,
- 37 **And he agayn; he seith nat ones nay,**  
And he does the same; he not once says 'nay,'
- 38 **But was as glad therof as fowel of day,**  
But was as glad of this as a fowl is of day,
- 39 **For to his herte it was a greet plesaunce.**  
For to his heart it was a great pleasure.
- 40 **Thus been they knyht with eterne alliaunce,**  
Thus are they knit with eternal alliance,
- 41 **And ech of hem gan oother for t' assure**  
And each of them assured the other
- 42 **Of bretherhede whil that hir lyf may dure.**  
Of brotherhood while their life may endure.
- 43 **Free was daun John, and manly of dispence,**  
Free-handed was Dan John, and generous in spending
- 44 **As in that hous, and ful of diligence**  
In that house, and full of diligence
- 45 **To doon plesaunce, and also greet costage.**  
To do pleasure, and also great expenditure.
- 46 **He noght forgat to yeve the leeste page**  
He did not forget to give to the lowest ranking servant
- 47 **In al that hous; but after hir degree,**  
In all that house; but according to their rank,
- 48 **He yaf the lord, and sitthe al his meynee,**  
He gave to the lord, and then to all his household,
- 49 **Whan that he cam, som manere honest thyng,**  
When he came, some sort of suitable gift,
- 50 **For which they were as glad of his comyng**  
For which they were as glad of his coming
- 51 **As fowel is fayn whan that the sonne up riseth.**  
As a fowl is happy when the sun rises up.
- 52 **Na moore of this as now, for it suffiseth.**  
No more of this for now, for it suffices.
- 53 **But so bifel, this marchant on a day**  
But as it happened, this merchant on a day
- 54 **Shoop hym to make redy his array**  
Decided to make ready his preparations
- 55 **Toward the toun of Brugges for to fare,**  
To travel to the town of Bruges ,
- 56 **To byen there a porcioun of ware;**  
To buy there a quantity of merchandise;
- 57 **For which he hath to Parys sent anon**  
For which he has to Paris sent immediately
- 58 **A messenger, and preyed hath daun John**  
A messenger, and has prayed Dan John
- 59 **That he sholde come to Seint-Denys to pleye**

- That he should come to Seint-Denis to visit  
60 **With hym and with his wyf a day or tweye,**  
With him and with his wife a day or two,  
61 **Er he to Brugges wente, in alle wise.**  
Before he went to Bruges, indeed.
- 62 **This noble monk, of which I yow devyse,**  
This noble monk, of whom I tell you,  
63 **Hath of his abbot, as hym list, licence,**  
Has of his abbot, as he pleases, permission,  
64 **By cause he was a man of heigh prudence**  
Because he was a man of great prudence  
65 **And eek an officer, out for to ryde,**  
And also an officer, to ride out  
66 **To seen hir graunges and hire bernes wyde,**  
To see to their granges and their capacious barns,  
67 **And unto Seint-Denys he comth anon.**  
And he comes quickly to Seint-Denis.  
68 **Who was so welcome as my lord daun John,**  
Who was so welcome as my lord Dan John,  
69 **Oure deere cosyn, ful of curteisye?**  
Our dear cousin, full of courtesy?  
70 **With hym broghte he a jubbe of malvesye,**  
With him he brought a jug of malmsey wine,  
71 **And eek another ful of fyn vernage,**  
And also another full of fine white wine,  
72 **And volatyl, as ay was his usage.**  
And game fowls, as always was his custom.  
73 **And thus I lete hem ete and drynke and pleye,**  
And thus I let them eat and drink and amuse  
themselves,  
74 **This marchant and this monk, a day or tweye.**  
This merchant and this monk, for a day or two.
- 75 **The thridde day, this marchant up ariseth,**  
The third day, this merchant up arises,  
76 **And on his nedes sadly hym avyseth,**  
And seriously considers his business,  
77 **And up into his countour-hous gooth he**  
And he goes up into his counting-house  
78 **To rekene with hymself, wel may be,**  
To reckon with himself, as it well may be,  
79 **Of thilke yeer how that it with hym stood,**  
Of that same year how it stood with him,  
80 **And how that he despended hadde his good,**  
And how he had spent his funds,  
81 **And if that he encessed were or noon.**  
And if he had profited or not.  
82 **His bookes and his bagges many oon**  
His account books and his moneybags many a one

- 83 **He leith biforn hym on his countyng-bord.**  
He lays before him on his counting-board.
- 84 **Ful riche was his tresor and his hord,**  
His treasure and his hoard was very rich,
- 85 **For which ful faste his countour-dore he shette;**  
For which he very tightly shut his counting house-door;
- 86 **And eek he nolde that no man sholde hym lette**  
And also he wanted that no one should hinder him
- 87 **Of his acountes, for the meene tyme;**  
From (making) his accounts, for the time being;
- 88 **And thus he sit til it was passed pryme.**  
And thus he sits until it was past nine o'clock.
- 89 **Daun John was rysen in the morwe also,**  
Dan John had also risen in the morning,
- 90 **And in the gardyn walketh to and fro,**  
And in the garden walks to and fro,
- 91 **And hath his thynges seyde ful curteisly.**  
And has said his prayers very courteously.
- 92 **This goode wyf cam walkyng pryvely**  
This good wife came walking alone
- 93 **Into the gardyn, there he walketh softe,**  
Into the garden, where he walks quietly,
- 94 **And hym saleweth, as she hath doon ofte.**  
And salutes him, as she has often done.
- 95 **A mayde child cam in hire compaignye,**  
A maid servant came in her company,
- 96 **Which as hir list she may governe and gye,**  
Whom she may govern and guide as she pleases,
- 97 **For yet under the yerde was the mayde.**  
For the maid was yet subject to adult discipline.
- 98 **"O deere cosyn myn, daun John," she sayde,**  
"Oh my dear cousin, Dan John," she said,
- 99 **"What eyleth yow so rathe for to ryse?"**  
"What ails you to rise so early?"
- 100 **"Nece," quod he, "it oghte ynough suffise**  
"Niece," said he, "it ought enough suffice
- 101 **Fyve houres for to slepe upon a nyght,**  
To sleep five hours upon a night,
- 102 **But it were for an old appalled wight,**  
Unless it were for an old enfeebled creature,
- 103 **As been thise wedded men, that lye and dare**  
As are these wedded men, that lie and doze
- 104 **As in a fourme sit a very hare,**  
As in his lair sits a weary hare,
- 105 **Were al forstraught with houndes grete and smale.**  
Which is greatly distressed by hounds great and small.

- 106 **But deere nece, why be ye so pale?**  
But dear niece, why are you so pale?
- 107 **I trowe, certes, that oure goode man**  
I believe, certainly, that the head of our household
- 108 **Hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan**  
Has labored you since the night began
- 109 **That yow were nede to resten hastily."**  
So much that you badly have need to rest."
- 110 **And with that word he lough ful murily,**  
And with that word he laughed very merrily,
- 111 **And of his owene thought he wax al reed.**  
And of his own thought he grew all red.
- 112 **This faire wyf gan for to shake hir heed**  
This fair wife began to shake her head
- 113 **And seyde thus, "Ye, God woot al," quod she.**  
And said thus, "Yea, God knows all," she said.
- 114 **"Nay, cosyn myn, it stant nat so with me;**  
"Nay, my cousin, it stands not so with me;
- 115 **For, by that God that yaf me soule and lyf,**  
For, by that God that gave me soul and life,
- 116 **In al the reawme of France is ther no wyf**  
In all the realm of France there is no wife
- 117 **That lasse lust hath to that sory pley.**  
That has less desire for that sorry play.
- 118 **For I may synge `allas and weylawey**  
For I may sing `alas and alack
- 119 **That I was born,' but to no wight," quod she,**  
That I was born,' but to no one," she said,
- 120 **"Dar I nat telle how that it stant with me.**  
"Dare I tell how it stands with me.
- 121 **Wherfore I thynke out of this land to wende,**  
Therefore I intend to go out of this land,
- 122 **Or elles of myself to make an ende,**  
Or else to make an end of myself,
- 123 **So ful am I of drede and eek of care."**  
I am so full of dread and also of care."
- 124 **This monk bigan upon this wyf to stare,**  
This monk began to stare upon this wife,
- 125 **And seyde, "Allas, my nece, God forbede**  
And said, "Alas, my niece, God forbid
- 126 **That ye, for any sorwe or any drede,**  
That you, for any sorrow or any dread,
- 127 **Fordo youreself; but telleth me youre grief.**  
Should destroy yourself; but tell me your grief.
- 128 **Paraventure I may, in youre meschief,**  
Perhaps I can, in your unhappy situation,
- 129 **Conseille or helpe; and therefore telleth me**  
Advise or help; and therefore tell me



- 130 **Al youre any, for it shal been secree.**  
All your trouble, for it shall be secret.
- 131 **For on my portehors I make an ooth**  
For on my prayer book I make an oath
- 132 **That nevere in my lyf, for lief ne looth,**  
That never in my life, willing or unwilling,
- 133 **Ne shal I of no conseil yow biwreye."**  
Shall I betray any of your secrets."
- 134 **"The same agayn to yow," quod she, "I seye.**  
"The same in reply to you," she said, "I say.
- 135 **By God and by this portehors I swere,**  
By God and by this prayer book I swear,
- 136 **Though men me wolde al into pieces tere,**  
Though men would tear me all to pieces
- 137 **Ne shal I nevere, for to goon to helle,**  
I shall never, even though I go to hell for it,
- 138 **Biwreye a word of thyng that ye me telle,**  
Betray a word of anything that you tell me,
- 139 **Nat for no cosynage ne alliance,**  
Not for any kinship nor alliance,
- 140 **But verrailly for love and affiance."**  
But truly for love and trust."
- 141 **Thus been they sworn, and heerupon they kiste,**  
Thus they are sworn, and thereupon they kissed,
- 142 **And ech of hem tolde oother what hem liste.**  
And each of them told the other what they pleased.
- 143 **"Cosyn," quod she, "if that I hadde a space,**  
"Cousin," she said, "if that I had a space of time,
- 144 **As I have noon, and namely in this place,**  
As I have none, and especially in this place,
- 145 **Thanne wolde I telle a legende of my lyf,**  
Then would I tell a legend of my life,
- 146 **What I have suffred sith I was a wyf**  
What I have suffered since I was a wife
- 147 **With myn housbonde, al be he youre cosyn."**  
Because of my husband, although he is your cousin."
- 148 **"Nay," quod this monk, "by God and Seint Martyn,**  
"Nay," said this monk, "by God and Saint Martin,
- 149 **He is na moore cosyn unto me**  
He is no more cousin unto me
- 150 **Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!**  
Than is this leaf that hangs on the tree!
- 151 **I clepe hym so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce,**  
I call him so, by Saint Denis of France,
- 152 **To have the moore cause of aqueyntaunce**  
To have the more opportunity of acquaintance

- 153 **Of yow, which I have loved specially**  
With you, whom I have loved especially
- 154 **Aboven alle wommen, sikerly.**  
Above all women, certainly.
- 155 **This swere I yow on my professioun.**  
This I swear to you on my religious vows.
- 156 **Telleth youre grief, lest that he come adoun;**  
Tell your grief, lest that he come down;
- 157 **And hasteth yow, and gooth youre wey anon."**  
And hasten you, and go your way quickly."

**When you are sure that you understand the Middle English, take a [quiz on this part](#) of the Shipman's Tale.**

**[Back to Lesson 6](#) | Or go on to [Part II](#). | (Or use your browser's back button to return to the previous page.)**

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## The Shipman's Tale

**He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,  
In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.  
A daggere hangynge on a laas hadde he  
Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun.  
The hote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun.**

[A rich merchant of Saint Denis (near Paris) has a beautiful wife and maintains a splendid household. The monk Dan John, who claims he is a cousin, is a frequent visitor. One day Dan John comes to call when the merchant is busy in his counting house. He makes advances to the wife, who says her wretched husband will not give her a hundred franks, which she needs to pay a debt; if he can give her that amount, she will show her gratitude. He says he will bring them, and he "caught her by the flanks."

When the merchant must go on business to Flanders the monk borrows a hundred franks from him. He gives the money to the wife, and he takes his pleasure of her. When the merchant returns and asks for his money, Dan John says he repaid it to the wife. When the Merchant later asks his wife for the money (which she has spent), she turns the tables, telling him she spent it on clothing, since it is to his honor to have her richly dressed. She will pay him back in bed -- "score it upon my tail."]

(Students reading this text for the first time may find an [interlinear translation](#) helpful).

The Shipman's Tale is a [fabliau](#) . Its setting in France and even its use of French phrases, perhaps as a touch of "local color," distinguish it sharply from works such as the Miller's and Reeve's Tales, which are clearly set in Chaucer's own place and time. For this reason, the Shipman's Tale has sometimes been regarded as Chaucer's earliest work in this genre, closer to his French models than his later fabliaux. However that may be, the tale provides a good beginning example for a study of Chaucer's use and redefinition of the genre. The basic story in the Shipman's Tale -- "The Lover's Gift Regained" --is ancient and widespread, and it remains in circulation today as an orally transmitted "dirty joke." Chaucer's version may well have been based on some oral version, or he may have drawn on one of a number of written versions. Typical of the medieval versions is that in Boccaccio's [Decameron , Day 8 Tale 1](#).

There are countless variations on this popular story. For a number of examples see Benson and Andersson, *The Literary Context of Chaucer's Fabliaux* (on Reserve) [PR1912.A2 B4]. Two French fabliaux are especially relevant:

[The Priest and the Lady](#), makes explicit the relationship between sex and money that is latent in all versions of the traditional tale; as the author says at the end of his tale, "It is a matter of buying and selling."

[Eustache d'Amiens, The Butcher of Abbeville](#), develops the basic story and the characters to an extent unusual in a fabliau before Chaucer took up the genre.

On the matter of the economics of sex in the tale and the more general problem of the relation of the tale to its present and probable previous tellers (the Shipman and the Wife of Bath) see Albert H. Silverman, "[Sex and Money in Chaucer's Shipman's Tale](#)," *Philological Quarterly*, XXXII (July, 1953), pp. 329-336.

For a bibliography of critical and scholarly works on the Shipman's Tale (and Fragment VII generally) [click here](#).

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# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 7: The General Prologue

Begin with reading through the interlinear translation of [The General Prologue](#). There are quizzes for you to take to gauge your progress. Go through them carefully; these are harder than the quizzes set for the Shipman's Tale (which stressed very basic vocabulary items), so do not be disturbed if you have some initial difficulty with them.

When you feel confident about your reading of the interlinear text, return to this page and then read through the General Prologue in your printed text. Go slowly and read for enjoyment as well as understanding. Consult the Explanatory Notes, which will often help increase your understanding of the text as well as some aspects of life in Chaucer's time.

When you have finished this reading to see how much you learned from the explanatory notes, [take a quiz](#).

Browse through the page on [The General Prologue](#), where you might find something of interest; and look over the [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) for any matters that might interest you (use the [Site Index](#) for looking for specific texts and subject matters).

Then go on to Lesson 8, [The Knight's Tale](#). | Or return to [the Index](#). | Or use your browser's back button to return to the previous page.

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# The General Prologue

## An Interlinear Translation

The Middle English text is from Larry D. Benson., Gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*,  
Houghton Mifflin Company; used with permission of the publisher.

(How to use the [interlinear translations.](#))

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*Here bygynneth the Book of the Tales of Caunterbury.*

- 1     **Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote**  
      When April with its sweet-smelling showers
- 2     **The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,**  
      Has pierced the drought of March to the root,
- 3     **And bathed every veyne in swich licour**  
      And bathed every vein (of the plants) in such liquid
- 4     **Of which vertu engendred is the flour;**  
      By the power of which the flower is created;
- 5     **Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth**  
      When the West Wind also with its sweet breath,
- 6     **Inspired hath in every holt and heeth**  
      In every wood and field has breathed life into,
- 7     **The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne**  
      The tender new leaves, and the young sun
- 8     **Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,**  
      Has run half its course in Aries,
- 9     **And smale foweles maken melodye,**  
      And small fowls make melody,
- 10    **That slepen al the nyght with open ye**  
      Those that sleep all the night with open eyes



- 11 **(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),**  
(So Nature incites them in their hearts),
- 12 **Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,**  
Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,
- 13 **And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,**  
And professional pilgrims (long) to seek foreign shores,
- 14 **To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;**  
To (go to) distant shrines, known in various lands;
- 15 **And specially from every shires ende**  
And specially from every shire's end
- 16 **Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,**  
Of England to Canterbury they travel,
- 17 **The hooly blisful martir for to seke,**  
To seek the holy blessed martyr,
- 18 **That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.**  
Who helped them when they were sick.
- 19 **Bifil that in that seson on a day,**  
It happened that in that season on a day,
- 20 **In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay**  
In Southwark at the Tabard Inn as I lay
- 21 **Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage**  
Ready to go on my pilgrimage
- 22 **To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,**  
To Canterbury with a very devout spirit,
- 23 **At nyght was come into that hostelrye**  
At night had come into that hostelry
- 24 **Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye**  
Well nine and twenty in a company
- 25 **Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle**  
Of various sorts of people, by chance fallen
- 26 **In felawshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,**  
In fellowship, and they were all pilgrims,
- 27 **That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.**  
Who intended to ride toward Canterbury.
- 28 **The chambres and the stables weren wyde,**  
The bedrooms and the stables were spacious,
- 29 **And wel we weren esed atte beste.**  
And we were well accommodated in the best way.
- 30 **And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,**  
And in brief, when the sun was (gone) to rest,
- 31 **So hadde I spoken with hem everichon**  
I had so spoken with everyone of them
- 32 **That I was of hir felawshipe anon,**  
That I was of their fellowship straightway,
- 33 **And made forward erly for to ryse,**  
And made agreement to rise early,
- 34 **To takeoure way ther as I yow devyse.**  
To take our way where I (will) tell you.

- 35 **But natheless, whil I have tyme and space,**  
 But nonetheless, while I have time and opportunity,
- 36 **Er that I ferther in this tale pace,**  
 Before I proceed further in this tale,
- 37 **Me thynketh it acordaunt to resoun**  
 It seems to me in accord with reason
- 38 **To telle yow al the condicioun**  
 To tell you all the circumstances
- 39 **Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,**  
 Of each of them, as it seemed to me,
- 40 **And whiche they weren, and of what degree,**  
 And who they were, and of what social rank,
- 41 **And eek in what array that they were inne;**  
 And also what clothing that they were in;
- 42 **And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.**  
 And at a knight then will I first begin.
- 43 **A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,**  
 A KNIGHT there was, and that (one was) a worthy man,
- 44 **That fro the tyme that he first bigan**  
 Who from the time that he first began
- 45 **To riden out, he loved chivalrie,**  
 To ride out, he loved chivalry,
- 46 **Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.**  
 Fidelity and good reputation, generosity and courtesy.
- 47 **Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,**  
 He was very worthy in his lord's war,
- 48 **And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,**  
 And for that he had ridden, no man farther,
- 49 **As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,**  
 As well in Christendom as in heathen lands,
- 50 **And evere honoured for his worthynesse;**  
 And (was) ever honored for his worthiness;
- 51 **At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne.**  
 He was at Alexandria when it was won.
- 52 **Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne**  
 He had sat very many times in the place of honor,
- 53 **Aboven alle nacions in Pruce;**  
 Above (knights of) all nations in Prussia;
- 54 **In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,**  
 He had campaigned in Lithuania and in Russia,
- 55 **No Cristen man so ofte of his degree.**  
 No Christian man of his rank so often (had done so).
- 56 **In Gernade at the seege eek hadde he be**  
 Also he had been in Grenada at the siege
- 57 **Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.**  
 Of Algeciras, and had ridden in Morocco.
- 58 **At Lyeyes was he and at Satalye,**  
 He was at Ayash and at Atalia,
- 59 **Whan they were wonne, and in the Grete See**

- When they were won, and in the Mediterranean
- 60 **At many a noble armee hadde he be.**  
He had been at many a noble expedition.
- 61 **At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,**  
He had been at fifteen mortal battles,
- 62 **And foughten for oure feith at Tramysse**  
And fought for our faith at Tlemcen
- 63 **In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo.**  
Three times in formal duels, and each time slain his foe.
- 64 **This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also**  
This same worthy knight had also been
- 65 **Somtyme with the lord of Palatye**  
At one time with the lord of Balat
- 66 **Agayn another hethen in Turkye;**  
Against another heathen in Turkey;
- 67 **And everemoore he hadde a sovereyn prys.**  
And evermore he had an outstanding reputation
- 68 **And though that he were worthy, he was wys,**  
And although he was brave, he was prudent,
- 69 **And of his port as meeke as is a mayde.**  
And of his deportment as meek as is a maid.
- 70 **He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde**  
He never yet said any rude word
- 71 **In al his lyf unto no maner wight.**  
In all his life unto any sort of person.
- 72 **He was a verray, parfit gentil knyght.**  
He was a truly perfect, noble knight.
- 73 **But for to tellen yow of his array,**  
But to tell you of his clothing,
- 74 **His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.**  
His horses were good, but he was not gaily dressed.
- 75 **Of fustian he wered a gypon**  
He wore a tunic of coarse cloth
- 76 **Al bismotered with his habergeon,**  
All stained (with rust) by his coat of mail,
- 77 **For he was late ycome from his viage,**  
For he was recently come (back) from his expedition,
- 78 **And wente for to doon his pilgrymage.**  
And went to do his pilgrimage.
- 79 **With hym ther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,**  
With him there was his son, a young SQUIRE,
- 80 **A lovyere and a lusty bacheler,**  
A lover and a lively bachelor,
- 81 **With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.**  
With locks curled as if they had been laid in a curler.
- 82 **Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.**  
He was twenty years of age, I guess.
- 83 **Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,**  
Of his stature he was of moderate height,

- 84 **And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.**  
And wonderfully agile, and of great strength.
- 85 **And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie**  
And he had been for a time on a cavalry expedition
- 86 **In Flaundes, in Artoys, and Pycardie,**  
In Flanders, in Artois, and Picardy,
- 87 **And born hym weel, as of so litel space,**  
And conducted himself well, for so little a space of time,
- 88 **In hope to stonden in his lady grace.**  
In hope to stand in his lady's good graces.
- 89 **Embrouded was he, as it were a meede**  
He was embroidered, as if it were a mead
- 90 **Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede.**  
All full of fresh flowers, white and red.
- 91 **Syngyng he was, or floytyng, al the day;**  
Singing he was, or fluting, all the day;
- 92 **He was as fressh as is the month of May.**  
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
- 93 **Short was his gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde.**  
His gown was short, with long and wide sleeves.
- 94 **Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde.**  
He well knew how to sit on horse and handsomely ride.
- 95 **He koude songes make and wel endite,**  
He knew how to make songs and well compose (the words),
- 96 **Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write.**  
Joust and also dance, and well draw and write.
- 97 **So hote he lovede that by nyghtertale**  
He loved so passionately that at nighttime
- 98 **He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.**  
He slept no more than does a nightingale.
- 99 **Curteis he was, lowely, and servysable,**  
Courteous he was, humble, and willing to serve,
- 100 **And carf biforn his fader at the table.**  
And (he) carved before his father at the table.
- 101 **A YEMAN hadde he and servantz namo**  
He (the Knight) had A YEOMAN and no more servants
- 102 **At that tyme, for hym liste ride so,**  
At that time, for it pleased him to ride so,
- 103 **And he was clad in cote and hood of grene.**  
And he (the yeoman) was clad in coat and hood of green.
- 104 **A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene,**  
A sheaf of peacock arrows, bright and keen,
- 105 **Under his belt he bar ful thriftily**  
He carried under his belt very properly
- 106 **(Wel koude he dresse his takel yemanly;**  
(He well knew how to care for his equipment as a yeoman should;
- 107 **His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe),**  
His arrows did not fall short because of drooping feathers),
- 108 **And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe.**

- And in his hand he carried a mighty bow.  
 109 **A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage.**  
 He had a close-cropped head, with a brown face.  
 110 **Of wodecraft wel koude he al the usage.**  
 He well knew all the practice of woodcraft.  
 111 **Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,**  
 He wore an elegant archer's arm-guard upon his arm,  
 112 **And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler,**  
 And by his side a sword and a small shield,  
 113 **And on that oother syde a gay daggere**  
 And on that other side an elegant dagger  
 114 **Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere;**  
 Well ornamented and sharp as the point of a spear;  
 115 **A Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene.**  
 A Christopher-medal of bright silver (was) on his breast.  
 116 **An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene;**  
 He carried a horn, the shoulder strap was green;  
 117 **A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse.**  
 He was a forester, truly, as I guess.
- 118 **Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,**  
 There was also a Nun, a PRIORESS,  
 119 **That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;**  
 Who was very simple and modest in her smiling;  
 120 **Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy;**  
 Her greatest oath was but by Saint Loy;  
 121 **And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.**  
 And she was called Madam Eglantine.  
 122 **Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,**  
 She sang the divine service very well,  
 123 **Entuned in hir nose ful semely;**  
 Intoned in her nose in a very polite manner;  
 124 **And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,**  
 And she spoke French very well and elegantly,  
 125 **After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,**  
 In the manner of Stratford at the Bow,  
 126 **For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.**  
 For French of Paris was to her unknown.  
 127 **At mete wel ytaught was she with alle;**  
 At meals she was well taught indeed;  
 128 **She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,**  
 She let no morsel fall from her lips,  
 129 **Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;**  
 Nor wet her fingers deep in her sauce;  
 130 **Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe**  
 She well knew how to carry a morsel (to her mouth) and take good care  
 131 **That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.**  
 That no drop fell upon her breast.  
 132 **In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.**  
 Her greatest pleasure was in good manners.

- 133 **Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene**  
She wiped her upper lip so clean
- 134 **That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene**  
That in her cup there was seen no tiny bit
- 135 **Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.**  
Of grease, when she had drunk her drink.
- 136 **Ful semely after hir mete she raughte.**  
She reached for her food in a very seemly manner.
- 137 **And sikerly she was of greet desport,**  
And surely she was of excellent deportment,
- 138 **And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,**  
And very pleasant, and amiable in demeanor,
- 139 **And peyned hire to countrefete cheere**  
And she took pains to imitate the manners
- 140 **Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,**  
Of court, and to be dignified in behavior,
- 141 **And to ben holden digne of reverence.**  
And to be considered worthy of reverence.
- 142 **But for to speken of hire conscience,**  
But to speak of her moral sense,
- 143 **She was so charitable and so pitous**  
She was so charitable and so compassionate
- 144 **She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous**  
She would weep, if she saw a mouse
- 145 **Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.**  
Caught in a trap, if it were dead or bled.
- 146 **Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde**  
She had some small hounds that she fed
- 147 **With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.**  
With roasted meat, or milk and fine white bread.
- 148 **But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,**  
But sorely she wept if one of them were dead,
- 149 **Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;**  
Or if someone smote it smartly with a stick;
- 150 **And al was conscience and tendre herte.**  
And all was feeling and tender heart.
- 151 **Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was,**  
Her wimple was pleated in a very seemly manner,
- 152 **Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,**  
Her nose (was) well formed, her eyes gray as glass,
- 153 **Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed.**  
Her mouth very small, and moreover soft and red.
- 154 **But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;**  
But surely she had a fair forehead;
- 155 **It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe;**  
It was almost nine inches broad, I believe;
- 156 **For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.**  
For, certainly, she was not undergrown.
- 157 **Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.**  
Her cloak was very well made , as I was aware.

- 158 **Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar**  
 About her arm she wore of small coral
- 159 **A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,**  
 A set of beads, with large green beads (to mark divisions),
- 160 **And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,**  
 And thereon hung a brooch of very bright gold,
- 161 **On which ther was first write a crowned A,**  
 On which there was first written an A with a crown,
- 162 **And after Amor vincit omnia.**  
 And after "Love conquers all."
- 163 **Another NONNE with hire hadde she,**  
 She had another NUN with her,
- 164 **That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre.**  
 Who was her secretary, and three priests.
- 165 **A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrie,**  
 There was a MONK, an extremely fine one,
- 166 **An outridere, that lovede venerie,**  
 An outrider (a monk with business outside the monastery), who loved hunting,
- 167 **A manly man, to been an abbot able.**  
 A virile man, qualified to be an abbot.
- 168 **Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,**  
 He had very many fine horses in his stable,
- 169 **And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere**  
 And when he rode, one could hear his bridle
- 170 **Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere**  
 Jingle in a whistling wind as clear
- 171 **And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle**  
 And also as loud as does the chapel belle
- 172 **Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle.**  
 Where this lord was in charge of the cell (subordinate monastery).
- 173 **The reule of Seint Maure or of Seint Beneit --**  
 The rule of Saint Maurus or of Saint Benedict --
- 174 **By cause that it was old and somdel streit**  
 Because it was old and somewhat strict
- 175 **This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,**  
 This same Monk let old things pass away,
- 176 **And heeld after the newe world the space.**  
 And followed the broader customs of modern times.
- 177 **He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,**  
 He gave not a plucked hen for that text
- 178 **That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men,**  
 That says that hunters are not holy men,
- 179 **Ne that a monk, whan he is recchelees,**  
 Nor that a monk, when he is heedless of rules,
- 180 **Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees --**  
 Is like a fish that is out of water --
- 181 **This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.**  
 This is to say, a monk out of his cloister.

- 182 **But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre;**  
 But he considered that same text not worth an oyster;
- 183 **And I seyde his opinion was good.**  
 And I said his opinion was good.
- 184 **What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,**  
 Why should he study and make himself crazy,
- 185 **Upon a book in cloystre alwey to poure,**  
 Always to pore upon a book in the cloister,
- 186 **Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,**  
 Or work with his hands, and labor,
- 187 **As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?**  
 As Augustine commands? How shall the world be served?
- 188 **Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!**  
 Let Augustine have his work reserved to him!
- 189 **Therefore he was a prikasour aright:**  
 Therefore he was indeed a vigorous horseman:
- 190 **Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight;**  
 He had greyhounds as swift as fowl in flight;
- 191 **Of prikyng and of huntynge for the hare**  
 Of tracking and of hunting for the hare
- 192 **Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.**  
 Was all his pleasure, by no means would he refrain from it.
- 193 **I seigh his sleves purfiled at the hond**  
 I saw his sleeves lined at the hand
- 194 **With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;**  
 With squirrel fur, and that the finest in the land;
- 195 **And for to festne his hood under his chyn,**  
 And to fasten his hood under his chin,
- 196 **He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn;**  
 He had a very skillfully made pin of gold;
- 197 **A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.**  
 There was an elaborate knot in the larger end.
- 198 **His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,**  
 His head was bald, which shone like any glass,
- 199 **And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.**  
 And his face did too, as if he had been rubbed with oil.
- 200 **He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt;**  
 He was a very fat lord and in good condition;
- 201 **His eyen stepe, and rolynge in his heed,**  
 His eyes were prominent, and rolling in his head,
- 202 **That stemed as a forneys of a leed;**  
 Which (the eyes) gleamed like a furnace under a cauldron;
- 203 **His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.**  
 His boots (were) supple, his horse in excellent condition.
- 204 **Now certainly he was a fair prelaat;**  
 Now certainly he was a handsome ecclesiastical dignitary;
- 205 **He was nat pale as a forpynded goost.**  
 He was not pale as a tormented spirit.
- 206 **A fat swan loved he best of any roost.**  
 A fat swan loved he best of any roast.



- 207 **His palfrey was as broun as is a berye.**  
 His palfrey (saddle horse) was as brown as is a berry.
- 208 **A FRERE ther was, a wantowne and a merye,**  
 There was a FRIAR, a pleasure-loving and merry one,
- 209 **A lymytour, a ful solempne man.**  
 A limiter (friar with an assigned district), a very solemn man.
- 210 **In alle the ordres foure is noon that kan**  
 In all the four orders of friars is no one that knows
- 211 **So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage.**  
 So much of sociability and elegant speech.
- 212 **He hadde maad ful many a mariage**  
 He had made very many a marriage
- 213 **Of yonge women at his owene cost.**  
 Of young women at his own cost.
- 214 **Unto his ordre he was a noble post.**  
 He was a noble supporter of his order.
- 215 **Ful wel biloved and famulier was he**  
 Very well beloved and familiar was he
- 216 **With frankeleyns over al in his contree,**  
 With landowners every where in his country,
- 217 **And eek with worthy wommen of the toun;**  
 And also with worthy women of the town;
- 218 **For he hadde power of confessioun,**  
 For he had power of confession,
- 219 **As seyde hymself, moore than a curat,**  
 As he said himself, more than a parish priest,
- 220 **For of his ordre he was licenciat.**  
 For by his order he was licensed to hear confessions.
- 221 **Ful swetely herde he confessioun,**  
 He heard confession very sweetly,
- 222 **And plesaunt was his absolucioun:**  
 And his absolution was pleasant:
- 223 **He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,**  
 He was a lenient man in giving penance,
- 224 **Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.**  
 Where he knew he would have a good gift.
- 225 **For unto a povre ordre for to yive**  
 For to give to a poor order (of friars)
- 226 **Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;**  
 Is a sign that a man is well confessed;
- 227 **For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,**  
 For if he gave, he (the friar) dared to assert,
- 228 **He wiste that a man was repentaunt;**  
 He knew that a man was repentant;
- 229 **For many a man so hard is of his herte,**  
 For many a man is so hard in his heart,
- 230 **He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte.**  
 He can not weep, although he painfully suffers.
- 231 **Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyeres**

- 232 **Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres.**  
 One may give silver to the poor friars.
- 233 **His typet was ay farsed ful of knyves**  
 His hood was always stuffed full of knives
- 234 **And pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves.**  
 And pins, to give to fair wives.
- 235 **And certainly he hadde a murye note:**  
 And certainly he had a merry voice:
- 236 **Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a rote;**  
 He well knew how to sing and play on a rote (string instrument);
- 237 **Of yeddynge he baar outrely the pris.**  
 He absolutely took the prize for reciting ballads.
- 238 **His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys;**  
 His neck was white as a lily flower;
- 239 **Therto he strong was as a champioun.**  
 Furthermore he was strong as a champion fighter.
- 240 **He knew the tavernes wel in every toun**  
 He knew the taverns well in every town
- 241 **And everich hostiler and tappestere**  
 And every innkeeper and barmaid
- 242 **Bet than a lazar or a beggestere,**  
 Better than a leper or a beggar-woman,
- 243 **For unto swich a worthy man as he**  
 For unto such a worthy man as he
- 244 **Acorded nat, as by his facultee,**  
 It was not suitable, in view of his official position,
- 245 **To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.**  
 To have acquaintance with sick lepers.
- 246 **It is nat honest; it may nat avaunce,**  
 It is not respectable; it can not be profitable,
- 247 **For to deelen with no swich poraille,**  
 To deal with any such poor people,
- 248 **But al with riche and selleres of vitaille.**  
 But all with rich people and sellers of victuals.
- 249 **And over al, ther as profit sholde arise,**  
 And every where, where profit should arise,
- 250 **Curteis he was and lowely of servyse;**  
 He was courteous and graciously humble;
- 251 **Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous.**  
 There was no man anywhere so capable (of such work).
- 252 **He was the beste beggere in his hous;**  
 He was the best beggar in his house;
- 252a **[And yaf a certeyn ferme for the graunt;**  
 [And he gave a certain fee for his grant (of begging rights);
- 252a **Noon of his bretheren cam ther in his haunt;]**  
 None of his brethren came there in his territory;]
- 253 **For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho,**  
 For though a widow had not a shoe,
- 254 **So plesaunt was his "In principio,"**

- 255 **So pleasant was his "In the beginning",  
Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente.**  
Yet he would have a farthing, before he went away.
- 256 **His purchas was wel bettre than his rente.**  
His total profit was much more than his proper income.
- 257 **And rage he koude, as it were right a whelp.**  
And he knew how to romp (or flirt), as if he were indeed a pup.
- 258 **In love-dayes ther koude he muchel help,**  
He knew how to be much help on days for resolving disputes,
- 259 **For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer**  
For there he was not like a cloistered monk
- 260 **With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler,**  
With a threadbare cope, like a poor scholar,
- 261 **But he was lyk a maister or a pope.**  
But he was like a master of arts or a pope.
- 262 **Of double worstede was his semycope,**  
Of wide (expensive) cloth was his short cloak,
- 263 **That rounded as a belle out of the presse.**  
Which was round as a bell fresh from the clothespress.
- 264 **Somwhat he lipped, for his wantownesse,**  
Somewhat he lisped, for his affectation,
- 265 **To make his Englishh sweete upon his tonge;**  
To make his English sweet upon his tongue;
- 266 **And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde songe,**  
And in his harping, when he had sung,
- 267 **His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght**  
His eyes twinkled in his head exactly
- 268 **As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.**  
As do the stars in the frosty night.
- 269 **This worthy lymytour was cleped Huberd.**  
This worthy friar was called Huberd.

Do you want to check your understanding of the text? If so take a [brief quiz](#).

- 270 **A MERCHANT was ther with a forked berd,**  
There was a MERCHANT with a forked beard,
- 271 **In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat;**  
Wearing parti-colored cloth, and in a high saddle he sat on his horse;
- 272 **Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat,**  
Upon his head (he wore a) Flemish beaver hat,
- 273 **His bootes clasped faire and fetisly.**  
His boots were buckled handsomely and elegantly.
- 274 **His resons he spak ful solempnely,**  
His opinions he spoke very solemnly,
- 275 **Sownynge alwey th' encrees of his wyunnyng.**  
Concerning always the increase of his profits.
- 276 **He wolde the see were kept for any thyng**  
He wanted the sea to be guarded at all costs
- 277 **Bitwixe Middelburgh and Orewelle.**  
Between Middelburgh (Holland) and Orwell (England).

- 278 **Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.**  
He well knew how to deal in foreign currencies.
- 279 **This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:**  
This worthy man employed his wit very well:
- 280 **Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,**  
There was no one who knew that he was in debt,
- 281 **So estatly was he of his governaunce**  
He was so dignified in managing his affairs
- 282 **With his bargaynes and with his chevyssaunce.**  
With his buying and selling and with his financial deals.
- 283 **For sothe he was a worthy man with alle,**  
Truly, he was a worthy man indeed,
- 284 **But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle.**  
But, to say the truth, I do not know what men call him.
- 285 **A CLERK ther was of Oxenford also,**  
There was also a CLERK (scholar) from Oxford,
- 286 **That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.**  
Who long before had begun the study of logic.
- 287 **As leene was his hors as is a rake,**  
His horse was as lean as is a rake,
- 288 **And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,**  
And he was not very fat, I affirm,
- 289 **But looked holwe, and therto sobrelly.**  
But looked emaciated, and moreover abstemious.
- 290 **Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy,**  
His short overcoat was very threadbare,
- 291 **For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice,**  
For he had not yet obtained an ecclesiastical living,
- 292 **Ne was so worldly for to have office.**  
Nor was he worldly enough to take secular employment.
- 293 **For hym was levere have at his beddes heed**  
For he would rather have at the head of his bed
- 294 **Twenty bookes, clad in blak or reed,**  
Twenty books, bound in black or red,
- 295 **Of Aristotle and his philosophie**  
Of Aristotle and his philosophy
- 296 **Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie.**  
Than rich robes, or a fiddle, or an elegant psaltery (a harp-like instrument).
- 297 **But al be that he was a philosophre,**  
But even though he was a philosopher,
- 298 **Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre;**  
Nevertheless he had but little gold in his strongbox;
- 299 **But al that he myghte of his freendes hente,**  
But all that he could get from his friends,
- 300 **On bookes and on lernynge he it spente,**  
He spent on books and on learning,
- 301 **And bisily gan for the soules preye**  
And diligently did pray for the souls
- 302 **Of hem that yaf hym wherwith to scoleye.**

- Of those who gave him the wherewithal to attend the schools.
- 303 **Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede.**  
He took most care and most heed of study.
- 304 **Noght o word spak he moore than was neede,**  
He spoke not one word more than was needed,
- 305 **And that was seyd in forme and reverence,**  
And that was said with due formality and respect,
- 306 **And short and quyk and ful of hy sentence;**  
And (was) short and lively and full of elevated content;
- 307 **Sownyng in moral vertu was his speche,**  
His speech was consonant with (his) moral virtue,
- 308 **And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.**  
And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.
- 309 **A SERGEANT OF THE LAWE, war and wys,**  
A SERGEANT OF THE LAW, prudent and wise,
- 310 **That often hadde been at the Parvys,**  
Who often had been at the Porch of St. Paul's (i.e. had long practiced law)
- 311 **Ther was also, ful riche of excellence.**  
Was also there, very rich in superior qualities.
- 312 **Discreet he was and of greet reverence --**  
He was judicious and of great dignity --
- 313 **He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise.**  
He seemed such, his words were so wise.
- 314 **Justice he was ful often in assise,**  
He was very often a judge in the court of assizes,
- 315 **By patente and by pleyn commissioun.**  
By royal appointment and with full jurisdiction.
- 316 **For his science and for his heigh renoun,**  
For his knowledge and for his excellent reputation,
- 317 **Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.**  
He had many grants of yearly income.
- 318 **So greet a purchasour was nowher noon:**  
There was nowhere so great a land-buyer:
- 319 **Al was fee symple to hym in effect;**  
In fact, all was unrestricted possession to him;
- 320 **His purchasyng myghte nat been infect.**  
His purchasing could not be invalidated.
- 321 **Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,**  
There was nowhere so busy a man as he,
- 322 **And yet he semed bisier than he was.**  
And yet he seemed busier than he was.
- 323 **In termes hadde he caas and doomes alle**  
He had in Year Books all the cases and decisions
- 324 **That from the tyme of kyng William were falle.**  
That from the time of king William have occurred.
- 325 **Therto he koude endite and make a thyng,**  
Furthermore, he knew how to compose and draw up a legal document,
- 326 **Ther koude no wight pynche at his writyng;**  
So that no one could find a flaw in his writing;

- 327 **And every statut koude he pleyn by rote.**  
And he knew every statute completely by heart.
- 328 **He rood but hoomly in a medlee cote,**  
He rode but simply in a parti-colored coat,
- 329 **Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale;**  
Girded with a belt of silk, with small stripes;
- 330 **Of his array telle I no lenger tale.**  
I tell no longer tale of his clothing.
- 331 **A FRANKLEYN was in his compaignye.**  
A FRANKLIN was in his company.
- 332 **Whit was his berd as is the dayesye;**  
His (the Franklin's) beard was white as a daisy;
- 333 **Of his complexioun he was sangwyn.**  
As to his temperament, he was dominated by the humor blood.
- 334 **Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn;**  
He well loved a bit of bread dipped in wine in the morning;
- 335 **To lyven in delit was evere his wone,**  
His custom was always to live in delight,
- 336 **For he was Epicurus owene sone,**  
For he was Epicurus' own son,
- 337 **That heeld opinioun that pleyn delit**  
Who (Epicurus) held the opinion that pure pleasure
- 338 **Was verray felicitee parfit.**  
Was truly perfect happiness.
- 339 **An housholdere, and that a greet, was he;**  
He was a householder, and a great one at that;
- 340 **Seint Julian he was in his contree.**  
He was Saint Julian (patron of hospitality) in his country.
- 341 **His breed, his ale, was always after oon;**  
His bread, his ale, was always of the same (good) quality;
- 342 **A bettre envyned man was nowher noon.**  
Nowhere was there any man better stocked with wine.
- 343 **Withoute bake mete was nevere his hous,**  
His house was never without baked pies
- 344 **Of fissh and flessh, and that so plentevous**  
Of fish and meat, and that so plentiful
- 345 **It snewed in his hous of mete and drynke;**  
That in his house it snowed with food and drink;
- 346 **Of alle deyntees that men koude thynke,**  
Of all the dainties that men could imagine,
- 347 **After the sondry sesons of the yeer,**  
In accord with the various seasons of the year,
- 348 **So changed he his mete and his soper.**  
So he varied his midday meal and his supper.
- 349 **Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,**  
He had very many fat partridges in pens,
- 350 **And many a breem and many a luce in stuwe.**  
And many a bream and many a pike in his fish pond.
- 351 **Wo was his cook but if his sauce were**

- 352 **Woe was his cook unless his sauce was  
Poynaunt and sharp, and redy al his geere.**  
Hotly spiced and sharp, and ready all his cooking equipment.
- 353 **His table dormant in his halle alway**  
In his hall his dining table always
- 354 **Stood redy covered al the longe day.**  
Stood covered (with table cloth) and ready all the long day.
- 355 **At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire;**  
He presided as lord and sire at court sessions;
- 356 **Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.**  
He was a member of parliament many times.
- 357 **An anlaas and a gipser al of silk**  
A dagger and a purse all of silk
- 358 **Heeng at his girdel, whit as morne milk.**  
Hung at his belt, white as morning milk.
- 359 **A shirreve hadde he been, and a contour.**  
He had been a sheriff, and an auditor of taxes.
- 360 **Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour.**  
There was nowhere such a worthy landowner.
- 361 **AN HABERDASSHERE and a CARPENTER,**  
A HABERDASHER and a CARPENTER,
- 362 **A WEBBE, a DYERE, and a TAPYCER --**  
A WEAVER, a DYER, and a TAPESTRY-MAKER --
- 363 **And they were clothed alle in o lyveree**  
And they were all clothed in the livery
- 364 **Of a solempne and a greet fraternitee.**  
Of a solemn and a great parish guild.
- 365 **Ful freshh and newe hir geere apiked was;**  
Their equipment was adorned all freshly and new;
- 366 **Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras**  
Their knives were not mounted with brass
- 367 **But al with silver, wrought ful clene and weel,**  
But entirely with silver, wrought very neatly and well,
- 368 **Hire girdles and hir pouches everydeel.**  
Their belts and their purses every bit.
- 369 **Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgeys**  
Each of them well seemed a solid citizen
- 370 **To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys.**  
To sit on a dais in a city hall.
- 371 **Everich, for the wisdom that he kan,**  
Every one of them, for the wisdom that he knows,
- 372 **Was shaply for to been an alderman.**  
Was suitable to be an alderman.
- 373 **For catel hadde they ynogh and rente,**  
For they had enough possessions and income,
- 374 **And eek hir wyves wolde it wel assente;**  
And also their wives would well assent to it;
- 375 **And elles certeyn were they to blame.**  
And otherwise certainly they would be to blame.

- 376 **It is ful fair to been ycleped "madame,"**  
 It is very fine to be called "my lady,"
- 377 **And goon to vigilies al bifore,**  
 And go to feasts on holiday eves heading the procession,
- 378 **And have a mantel roialliche ybore.**  
 And have a gown with a train royally carried.
- 379 **A COOK they hadde with hem for the nones**  
 A COOK they had with them for the occasion
- 380 **To boille the chiknes with the marybones,**  
 To boil the chickens with the marrow bones,
- 381 **And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.**  
 And tart poudre-marchant and galingale (spices).
- 382 **Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.**  
 He well knew how to judge a draft of London ale.
- 383 **He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,**  
 He knew how to roast, and boil, and broil, and fry,
- 384 **Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.**  
 Make stews, and well bake a pie.
- 385 **But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,**  
 But it was a great harm, as it seemed to me,
- 386 **That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.**  
 That he had an open sore on his shin.
- 387 **For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.**  
 As for white pudding, he made that of the best quality.
- 388 **A SHIPMAN was ther, wonyng fer by weste;**  
 A SHIPMAN was there, dwelling far in the west;
- 389 **For aught I woot, he was of Dertemouthe.**  
 For all I know, he was from Dartmouth.
- 390 **He rood upon a rouncy, as he kouthe,**  
 He rode upon a cart horse, insofar as he knew how,
- 391 **In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.**  
 In a gown of woolen cloth (that reached) to the knee.
- 392 **A daggere hangyng on a laas hadde he**  
 He had a dagger hanging on a cord
- 393 **Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun.**  
 About his neck, down under his arm.
- 394 **The hote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun;**  
 The hot summer had made his hue all brown;
- 395 **And certainly he was a good felawe.**  
 And certainly he was a boon companion.
- 396 **Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe**  
 He had drawn very many a draft of wine
- 397 **Fro Burdeux-ward, whil that the chapman sleep.**  
 While coming from Bordeaux, while the merchant slept.
- 398 **Of nyce conscience took he no keep.**  
 He had no concern for a scrupulous conscience.
- 399 **If that he faught and hadde the hyer hond,**  
 If he fought and had the upper hand,



- 400 **By water he sente hem hoom to every lond.**  
 He sent them home by water to every land (they walked the plank).
- 401 **But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,**  
 But of his skill to reckon well his tides,
- 402 **His stremes, and his daungers hym bisides,**  
 His currents, and his perils near at hand,
- 403 **His herberwe, and his moone, his lodemenage,**  
 His harbors, and positions of his moon, his navigation,
- 404 **Ther nas noon swich from Hulle to Cartage.**  
 There was none other such from Hull to Cartagena (Spain).
- 405 **Hardy he was and wys to undertake;**  
 He was bold and prudent in his undertakings;
- 406 **With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.**  
 His beard had been shaken by many a tempest.
- 407 **He knew alle the havenes, as they were,**  
 He knew all the harbors, how they were,
- 408 **Fro Gootlond to the cape of Fynystere,**  
 From Gotland to the Cape of Finisterre,
- 409 **And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne.**  
 And every inlet in Brittany and in Spain.
- 410 **His barge ycleped was the Maudelayne.**  
 His barge was called the Maudelayne.
- 411 **With us ther was a DOCTOUR OF PHISIK;**  
 With us there was a DOCTOR OF MEDICINE
- 412 **In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik,**  
 In all this world there was no one like him,
- 413 **To speke of phisik and of surgerye,**  
 To speak of medicine and of surgery,
- 414 **For he was grounded in astronomye.**  
 For he was instructed in astronomy.
- 415 **He kepte his pacient a ful greet deel**  
 He took care of his patient very many times
- 416 **In houres by his magyk natureel.**  
 In (astronomically suitable) hours by (use of) his natural science.
- 417 **Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent**  
 He well knew how to calculate the planetary position
- 418 **Of his ymages for his pacient.**  
 Of his astronomical talismans for his patient.
- 419 **He knew the cause of everich maladye,**  
 He knew the cause of every malady,
- 420 **Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,**  
 Were it of hot, or cold, or moist, or dry elements,
- 421 **And where they engendred, and of what humour.**  
 And where they were engendered, and by what bodily fluid.
- 422 **He was a verray, parfit praktisour:**  
 He was a truly, perfect practitioner:
- 423 **The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,**  
 The cause known, and the source of his (patient's) harm,
- 424 **Anon he yaf the sike man his boote.**

- 425 **Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries**  
He had his apothecaries all ready
- 426 **To sende hym drogges and his letuaries,**  
To send him drugs and his electuaries,
- 427 **For ech of hem made oother for to wynne --**  
For each of them made the other to profit --
- 428 **Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigynne.**  
Their friendship was not recently begun.
- 429 **Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,**  
He well knew the old Aesculapius,
- 430 **And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,**  
And Dioscorides, and also Rufus,
- 431 **Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,**  
Old Hippocrates, Haly, and Galen,
- 432 **Serapion, Razis, and Avycen,**  
Serapion, Rhazes, and Avicenna,
- 433 **Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,**  
Averroes, John the Damascan, and Constantine,
- 434 **Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn.**  
Bernard, and Gaddesden, and Gilbertus.
- 435 **Of his diete mesurable was he,**  
He was moderate in his diet,
- 436 **For it was of no superfluitee,**  
For it was of no excess,
- 437 **But of greet norissyng and digestible.**  
But greatly nourishing and digestible.
- 438 **His studie was but litel on the Bible.**  
His study was but little on the Bible.
- 439 **In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,**  
He was clad all in red and in blue,
- 440 **Lyned with taffata and with sendal.**  
Lined with taffeta and with silk.
- 441 **And yet he was but esy of dispence;**  
And yet he was moderate (careful) in spending;
- 442 **He kepte that he wan in pestilence.**  
He kept what he earned in (times of) plague.
- 443 **For gold in phisik is a cordial,**  
Since in medicine gold is a restorative for the heart,
- 444 **Therefore he lovede gold in special.**  
Therefore he loved gold in particular.

Do you want to check your understanding of the text? If so take a [brief quiz](#).

- 445 **A good WIF was ther OF biside BATHE,**  
There was a good WIFE OF beside BATH,
- 446 **But she was somdel deaf, and that was scathe.**  
But she was somewhat deaf, and that was a pity.
- 447 **Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt**  
She had such a skill in cloth-making

- 448 **She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt.**  
She surpassed them of Ypres and of Ghent.
- 449 **In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon**  
In all the parish there was no wife
- 450 **That to the offrynge bifore hire sholde goon;**  
Who should go to the Offering before her;
- 451 **And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she**  
And if there did, certainly she was so angry
- 452 **That she was out of alle charitee.**  
That she was out of all charity (love for her neighbor).
- 453 **Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;**  
Her kerchiefs (coverings for the head) were very fine in texture;
- 454 **I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound**  
I dare swear they weighed ten pound
- 455 **That on a Sondag weren upon hir heed.**  
That on a Sunday were upon her head.
- 456 **Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,**  
Her stockings were of fine scarlet red,
- 457 **Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.**  
Very closely laced, and shoes very supple and new.
- 458 **Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.**  
Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue.
- 459 **She was a worthy womman al hir lyve:**  
She was a worthy woman all her life:
- 460 **Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,**  
She had (married) five husbands at the church door,
- 461 **Withouten oother compaignye in youthe --**  
Not counting other company in youth --
- 462 **But thereof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe.**  
But there is no need to speak of that right now.
- 463 **And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;**  
And she had been three times at Jerusalem;
- 464 **She hadde passed many a straunge strem;**  
She had passed many a foreign sea;
- 465 **At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,**  
She had been at Rome, and at Boulogne,
- 466 **In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne.**  
In Galicia at Saint-James (of Compostella), and at Cologne.
- 467 **She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye.**  
She knew much about wandering by the way.
- 468 **Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.**  
She had teeth widely set apart, truly to say.
- 469 **Upon an amblere esily she sat,**  
She sat easily upon a pacing horse,
- 470 **Ywympled wel, and on hir heed an hat**  
Wearing a large wimple, and on her head a hat
- 471 **As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;**  
As broad as a buckler or a shield;
- 472 **A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large,**  
An overskirt about her large hips,

- 473 **And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe.**  
 And on her feet a pair of sharp spurs.
- 474 **In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe.**  
 In fellowship she well knew how to laugh and chatter.
- 475 **Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,**  
 She knew, as it happened, about remedies for love
- 476 **For she koude of that art the olde daunce.**  
 For she knew the old dance (tricks of the trade) of that art.
- 477 **A good man was ther of religioun,**  
 A good man was there of religion,
- 478 **And was a povre PERSOUN OF A TOUN,**  
 And (he) was a poor PARSON OF A TOWN,
- 479 **But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk.**  
 But he was rich in holy thought and work.
- 480 **He was also a lerned man, a clerk,**  
 He was also a learned man, a scholar,
- 481 **That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;**  
 Who would preach Christ's gospel truly;
- 482 **His parisspens devoutly wolde he teche.**  
 He would devoutly teach his parishioners.
- 483 **Benygne he was, and wonder diligent,**  
 He was gracious, and wonderfully diligent,
- 484 **And in adversitee ful pacient,**  
 And very patient in adversity,
- 485 **And swich he was ypreved ofte sithes.**  
 And such he was proven many times.
- 486 **Ful looth were hym to cursen for his tithes,**  
 He was very reluctant to excommunicate for (nonpayment of) his tithes,
- 487 **But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,**  
 But rather would he give, there is no doubt,
- 488 **Unto his povre parisspens aboute**  
 Unto his poor parishioners about
- 489 **Of his offryng and eek of his substaunce.**  
 Some of his offering (received at mass) and also some of his income.
- 490 **He koude in litel thyng have suffisaunce.**  
 He knew how to have sufficiency in few possessions.
- 491 **Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer asonder,**  
 His parish was wide, and houses far apart,
- 492 **But he ne lefte nat, for reyn ne thonder,**  
 But he did not omit, for rain nor thunder,
- 493 **In siknesse nor in meschief to visite**  
 In sickness or in trouble to visit
- 494 **The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lite,**  
 Those living farthest away in his parish, high-ranking and low,
- 495 **Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf.**  
 Going by foot, and in his hand a staff.
- 496 **This noble ensample to his sheep he yaf,**  
 He gave this noble example to his sheep,
- 497 **That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte.**

- That first he wrought, and afterward he taught.
- 498 **Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte,**  
He took those words out of the gospel,
- 499 **And this figure he added eek therto,**  
And this metaphor he added also to that,
- 500 **That if gold ruste, what shal iren do?**  
That if gold rust, what must iron do?
- 501 **For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,**  
For if a priest, on whom we trust, should be foul
- 502 **No wonder is a lewed man to ruste;**  
It is no wonder for a layman to go bad;
- 503 **And shame it is, if a prest take keep,**  
And it is a shame, if a priest is concerned:
- 504 **A shiten shepherde and a clene sheep.**  
A defiled (shitty) shepherd and a clean sheep.
- 505 **Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive,**  
Well ought a priest to give an example,
- 506 **By his clenness, how that his sheep sholde lyve.**  
By his purity, (of) how his sheep should live.
- 507 **He sette nat his benefice to hyre**  
He did not rent out his benefice (ecclesiastical living)
- 508 **And leet his sheep encombred in the myre**  
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire
- 509 **And ran to Londoun unto Seinte Poules**  
And run to London unto Saint Paul's
- 510 **To seken hym a chaunterie for soules,**  
To seek an appointment as a chantry priest (praying for a patron)
- 511 **Or with a bretherhed to been withholde;**  
Or to be hired (as a chaplain) by a guild;
- 512 **But dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,**  
But dwelt at home, and kept well his sheep fold (parish),
- 513 **So that the wolf ne made it nat myscarie;**  
So that the wolf did not make it go wrong;
- 514 **He was a shepherde and nocht a mercenarie.**  
He was a shepherd and not a hireling.
- 515 **And though he hooly were and vertuous,**  
And though he was holy and virtuous,
- 516 **He was to synful men nat despitous,**  
He was not scornful to sinful men,
- 517 **Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne,**  
Nor domineering nor haughty in his speech,
- 518 **But in his techyng discreet and benygne.**  
But in his teaching courteous and kind.
- 519 **To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse,**  
To draw folk to heaven by gentleness,
- 520 **By good ensample, this was his bisynesse.**  
By good example, this was his business.
- 521 **But it were any persone obstinat,**  
Unless it were an obstinate person,
- 522 **What so he were, of heigh or lough estat,**

- Whoever he was, of high or low rank,  
 523 **Hym wolde he snybben sharply for the nonys.**  
 He would rebuke him sharply at that time.
- 524 **A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys.**  
 I believe that nowhere is there a better priest.
- 525 **He waited after no pompe and reverence,**  
 He expected no pomp and ceremony,
- 526 **Ne maked him a spiced conscience,**  
 Nor made himself an overly fastidious conscience,
- 527 **But Cristes loore and his apostles twelve**  
 But Christ's teaching and His twelve apostles
- 528 **He taughte; but first he folwed it hymselfe.**  
 He taught; but first he followed it himself.
- 529 **With hym ther was a PLOWMAN, was his brother,**  
 With him there was a PLOWMAN, who was his brother,
- 530 **That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother;**  
 Who had hauled very many a cartload of dung;
- 531 **A trewe swynkere and a good was he,**  
 He was a true and good worker,
- 532 **Lyvyng in pees and parfit charitee.**  
 Living in peace and perfect love.
- 533 **God loved he best with al his hoole herte**  
 He loved God best with all his whole heart
- 534 **At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,**  
 At all times, whether it pleased or pained him,
- 535 **And thanne his neighebor right as hymselfe.**  
 And then (he loved) his neighbor exactly as himself.
- 536 **He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,**  
 He would thresh, and moreover make ditches and dig,
- 537 **For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,**  
 For Christ's sake, for every poor person,
- 538 **Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght.**  
 Without payment, if it lay in his power.
- 539 **His tithes payde he ful faire and wel,**  
 He paid his tithes completely and well,
- 540 **Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel.**  
 Both of his own labor and of his possessions.
- 541 **In a tabard he rood upon a mere.**  
 He rode in a tabard (sleeveless jacket) upon a mare.
- 542 **Ther was also a REVE, and a MILLERE,**  
 There was also a REEVE, and a MILLER,
- 543 **A SOMNOUR, and a PARDONER also,**  
 A SUMMONER, and a PARDONER also,
- 544 **A MAUNCIPLE, and myself -- ther were namo.**  
 A MANCIPLE, and myself -- there were no more.
- 545 **The MILLERE was a stout carl for the nones;**

- 546       The MILLER was a stout fellow indeed;  
**Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones.**  
 He was very strong of muscle, and also of bones.
- 547       **That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,**  
 That was well proven, for wherever he came,
- 548       **At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram.**  
 At wrestling he would always have the ram (the prize).
- 549       **He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;**  
 He was stoutly built, broad, a large-framed fellow;
- 550       **Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre,**  
 There was no door that he would not heave off its hinges,
- 551       **Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.**  
 Or break it by running at it with his head.
- 552       **His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,**  
 His beard was red as any sow or fox,
- 553       **And therto brood, as though it were a spade.**  
 And moreover broad, as though it were a spade.
- 554       **Upon the cop right of his nose he hade**  
 Upon the exact top of his nose he had
- 555       **A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys,**  
 A wart, and thereon stood a tuft of hairs,
- 556       **Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys;**  
 Red as the bristles of a sow's ears;
- 557       **His nosethirles blake were and wyde.**  
 His nostrils were black and wide.
- 558       **A swerd and a bokeler bar he by his syde.**  
 He wore a sword and a buckler by his side.
- 559       **His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys.**  
 His mouth was as large as a large furnace.
- 560       **He was a janglere and a goliardeys,**  
 He was a loudmouth and a buffoon,
- 561       **And that was moost of synne and harlotries.**  
 And that was mostly of sin and deeds of harlotry.
- 562       **Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;**  
 He well knew how to steal corn and take payment three times;
- 563       **And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.**  
 And yet he had a thumb of gold, indeed.
- 564       **A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.**  
 He wore a white coat and a blue hood.
- 565       **A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,**  
 He well knew how to blow and play a bag-pipe,
- 566       **And therwithal he broghte us out of towne.**  
 And with that he brought us out of town.
- 567       **A gentil MAUNCIPLE was ther of a temple,**  
 There was a fine MANCIPIE of a temple (law school),
- 568       **Of which achatours myghte take exemple**  
 Of whom buyers of provisions might take example
- 569       **For to be wise in byynge of vitaille;**  
 For how to be wise in buying of victuals;

- 570 **For whether that he payde or took by taille,**  
 For whether he paid (cash) or took (goods) on credit,
- 571 **Algate he wayted so in his achaat**  
 Always he watched so (carefully for his opportunity) in his purchases
- 572 **That he was ay biforn and in good staat.**  
 That he was always ahead and in good state.
- 573 **Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace**  
 Now is not that a very fair grace of God
- 574 **That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace**  
 That such an unlearned man's wit shall surpass
- 575 **The wisdom of an heep of lerned men?**  
 The wisdom of a heap of learned men?
- 576 **Of maistres hadde he mo than thries ten,**  
 He had more than three times ten masters,
- 577 **That weren of lawe expert and curious,**  
 Who were expert and skillful in law,
- 578 **Of which ther were a duszeyne in that hous**  
 Of whom there were a dozen in that house
- 579 **Worthy to been stywardes of rente and lond**  
 Worthy to be stewards of rent and land
- 580 **Of any lord that is in Engelond,**  
 Of any lord that is in England,
- 581 **To make hym lyve by his propre good**  
 To make him live by his own wealth
- 582 **In honour dettelees (but if he were wood),**  
 In honor and debtless (unless he were crazy),
- 583 **Or lyve as scarsly as hym list desire;**  
 Or live as economically as it pleased him to desire;
- 584 **And able for to helpen al a shire**  
 And (they would be) able to help all a shire
- 585 **In any caas that myghte falle or happe.**  
 In any emergency that might occur or happen.
- 586 **And yet this Manciple sette hir aller cappe.**  
 And yet this Manciple set all their caps (fooled them all).
- 587 **The REVE was a sclendre colerik man.**  
 The REEVE was a slender choleric man.
- 588 **His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;**  
 His beard was shaved as close as ever he can;
- 589 **His heer was by his erys ful round yshorn;**  
 His hair was closely cropped by his ears;
- 590 **His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn.**  
 The top of his head in front was cut short like a priest's.
- 591 **Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,**  
 His legs were very long and very lean,
- 592 **Ylyk a staf; ther was no calf ysene.**  
 Like a stick; there was no calf to be seen.
- 593 **Wel koude he kepe a gerner and a bynne;**  
 He well knew how to keep a granary and a storage bin;
- 594 **Ther was noon auditour koude on him wyne.**



- There was no auditor who could earn anything (by catching him).
- 595 **Wel wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn**  
He well knew by the drought and by the rain
- 596 **The yeldyng of his seed and of his greyn.**  
(What would be) the yield of his seed and of his grain.
- 597 **His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,**  
His lord's sheep, his cattle, his herd of dairy cows,
- 598 **His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye**  
His swine, his horses, his livestock, and his poultry
- 599 **Was hoolly in this Reves governyng,**  
Was wholly in this Reeve's control,
- 600 **And by his covenant yaf the rekenyng,**  
And in accord with his contract he gave the reckoning,
- 601 **Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age.**  
Since his lord was twenty years of age.
- 602 **Ther koude no man bryng hym in arrerage.**  
There was no man who could find him in arrears.
- 603 **Ther nas baillif, ne hierde, nor oother hyne,**  
There was no farm manager, nor herdsman, nor other servant,
- 604 **That he ne knew his sleighte and his covyne;**  
Whose trickery and treachery he (the Manciple) did not know;
- 605 **They were adrad of hym as of the deeth.**  
They were afraid of him as of the plague.
- 606 **His wonyng was ful faire upon an heeth;**  
His dwelling was very nicely situated upon an heath;
- 607 **With grene trees yshadwed was his place.**  
His place was shadowed with green trees.
- 608 **He koude better than his lord purchace.**  
He could buy property better than his lord could.
- 609 **Ful riche he was astored pryvely.**  
He was secretly very richly provided.
- 610 **His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,**  
He well knew how to please his lord subtly,
- 611 **To yeve and lene hym of his owene good,**  
By giving and lending him some of his lord's own possessions,
- 612 **And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.**  
And have thanks, and also a coat and hood (as a reward).
- 613 **In youthe he hadde lerned a good myster:**  
In youth he had learned a good craft:
- 614 **He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.**  
He was a very good craftsman, a carpenter.
- 615 **This Reve sat upon a ful good stot**  
This Reeve sat upon a very good horse
- 616 **That was al pomely grey and highte Scot.**  
That was all dapple gray and was called Scot.
- 617 **A long surcote of pers upon he hade,**  
He had on a long outer coat of dark blue,
- 618 **And by his syde he baar a rusty blade.**  
And by his side he wore a rusty sword.
- 619 **Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle,**

- Of Northfolk was this Reeve of whom I tell,  
 620 **Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle.**  
 Beside a town men call Bawdeswelle.
- 621 **Tukked he was as is a frere aboute,**  
 He had his coat hitched up and belted, like a friar,  
 622 **And evere he rood the hyndreste of oure route.**  
 And ever he rode as the last of our company.
- 623 **A SOMONOUR was ther with us in that place,**  
 There was a SUMMONER with us in that place,  
 624 **That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,**  
 Who had a fire-red cherubim's face,  
 625 **For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.**  
 For it was pimpled and discolored, with swollen eyelids.  
 626 **As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,**  
 He was as hot and lecherous as a sparrow,  
 627 **With scalled browes blake and piled berd.**  
 With black, scabby brows and a beard with hair fallen out.  
 628 **Of his visage children were aferd.**  
 Children were afraid of his face.
- 629 **Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,**  
 There was no mercury, lead monoxide, nor sulphur,  
 630 **Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon,**  
 Borax, white lead, nor any oil of tarter,  
 631 **Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,**  
 Nor ointment that would cleanse and burn,  
 632 **That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,**  
 That could cure him of his white pustules,  
 633 **Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.**  
 Nor of the knobs sitting on his cheeks.
- 634 **Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,**  
 He well loved garlic, onions, and also leeks,  
 635 **And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;**  
 And to drink strong wine, red as blood;  
 636 **Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood.**  
 Then he would speak and cry out as if he were crazy.
- 637 **And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,**  
 And when that he had drunk deeply of the wine,  
 638 **Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.**  
 Then he would speak no word but Latin.
- 639 **A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,**  
 He had a few legal terms, two or three,  
 640 **That he had lerned out of som decree --**  
 That he had learned out of some text of ecclesiastical law --  
 641 **No wonder is, he herde it al the day;**  
 That is no wonder, he heard it all the day;  
 642 **And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay**  
 And also you know well how a jay  
 643 **Kan clepen "Watte" as wel as kan the pope.**  
 Can call out "Walter" as well as the pope can.

- 644 **But whoso koude in oother thyng hym grope,**  
 But whoever knew how to examine him in other matters,
- 645 **Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie;**  
 (Would find that) he had used up all his learning;
- 646 **Ay "Questio quid iuris" wolde he crie.**  
 Always "The question is, what point of the law applies?" he would cry.
- 647 **He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;**  
 He was a fine rascal and a kind one;
- 648 **A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde.**  
 One could not find a better fellow.
- 649 **He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn**  
 For a quart of wine he would allow
- 650 **A good felawe to have his concubyn**  
 A good fellow to have his concubine
- 651 **A twelf month, and excuse hym atte fulle;**  
 For twelve months, and excuse him completely;
- 652 **Ful prively a fynch eek koude he pulle.**  
 Secretly he also knew how to pull off a clever trick.
- 653 **And if he foond owher a good felawe,**  
 And if he found anywhere a good fellow,
- 654 **He wolde techen him to have noon awe**  
 He would teach him to have no awe
- 655 **In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs,**  
 Of the archdeacon's curse (of excommunication) in such a case,
- 656 **But if a mannes soule were in his purs;**  
 Unless a man's soul were in his purse;
- 657 **For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.**  
 For in his purse he would be punished.
- 658 **"Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he.**  
 "Purse is the archdeacon's hell," he said.
- 659 **But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;**  
 But well I know he lied right certainly;
- 660 **Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,**  
 Each guilty man ought to be afraid of excommunication,
- 661 **For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,**  
 For excommunication will slay just as forgiveness saves,
- 662 **And also war hym of a Significavit.**  
 And let him also beware of a Significavit (order for imprisonment).
- 663 **In daunger hadde he at his owene gise**  
 In his control he had as he pleased
- 664 **The yonge girles of the diocise,**  
 The young people of the diocese,
- 665 **And knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed.**  
 And knew their secrets, and was the adviser of them all.
- 666 **A gerland hadde he set upon his heed,**  
 He had set a garland upon his heed,
- 667 **As greet as it were for an ale-stake.**  
 As large as if it were for the sign of a tavern
- 668 **A bokeleer hadde he maad hym of a cake.**  
 He had made himself a buckler of a cake.

Do you want to check your understanding of the text? If so take a [brief quiz](#).

- 669 **With hym ther rood a gentil PARDONER**  
With him there rode a fine PARDONER
- 670 **Of Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer,**  
Of Rouncivale, his friend and his companion,
- 671 **That streight was comen fro the court of Rome.**  
Who had come straight from the court of Rome.
- 672 **Ful loude he soong "Com hider, love, to me!"**  
Very loud he sang "Come hither, love, to me!"
- 673 **This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun;**  
This Summoner harmonized with him in a strong bass;
- 674 **Was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun.**  
There was never a trumpet of half so great a sound.
- 675 **This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wax,**  
This Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
- 676 **But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;**  
But smooth it hung as does a clump of flax;
- 677 **By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,**  
By small strands hung such locks as he had,
- 678 **And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;**  
And he spread them over his shoulders;
- 679 **But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon.**  
But thin it lay, by strands one by one.
- 680 **But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,**  
But to make an attractive appearance, he wore no hood,
- 681 **For it was trussed up in his walet.**  
For it was trussed up in his knapsack.
- 682 **Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;**  
It seemed to him that he rode in the very latest style;
- 683 **Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare.**  
With hair unbound, save for his cap, he rode all bare-headed.
- 684 **Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare.**  
He had such glaring eyes as has a hare.
- 685 **A vernycle hadde he sowed upon his cappe.**  
He had sewn a Veronica upon his cap.
- 686 **His walet, biforn hym in his lappe,**  
Before him in his lap, (he had) his knapsack,
- 687 **Bretful of pardoun comen from Rome al hoot.**  
Brimful of pardons come all fresh from Rome.
- 688 **A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.**  
He had a voice as small as a goat has.
- 689 **No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;**  
He had no beard, nor never would have;
- 690 **As smothe it was as it were late shave.**  
It (his face) was as smooth as if it were recently shaven.
- 691 **I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare.**  
I believe he was a eunuch or a homosexual.
- 692 **But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware**

- But as to his craft, from Berwick to Ware  
 693 **Ne was ther swich another pardoner.**  
 There was no other pardoner like him.
- 694 **For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,**  
 For in his pouch he had a pillow-case,  
 695 **Which that he seyde was Oure Lady veyl;**  
 Which he said was Our Lady's veil;  
 696 **He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl**  
 He said he had a piece of the sail  
 697 **That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente**  
 That Saint Peter had, when he went  
 698 **Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.**  
 Upon the sea, until Jesus Christ took him.
- 699 **He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,**  
 He had a cross of latten (brass-like alloy) full of stones,  
 700 **And in a glas he hadde pigges bones.**  
 And in a glass container he had pigs' bones.
- 701 **But with thise relikes, whan that he fond**  
 But with these relics, when he found  
 702 **A povre person dwellynge upon lond,**  
 A poor parson dwelling in the countryside,  
 703 **Upon a day he gat hym moore moneye**  
 In one day he got himself more money  
 704 **Than that the person gat in monthes tweye;**  
 Than the parson got in two months;  
 705 **And thus, with feyned flaterye and japes,**  
 And thus, with feigned flattery and tricks,  
 706 **He made the person and the peple his apes.**  
 He made fools of the parson and the people.
- 707 **But trewely to tellen atte laste,**  
 But truly to tell at the last,  
 708 **He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.**  
 He was in church a noble ecclesiast.
- 709 **Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,**  
 He well knew how to read a lesson or a story,  
 710 **But alderbest he song an offertorie;**  
 But best of all he sang an Offertory;  
 711 **For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,**  
 For he knew well, when that song was sung,  
 712 **He moste preche and wel affile his tonge**  
 He must preach and well smooth his speech  
 713 **To wynne silver, as he ful wel koude;**  
 To win silver, as he very well knew how;  
 714 **Therefore he song the murierly and loude.**  
 Therefore he sang the more merrily and loud.
- 715 **Now have I toold you soothly, in a clause,**  
 Now have I told you truly, briefly,  
 716 **Th' estat, th' array, the nombre, and eek the cause**  
 The rank, the dress, the number, and also the cause

- 717 **Why that assembled was this compaignye**  
Why this company was assembled
- 718 **In Southwerk at this gentil hostelrye**  
In Southwark at this fine hostelry
- 719 **That highte the Tabard, faste by the Belle.**  
That is called the Tabard, close by the Bell.
- 720 **But now is tyme to yow for to telle**  
But now it is time to tell to you
- 721 **How that we baren us that ilke nyght,**  
How we conducted ourselves that same night,
- 722 **Whan we were in that hostelrie alyght;**  
When we had arrived in that hostelry;
- 723 **And after wol I telle of our viage**  
And after that I will tell of our journey
- 724 **And al the remenaunt of oure pilgrimage.**  
And all the rest of our pilgrimage.
- 725 **But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,**  
But first I pray yow, of your courtesy,
- 726 **That ye n' arette it nat my vileynye,**  
That you do not attribute it to my rudeness,
- 727 **Thogh that I pleynly speke in this mateere,**  
Though I speak plainly in this matter,
- 728 **To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,**  
To tell you their words and their behavior,
- 729 **Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.**  
Nor though I speak their words accurately.
- 730 **For this ye knowen al so wel as I:**  
For this you know as well as I:
- 731 **Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,**  
Whoever must repeat a story after someone,
- 732 **He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan**  
He must repeat as closely as ever he knows how
- 733 **Everich a word, if it be in his charge,**  
Every single word, if it be in his power,
- 734 **Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,**  
Although he may speak ever so rudely and freely,
- 735 **Or ellis he moot telle his tale untrewre,**  
Or else he must tell his tale inaccurately,
- 736 **Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.**  
Or make up things, or find new words.
- 737 **He may nat spare, althogh he were his brother;**  
He may not refrain from (telling the truth), although he were his brother;
- 738 **He moot as wel seye o word as another.**  
He must as well say one word as another.
- 739 **Crist spak hymself ful brode in hooly writ,**  
Christ himself spoke very plainly in holy writ,
- 740 **And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.**  
And you know well it is no rudeness.
- 741 **Eek Plato seith, whoso kan hym rede,**  
Also Plato says, whosoever knows how to read him,

- 742 **The wordes moote be cosyn to the dede.**  
The words must be closely related to the deed.
- 743 **Also I prey yow to foryeve it me,**  
Also I pray you to forgive it to me,
- 744 **Al have I nat set folk in hir degree**  
Although I have not set folk in order of their rank
- 745 **Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.**  
Here in this tale, as they should stand.
- 746 **My wit is short, ye may wel understonde.**  
My wit is short, you can well understand.
- 747 **Greet chiere made oure Hoost us everichon,**  
Our Host made great hospitality to everyone of us,
- 748 **And to the soper sette he us anon.**  
And to the supper he set us straightway.
- 749 **He served us with vitaille at the beste;**  
He served us with victuals of the best sort;
- 750 **Strong was the wyn, and wel to drynke us leste.**  
The wine was strong, and it well pleased us to drink.
- 751 **A semely man OURE HOOSTE was withalle**  
OUR HOST was an impressive man indeed
- 752 **For to been a marchal in an halle.**  
(Qualified) to be a master of ceremonies in a hall.
- 753 **A large man he was with eyen stepe --**  
He was a large man with prominent eyes --
- 754 **A fairer burgeys was ther noon in Chepe --**  
There was no better business man in Cheapside --
- 755 **Boold of his speche, and wys, and wel ytaught,**  
Bold of his speech, and wise, and well mannered,
- 756 **And of manhod hym lakkede right naught.**  
And he lacked nothing at all of the qualities proper to a man.
- 757 **Eek therto he was right a myrie man;**  
Also moreover he was a right merry man;
- 758 **And after soper pleyen he bigan,**  
And after supper he began to be merry,
- 759 **And spak of myrthe amonges othere thynges,**  
And spoke of mirth among other things,
- 760 **Whan that we hadde maad oure rekenynges,**  
When we had paid our bills,
- 761 **And seyde thus: "Now, lordynges, trewely,**  
And said thus: "Now, gentlemen, truly,
- 762 **Ye been to me right welcome, hertely;**  
You are right heartily welcome to me;
- 763 **For by my trouthe, if that I shal nat lye,**  
For by my word, if I shall not lie (I must say),
- 764 **I saugh nat this yeer so myrie a compaignye**  
I saw not this year so merry a company
- 765 **Atones in this herberwe as is now.**  
At one time in this lodging as is (here) now.
- 766 **Fayn wolde I doon yow myrthe, wiste I how.**

- I would gladly make you happy, if I knew how.  
 767 **And of a myrthe I am right now bythoght,**  
 And I have just now thought of an amusement,  
 768 **To doon yow ese, and it shal coste noght.**  
 To give you pleasure, and it shall cost nothing.
- 769 **"Ye goon to Caunterbury -- God yow speede,**  
 "You go to Canterbury -- God give you success,  
 770 **The blisful martir quite yow youre meede!**  
 May the blessed martyr give you your reward!  
 771 **And wel I woot, as ye goon by the weye,**  
 And well I know, as you go by the way,  
 772 **Ye shapen yow to talen and to pleye;**  
 You intend to tell tales and to amuse yourselves;  
 773 **For trewely, confort ne myrthe is noon**  
 For truly, it is no comfort nor mirth  
 774 **To ride by the weye doumb as a stoon;**  
 To ride by the way dumb as a stone;  
 775 **And therefore wol I maken yow disport,**  
 And therefore I will make a game for you,  
 776 **As I seyde erst, and doon yow som confort.**  
 As I said before, and provide you some pleasure.  
 777 **And if yow liketh alle by oon assent**  
 And if pleases you all unanimously  
 778 **For to stonden at my juggement,**  
 To be subject to my judgment,  
 779 **And for to werken as I shal yow seye,**  
 And to do as I shall tell you,  
 780 **Tomorwe, whan ye riden by the weye,**  
 Tomorrow, when you ride by the way,  
 781 **Now, by my fader soule that is deed,**  
 Now, by the soul of my father who is dead,  
 782 **But ye be myrie, I wol yeve yow myn heed!**  
 Unless you be merry (if you are not), I will give you my head!  
 783 **Hoold up youre hondes, withouten moore speche."**  
 Hold up your hands, without more speech."
- 784 **Oure conseil was nat longe for to seche.**  
 Our decision was not long to seek out.  
 785 **Us thoughte it was noght worth to make it wys,**  
 It seemed to us it was not worthwhile to deliberate on it,  
 786 **And graunted hym withouten moore avys,**  
 And (we) granted his request without more discussion,  
 787 **And bad him seye his voirdit as hym leste.**  
 And asked him to say his decision as it pleased him.  
 788 **"Lordynges," quod he, "now herkneth for the beste;**  
 "Gentlemen," said he, "now listen for the best course of action;  
 789 **But taak it nought, I prey yow, in desdeyn.**  
 But, I pray you, do not take it in disdain (scorn it).  
 790 **This is the poynt, to speken short and pleyn,**



- This is the point, to speak briefly and clearly,  
 791 **That ech of yow, to shorte with oure weye,**  
 That each of yow, to make our way seem short by this means,  
 792 **In this viage shal telle tales tweye**  
 Must tell two tales in this journey  
 793 **To Caunterbury-ward, I mene it so,**  
 On the way to Canterbury, that is what I mean,  
 794 **And homward he shal tellen othere two,**  
 And on the homeward trip he shall tell two others,  
 795 **Of aventures that whilom han bifalle.**  
 About adventures that in old times have happened.  
 796 **And which of yow that bereth hym best of alle --**  
 And whoever of you who does best of all --  
 797 **That is to seyn, that telleth in this caas**  
 That is to say, who tells in this case  
 798 **Tales of best sentence and moost solaas --**  
 Tales of best moral meaning and most pleasure --  
 799 **Shal have a soper at oure aller cost**  
 Shall have a supper at the cost of us all  
 800 **Heere in this place, sittynge by this post,**  
 Here in this place, sitting by this post,  
 801 **Whan that we come agayn fro Caunterbury.**  
 When we come back from Canterbury.  
 802 **And for to make yow the moore mury,**  
 And to make you the more merry,  
 803 **I wol myselven goodly with yow ryde,**  
 I will myself gladly ride with you,  
 804 **Right at myn owene cost, and be youre gyde;**  
 Entirely at my own cost, and be your guide;  
 805 **And whoso wole my juggement withseye**  
 And whosoever will not accept my judgment  
 806 **Shal paye al that we spenden by the weye.**  
 Shall pay all that we spend by the way.  
 807 **And if ye vouche sauf that it be so,**  
 And if you grant that it be so,  
 808 **Tel me anon, withouten wordes mo,**  
 Tell me straightway, without more words,  
 809 **And I wol erly shape me therfore."**  
 And I will get ready early for this."
- 810 **This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore**  
 This thing was granted, and our oaths (were) sworn  
 811 **With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also**  
 With very glad hearts, and (we) prayed him also  
 812 **That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,**  
 That he would consent to do so,  
 813 **And that he wolde been oure governour,**  
 And that he would be our governor,  
 814 **And of oure tales juge and reportour,**  
 And judge and score keeper of our tales,

- 815 **And sette a soper at a certeyn pris,**  
And set a supper at a certain price,
- 816 **And we wol reuled been at his devys**  
And we will be ruled as he wishes
- 817 **In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent**  
In every respect; and thus unanimously
- 818 **We been acorded to his juggement.**  
We are accorded to his judgment.
- 819 **And therupon the wyn was fet anon;**  
And thereupon the wine was fetched immediately;
- 820 **We dronken, and to reste wente echon,**  
We drank, and each one went to rest,
- 821 **Withouten any lenger tarynge.**  
Without any longer tarrying.
- 822 **Amorwe, whan that day bigan to sprynge,**  
In the morning, when day began to spring,
- 823 **Up roosoure Hoost, and wasoure aller cok,**  
Our Host arose, and was the rooster of us all (awakened us).
- 824 **And gadrede us togidre alle in a flok,**  
And gathered us together all in a flock,
- 825 **And forth we riden a litel moore than paas**  
And forth we ride at little more than a walk
- 826 **Unto the Wateryng of Seint Thomas;**  
Unto the Watering of Saint Thomas;
- 827 **And thereoure Hoost bigan his hors areste**  
And there our Host stopped his horse
- 828 **And seyde, "Lordynges, herkneth, if yow leste.**  
And said, "Gentlemen, listen, if you please.
- 829 **Ye woot youre foreward, and I it yow recorde.**  
You know your agreement, and I remind you of it.
- 830 **If even-song and morwe-song accorde,**  
If what you said last night agrees with what you say this morning,
- 831 **Lat se now who shal telle the firste tale.**  
Let's see now who shall tell the first tale.
- 832 **As evere mote I drynke wyn or ale,**  
As ever I may drink wine or ale,
- 833 **Whoso be rebel to my juggement**  
Whosoever may be rebel to my judgment
- 834 **Shal paye for al that by the wey is spent.**  
Shall pay for all that is spent by the way.
- 835 **Now draweth cut, er that we ferrer twynne;**  
Now draw straws, before we depart further (from London);
- 836 **He which that hath the shorteste shal bigynne.**  
He who has the shortest (straw) shall begin.
- 837 **Sire Knyght," quod he, "my mayster and my lord,**  
Sir Knight," said he, "my master and my lord,
- 838 **Now draweth cut, for that is myn accord.**  
Now draw a straw, for that is my decision.
- 839 **Cometh neer," quod he, "my lady Prioressse.**

Come nearer," he said, "my lady Prioress.  
 840 **And ye, sire Clerk, lat be youre shamefastnesse,**  
 And you, sir Clerk, let be your modesty,  
 841 **Ne studieth noght; ley hond to, every man!"**  
 And study not; lay hand to (draw a straw), every man!"  
 842 **Anon to drawen every wight bigan,**  
 Every person began straightway to draw,  
 843 **And shortly for to tellen as it was,**  
 And shortly to tell as it was,  
 844 **Were it by aventure, or sort, or cas,**  
 Were it by chance, or destiny, or luck,  
 845 **The sothe is this: the cut fil to the Knyght,**  
 The truth is this: the draw fell to the Knight,  
 846 **Of which ful blithe and glad was every wyght,**  
 For which everyone was very happy and glad,  
 847 **And telle he moste his tale, as was resoun,**  
 And he must tell his tale, as was reasonable,  
 848 **By foreward and by composicioun,**  
 By our previous promise and by formal agreement,  
 849 **As ye han herd; what nedeth wordes mo?**  
 As you have heard; what more words are needed?  
 850 **And whan this goode man saugh that it was so,**  
 And when this good man saw that it was so,  
 851 **As he that wys was and obedient**  
 Like one who was wise and obedient  
 852 **To kepe his foreward by his free assent,**  
 To keep his agreement by his free assent,  
 853 **He seyde, "Syn I shal bigynne the game,**  
 He said, "Since I must begin the game,  
 854 **What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!**  
 What! Welcome be the draw, in God's name!  
 855 **Now lat us ryde, and herkneth what I seye."**  
 Now let us ride, and listen to what I say."  
 856 **And with that word we ryden forth oure weye,**  
 And with that word we rode forth on our way,  
 857 **And he bigan with right a myrie cheere**  
 And he began with a truly merry demeanor  
 858 **His tale anon, and seyde as ye may heere.**  
 To tell his tale straightway, and said as you may hear.

Do you want to check your understanding of the text? If so take a [brief quiz](#).

Or go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#).

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## **Explanatory Notes of The General Prologue A Check List (Lines I.1-858)**

Here are a list of subjects selected more or less at random from the Explanatory Notes for The General Prologue in *The Canterbury Tales Complete* and *The Riverside Chaucer*. By way of checking on how much general information about Chaucer and his art and time you have acquired at this point, jot down a brief explanation of each of the following terms; then check your answers against the Explanatory Notes cited in parentheses at the end of each entry.

- 1) **palmer (I.13)**
- 2) **squire (I.79-80)**
- 3) **nightingales sing at night (I.98)**
- 4) **Anglo-Norman (I.124-26)**
- 5) **wastel breed (I.147)**
- 6) **grey eyes (I.152)**
- 7) **outridere (I.166)**
- 8) **Benedictine rule (I.173)**
- 9) **four orders of Friars (I.210)**
- 10) **champion (I.239)**
- 11) **love-dayes (I.258)**
- 12) **benefice (ecclesiastical living) (I.291-92)**
- 13) **complexion (I.333)**
- 14) **table dormant (I.353)**
- 15) **knight of the shire (I.356)**
- 16) **mormal (I.386)**
- 17) **astrological hours (I.415-16)**
- 18) **humors (I.420; cf. I.333, I.587)**
- 19) **marriage atte chirche dor (I.460)**
- 20) **cursing for tithes (I.486)**

- 21) chantry (l.510)
- 22) Significavit (l.662)
- 23) alopecia (l.625, 626, 627)
- 24) Rouncivale (l.670)
- 25) Veronica (vernycle) (l.685)
- 26) topos of "affected modesty" (l.746)

**If you get twenty or more of these right, you have done your duty by the explanatory notes; if you got fewer than 20, you should probably browse through those notes once more. You need not read every note nor every part of the notes you do read. However, some time spent on the notes will increase your understanding of Chaucer's world and his art.**

**Return to [Lesson 7](#). Or go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#). Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.**



# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 8: The Knight's Tale

**The Knight's Tale is a much longer and somewhat more solemn work than either the Shipman's Tale or The General Prologue. Before you begin your reading of this tale, look through this summary of the action:**

[Theseus, duke of Athens, returning with Ypolita from his conquest of the Amazons, turns aside to defeat Creon, the tyrant of Thebes, who has unjustly refused burial for his victims. Among the wounded are Palamoun and Arcite, young Thebans of royal blood. Theseus condemns them to perpetual imprisonment. From the window of their cell they see the lovely Emily, Ypolita's young sister, with whom both fall in love.

They argue over who shall have her, though both are helplessly imprisoned. Perotheus, a friend of Theseus, obtains Arcite's release on the condition he never returns to Athens.

Arcite is so ravaged by love he is no longer recognizable; he returns to Athens, disguised, and takes service in Theseus' household. Palamon, by help of a friend, escapes from captivity. He hides in a woodland where he comes upon Arcite bemoaning his love for Emily. The two former friends engage in deadly battle. Theseus, hunting with his queen Ypolita and Emily, comes upon the duel and stops it. The ladies plead for the lives of the young men, and Theseus spares them and arranges for a great tournament, with one hundred knights to a side, to determine who shall have Emily.

The tournament is held a year later. Palamon prays to Venus to

grant him Emily and the goddess agrees; Arcite prays to Mars for victory, and Mars agrees. Wise old Saturn finds a way to satisfy both Mars and Venus. Palamon loses the tournament; he is captured, and Arcite rides through the arena in triumph. But a fury sent from hell by Saturn frightens his horse, who suddenly rears and fatally injures him. Medicine does not avail, and he dies. All are deep in mourning, Theseus is so saddened that only his old father Egeus can comfort him. But years ease the pain, and in Parliament Theseus proposes the marriage of Emily and Palamon, which brings final peace between Thebes and Athens. They live in perfect love, with never a harsh word between them.]

Since this is the first long narrative assigned in this course, students may wish to read through a [more detailed summary](#) of the Knight's Tale in order to get a clearer idea of the story.

Then read carefully through the Knight's Tale in the interlinear version. At the end of each of the four parts of the Knight's Tale you will be offered a chance to check your progress by taking a brief quiz on the vocabulary. It is up to you whether you take those quizzes. You may feel that you are doing well enough that you do not need them or you may simply be tired of doing these quizzes. That is up to you. To begin your study of the interlinear text (whether or not you take the quizzes) [click here](#).

When you have finished reading through the interlinear text, read the Knight's Tale in your printed text; go slowly; read for pleasure, and make use of the Explanatory notes.

When you have finished your reading of the printed text you may want to check how much you have learned from the Notes; if so, take a [brief quiz](#).


Then browse through the page on [The Knight's Tale](#) on The Geoffrey Chaucer Page, scanning some subjects and reading some that are of interest to you.

Then go on to [Lesson 9](#), on the Miller's Reeve's, and Cook's Tales; they provide an abrupt and perhaps welcome change of tone. | Or use your browser's back button to return to the previous page.

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## The Knight's Tale, Part I

### An Interlinear Translation (lines 859-1354)

*Heere bigynneth the Knyghtes Tale.*

*Iamque domos patrias, Sithice post  
aspera gentis prelia, laurigero, etc.*

And now (Theseus drawing nigh his) native land in  
laurelled car after battling with the Scithian folk, etc.

- 859 **Whilom, as olde stories tellen us,**  
Once, as old histories tell us,
- 860 **Ther was a duc that highte Theseus;**  
There was a duke who was called Theseus;
- 861 **Of Atthenes he was lord and governour,**  
He was lord and governor of Athens,
- 862 **And in his tyme swich a conquerour**  
And in his time such a conqueror
- 863 **That gretter was ther noon under the sonne.**  
That there was no one greater under the sun.
- 864 **Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne;**  
Very many a powerful country had he won;
- 865 **What with his wysdom and his chivalrie,**  
What with his wisdom and his chivalry,
- 866 **He conquered al the regne of Femenye,**

He conquered all the land of the Amazons,  
 867 **That whilom was ycleped Scithia,**  
 That once was called Scithia,  
 868 **And weddede the queene Ypolita,**  
 And wedded the queen Ypolita,  
 869 **And broghte hire hoom with hym in his contree**  
 And brought her home with him into his country  
 870 **With muchel glorie and greet solempnytee,**  
 With much glory and great ceremony,  
 871 **And eek hir yonge suster Emelye.**  
 And also her young sister Emelye.  
 872 **And thus with victorie and with melodye**  
 And thus with victory and with festivity  
 873 **Lete I this noble duc to Atthenes ryde,**  
 I leave this noble duke riding to Athens,  
 874 **And al his hoost in armes hym bisyde.**  
 And all his host in arms beside him.  
 875 **And certes, if it nere to long to heere,**  
 And certainly, if it were not too long to hear,  
 876 **I wolde have toold yow fully the manere**  
 I would have told you fully the manner  
 877 **How wonnen was the regne of Femenye**  
 How the reign of Femenye was won  
 878 **By Theseus and by his chivalrye;**  
 By Theseus and by his chivalry;  
 879 **And of the grete bataille for the nones**  
 And of the great battle at that time  
 880 **Bitwixen Atthenes and Amazones;**  
 Between Athenians and Amazons;  
 881 **And how asseged was Ypolita,**  
 And how Ypolita was besieged,  
 882 **The faire, hardy queene of Scithia;**  
 The fair, bold queen of Scithia;  
 883 **And of the feste that was at hir weddyng,**  
 And of the festivity that was at their wedding,  
 884 **And of the tempest at hir hoom-comyng;**  
 And of the storm at her home-coming;  
 885 **But al that thyng I moot as now forbere.**  
 But all that matter I must now forgo (narrating).  
 886 **I have, God woot, a large feeld to ere,**  
 I have, God knows, a large field to till,  
 887 **And wayke been the oxen in my plough.**  
 And the oxen in my plow are weak.  
 888 **The remenant of the tale is long ynough.**  
 The remnant of the tale is long enough.  
 889 **I wol nat letten eek noon of this route;**  
 Also I will not hinder any one of this company;  
 890 **Lat every felawe telle his tale aboute,**  
 Let every fellow tell his tale in turn,  
 891 **And lat se now who shal the soper wyne;**

- 892 And let's see now who shall win the supper;  
**And ther I lefte, I wol ayeyn bigynne.**  
 And where I left off, I will again begin.
- 893 **This duc, of whom I make mencion,**  
 This duke, of whom I make mention,  
 894 **Whan he was come almoost unto the toun,**  
 When he was come almost unto the town,  
 895 **In al his wele and in his mooste pride,**  
 In all his prosperity and in his most pride,  
 896 **He was war, as he caste his eye aside,**  
 He was aware, as he cast his eye aside,  
 897 **Where that ther kneled in the heighe weye**  
 Where there kneeled in the high way  
 898 **A compaignye of ladyes, tweye and tweye,**  
 A company of ladies, two by two,  
 899 **Ech after oother clad in clothes blake;**  
 Each after another, clad in black clothes;  
 900 **But swich a cry and swich a wo they make**  
 But such a cry and such a woeful (lament) they make  
 901 **That in this world nys creature lyvyng**  
 That in this world is no living creature  
 902 **That herde swich another waymentyng;**  
 That (ever) heard lamentation such as this;  
 903 **And of this cry they nolde nevere stenten**  
 And of this cry they would not ever stop  
 904 **Til they the reynes of his brydel henten.**  
 Until they seized the reins of his bridle.
- 905 **"What folk been ye, that at myn hom-comyng**  
 "What folk are you, who at my homecoming  
 906 **Perturben so my feste with cryng?"**  
 So disturb my festival with crying?"  
 907 **Quod Theseus. "Have ye so greet envye**  
 Said Theseus. "Have you so great envy  
 908 **Of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye?**  
 Of my honor, (you) who thus lament and cry?  
 909 **Or who hath yow mysboden or offended?**  
 Or who has injured or offended you?  
 910 **And telleth me if it may been amended,**  
 And tell me if it may be remedied,  
 911 **And why that ye been clothed thus in blak."**  
 And why you are clothed thus in black."
- 912 **The eldeste lady of them alle spak,**  
 The eldest lady of them all spoke,  
 913 **Whan she hadde swowned with a deedly cheere,**  
 After she had swooned with (so) deadly a countenance,  
 914 **That it was routhe for to seen and heere;**  
 That it was pitiful to see and hear;  
 915 **She seyde, "Lord, to whom Fortune hath yiven**

She said, "Lord, to whom Fortune has given  
 916 **Victorie, and as a conqueror to lyven,**  
 Victory, and (allowed) to live as a conqueror,  
 917 **Nat greveth us youre glorie and youre honour,**  
 Your glory and your honor (does) not grieve us,  
 918 **But we biseken mercy and socour.**  
 But we beseech (you for) mercy and succor.  
 919 **Have mercy on oure wo and oure distresse!**  
 Have mercy on our woe and our distress!  
 920 **Som drope of pitee, thurgh thy gentillesse,**  
 Some drop of pity, because of thy nobility,  
 921 **Upon us wrecched wommen lat thou falle,**  
 Let thou fall upon us wretched women,  
 922 **For, certes, lord, ther is noon of us alle**  
 For, certainly, lord, there is not one of us all  
 923 **That she ne hath been a duchesse or a queene.**  
 Who has not been a duchesse or a queen.  
 924 **Now be we caytyves, as it is wel seene,**  
 Now we are miserable wretches, as it is easily seen,  
 925 **Thanked be Fortune and hire false wheel,**  
 Thanks be to Fortune and her false wheel,  
 926 **That noon estaat assureth to be weel.**  
 Who assures no estate (will continue) to be well.  
 927 **And certes, lord, to abyden youre presence,**  
 And certainly, lord, to await your presence,  
 928 **Heere in this temple of the goddesse Clemence**  
 Here in this temple of the goddess Clemency  
 929 **We han ben waityng al this fourtenyght.**  
 We have been waiting all this fortnight.  
 930 **Now help us, lord, sith it is in thy myght.**  
 Now help us, lord, since it is in thy power.  
  
 931 **"I, wrecche, which that wepe and wayle thus,**  
 "I, wretch, who weep and wail thus,  
 932 **Was whilom wyf to kyng Cappaneus,**  
 Was once wife to king Cappaneus,  
 933 **That starf at Thebes -- cursed be that day! --**  
 Who died at Thebes -- cursed be that day! --  
 934 **And alle we that been in this array**  
 And all of us who are in this condition  
 935 **And maken al this lamentacioun,**  
 And make all this lamentation,  
 936 **We losten alle oure housbondes at that toun,**  
 We lost all our husbands at that town,  
 937 **Whil that the seege therabout lay.**  
 While the siege lay around it.  
 938 **And yet now the olde Creon -- weylaway! --**  
 And yet now the old Creon -- alas! --  
 939 **That lord is now of Thebes the citee,**  
 Who is now lord of the city of Thebes,  
 940 **Fulfild of ire and of iniquitee,**

- 941 **Filled with anger and with iniquity,**  
**He, for despit and for his tirannye,**  
 He, for spite and for his tyranny,  
 942 **To do the dede bodyes vileynye**  
 To do dishonor to the dead bodies  
 943 **Of alle oure lordes whiche that been yslawe,**  
 Of all our lords who are slain,  
 944 **Hath alle the bodyes on an heep ydrawe,**  
 Has dragged all the bodies in a heap,  
 945 **And wol nat suffren hem, by noon assent,**  
 And will not allow them, not at all,  
 946 **Neither to been yburyed nor ybrent,**  
 Neither to be buried nor burned,  
 947 **But maketh houndes ete them in despit."**  
 But makes hounds eat them as an insult."  
  
 948 **And with that word, withouten moore respit,**  
 And with that word, without more delay,  
 949 **They fillen gruf and criden pitously,**  
 They fell face down and cried piteously,  
 950 **"Have on us wrecched wommen som mercy,**  
 "Have some mercy on us wretched women,  
 951 **And lat oure sorwe synken in thyn herte."**  
 And let our sorrow sink in thy heart."  
  
 952 **This gentil duc don from his courser sterte**  
 This gentle duke leaped down from his war horse  
 953 **With herte pitous, whan he herde them speke.**  
 With compassionate heart, when he heard them speak.  
 954 **Hym thoughte that his herte wolde breke,**  
 It seemed to him that his heart would break,  
 955 **Whan he saugh hem so pitous and so maat,**  
 When he saw them so pitiful and so dejected,  
 956 **That whilom weren of so greet estaat;**  
 That once were of such high rank;  
 957 **And in his armes he hem alle up hente,**  
 And in his arms he caught up them all,  
 958 **And hem conforteth in ful good entente,**  
 And comforts them with very good will,  
 959 **And swoor his ooth, as he was trewe knyght,**  
 And swore his oath, as he was true knight,  
 960 **He wolde doon so ferforthly his myght**  
 (That) he would do his might so completely  
 961 **Upon the tiraunt Creon hem to wreke**  
 To avenge them upon the tyrant Creon  
 962 **That al the peple of Grece sholde speke**  
 That all the people of Greece should speak (about)  
 963 **How Creon was of Theseus yserved**  
 How Creon was treated by Theseus  
 964 **As he that hadde his deeth ful wel deserved.**  
 As one who had very well deserved his death.

- 965 **And right anoon, withouten moore abood,**  
 And right away, without more delay,
- 966 **His baner he desplayeth, and forth rood**  
 He displays his banner, and rode forth
- 967 **To Thebes-ward, and al his hoost beside.**  
 Toward Thebes, and all his army beside (him).
- 968 **No neer Atthenes wolde he go ne ride,**  
 He would not walk nor ride any nearer to Athens,
- 969 **Ne take his ese fully half a day,**  
 Nor take his ease fully half a day,
- 970 **But onward on his wey that nyght he lay,**  
 But that night he lay (camped) on his way,
- 971 **And sente anon Ypolita the queene,**  
 And sent straightway Ypolita the queen,
- 972 **And Emelye, hir yonge suster sheene,**  
 And Emelye, her bright (beautiful) young sister,
- 973 **Unto the toun of Atthenes to dwelle,**  
 Unto the town of Athens to dwell,
- 974 **And forth he rit; ther is namoore to telle.**  
 And forth he rides; there is no more to tell.
- 975 **The rede statue of Mars, with spere and targe,**  
 The red statue of Mars, with spear and shield,
- 976 **So shyneth in his white baner large**  
 So shines in his large white banner
- 977 **That alle the feeldes glyteren up and doun;**  
 That all the fields glitter all around;
- 978 **And by his baner born is his penoun**  
 And by his banner is carried his pennon
- 979 **Of gold ful riche, in which ther was ybete**  
 Of very rich gold, in which there was embroidered
- 980 **The Mynotaur, which that he wan in Crete.**  
 The Minotaur, which he defeated in Crete.
- 981 **Thus rit this duc, thus rit this conquerour,**  
 Thus rides this duke, thus rides this conqueror,
- 982 **And in his hoost of chivalrie the flour,**  
 And in his army the flower of chivalry,
- 983 **Til that he cam to Thebes and alighte**  
 Until he came to Thebes and dismounted
- 984 **Faire in a feeld, ther as he thoughte to fighte.**  
 Graciously in a field, where he intended to fight.
- 985 **But shortly for to speken of this thyng,**  
 But briefly to speak of this thing,
- 986 **With Creon, which that was of Thebes kyng,**  
 With Creon, who was king of Thebes,
- 987 **He faught, and slough hym manly as a knyght**  
 He fought, and slew him boldly as a knight
- 988 **In pleyn bataille, and putte the folk to flyght;**  
 In open battle, and put the army to flight;
- 989 **And by assaut he wan the citee after,**

- 990 **And rente adoun bothe wall and sparre and rafter;**  
 And tore down both wall and beam and rafter;  
 991 **And to the ladyes he restored agayn**  
 And he gave back to the ladies  
 992 **The bones of hir freendes that were slayn,**  
 The bones of their husbands who were slain,  
 993 **To doon obsequies, as was tho the gyse.**  
 To do obsequies, as was then the custom.  
 994 **But it were al to longe for to devyse**  
 But it would be all too long to describe  
 995 **The grete clamour and the waymentyng**  
 The great clamor and the lamentation  
 996 **That the ladyes made at the brennyng**  
 That the ladies made at the burning  
 997 **Of the bodies, and the grete honour**  
 Of the bodies, and the great honor  
 998 **That Theseus, the noble conquerour,**  
 That Theseus, the noble conqueror,  
 999 **Dooth to the ladyes, whan they from hym wente;**  
 Does to the ladies, when they went from him;  
 1000 **But shortly for to telle is myn entente.**  
 But briefly to tell is my intent.
- 1001 **Whan that this worthy duc, this Theseus,**  
 When this worthy duke, this Theseus,  
 1002 **Hath Creon slayn and wonne Thebes thus,**  
 Has slain Creon and thus won Thebes,  
 1003 **Stille in that feeld he took al nyght his reste,**  
 Still in that field he took all night his rest,  
 1004 **And dide with al the contree as hym leste.**  
 And did with all the country as he pleased.
- 1005 **To ransake in the taas of bodyes dede,**  
 To search in the heap of dead bodies,  
 1006 **Hem for to strepe of harneys and of wede,**  
 To strip them of armor and of clothing,  
 1007 **The pilours diden bisynesse and cure**  
 The scavengers took great pains (worked hard)  
 1008 **After the bataille and disconfiture.**  
 After the battle and defeat.  
 1009 **And so bifel that in the taas they founde,**  
 And (it) so befell that in the heap they found,  
 1010 **Thurgh-girt with many a grevous bloody wounde,**  
 Pierced through with many a grievous bloody wound,  
 1011 **Two yonge knyghtes liggyng by and by,**  
 Two young knights lying side by side,  
 1012 **Bothe in oon armes, wrought ful richely,**  
 Both with the same coat of arms, full richly wrought,  
 1013 **Of whiche two Arcita highte that oon,**



- 1014 **Of which two one was called Arcite,**  
**And that oother knyght highte Palamon.**  
 And that other knight was called Palamon.
- 1015 **Nat fully quyke, ne fully dede they were,**  
 They were not fully alive, nor fully dead,
- 1016 **But by hir cote-armures and by hir gere**  
 But by their coats of arms and by their equipment
- 1017 **The heraudes knewe hem best in special**  
 The heralds knew them best in particular
- 1018 **As they that weren of the blood roial**  
 As they that were of the royal blood
- 1019 **Of Thebes, and of sustren two yborn.**  
 Of Thebes, and born of two sisters.
- 1020 **Out of the taas the pilours han hem torn,**  
 The scavengers have torn them out of the heap,
- 1021 **And han hem caried softe unto the tente**  
 And have carried them softy unto the tent
- 1022 **Of Theseus; and he ful soone hem sente**  
 Of Theseus; and he very soon sent them
- 1023 **To Atthenes, to dwellen in prisoun**  
 To Athens, to dwell in prison
- 1024 **Perpetuelly -- he nolde no raunsoun.**  
 Perpetually -- he would not (accept) any ransom.
- 1025 **And whan this worthy duc hath thus ydon,**  
 And when this worthy duke has thus done,
- 1026 **He took his hoost, and hoom he rit anon**  
 He took his army, and home he rides straightway
- 1027 **With laurer crowned as a conquerour;**  
 As a conqueror crowned with laurel;
- 1028 **And ther he lyveth in joye and in honour**  
 And there he lives in joy and in honor
- 1029 **Terme of his lyf; what nedeth wordes mo?**  
 For the duration of his life; what more words are needed?
- 1030 **And in a tour, in angwissh and in wo,**  
 And in a tower, in anguish and in woe,
- 1031 **This Palamon and his felawe Arcite**  
 This Palamon and his fellow Arcite
- 1032 **For everemoore; ther may no gold hem quite.**  
 For evermore (remain); no gold can ransom them.
- 1033 **This passeth yeer by yeer and day by day,**  
 This passes year by year and day by day,
- 1034 **Till it fil ones, in a morwe of May,**  
 Until it befell once, in a morning of May,
- 1035 **That Emelye, that fairer was to sene**  
 That Emelye, who was fairer to be seen (look at)
- 1036 **Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,**  
 Than is the lily upon its green stalk,
- 1037 **And fressher than the May with floures newe --**  
 And fresher than the May with new flowers --

- 1038 **For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,**  
For her hue vied with color of the rose,
- 1039 **I noot which was the fyner of hem two --**  
I do not know which was the finer of them two --
- 1040 **Er it were day, as was hir wone to do,**  
Before it was day, as was her custom to do,
- 1041 **She was arisen and al redy dight,**  
She was arisen and all ready prepared,
- 1042 **For May wole have no slogardie anyght.**  
For May will have no laziness at night.
- 1043 **The sesoun priketh every gentil herte,**  
The season urges on every gentle heart,
- 1044 **And maketh it out of his slep to sterte,**  
And makes it out of its sleep to awake suddenly,
- 1045 **And seith "Arys, and do thyn observaunce."**  
And says "Arise, and do thy observance."
- 1046 **This maked Emelye have remembraunce**  
This made Emelye remember
- 1047 **To doon honour to May, and for to ryse.**  
To do honor to May, and to rise.
- 1048 **Yclothed was she fressh, for to devyse:**  
She was gaily clothed, so to say:
- 1049 **Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse**  
Her yellow hair was braided in a tress
- 1050 **Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.**  
Behind her back, a yard long, I guess.
- 1051 **And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,**  
And in the garden, at the rising of the sun,
- 1052 **She walketh up and doun, and as hire liste**  
She walks up and down, and as she pleases
- 1053 **She gadereth floures, party white and rede,**  
She gathers flowers, mixed white and red,
- 1054 **To make a subtil gerland for hire hede;**  
To make an intricate garland for her head;
- 1055 **And as an aungel hevenyssshly she soong.**  
And she sang (as) heavenly as an angel.
- 1056 **The grete tour, that was so thikke and stroong,**  
The great tower, that was so thick and strong,
- 1057 **Which of the castel was the chief dongeoun**  
Which was the chief dungeon (main fortification) of the castle
- 1058 **(Ther as the knyghtes weren in prisoun**  
(Where the knights were in prison
- 1059 **Of which I tolde yow and tellen shal),**  
Of which I told yow and shall tell),
- 1060 **Was evene joynant to the gardyn wal**  
Was just next to the garden wall
- 1061 **Ther as this Emelye hadde hir pleyynge.**  
Where this Emelye took her pleasure.
- 1062 **Bright was the sonne and cleer that morwenyng,**  
The sun was bright and clear that morning,

- 1063 **And Palamoun, this woful prisoner,**  
And Palamon, this woeful prisoner,
- 1064 **As was his wone, by leve of his gayler,**  
As was his custom, by permission of his jailer,
- 1065 **Was risen and romed in a chambre an heigh,**  
Had risen and roamed in a chamber on high,
- 1066 **In which he al the noble citee seigh,**  
In which he saw all the noble city,
- 1067 **And eek the gardyn, ful of braunches grene,**  
And also the garden, full of green branches,
- 1068 **Ther as this fresshe Emelye the shene**  
Where this fresh Emelye the bright
- 1069 **Was in hire walk, and romed up and doun.**  
Was in her walk, and roamed up and down.
- 1070 **This sorweful prisoner, this Palamoun,**  
This sorrowful prisoner, this Palamon,
- 1071 **Goth in the chambre romynge to and fro**  
Goes in the chamber roaming to and fro
- 1072 **And to hymself compleynynge of his wo.**  
And to himself lamenting his woe.
- 1073 **That he was born, ful ofte he seyde, "allas!"**  
That he was born, full often he said, "alas!"
- 1074 **And so bifel, by aventure or cas,**  
And so it happened, by chance or accident,
- 1075 **That thurgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barre**  
That through a window, thickly set with many a bar
- 1076 **Of iren greet and square as any sparre,**  
Of iron, great and square as any beam,
- 1077 **He cast his eye upon Emelya,**  
He cast his eye upon Emelye,
- 1078 **And therwithal he bleynte and cride, "A!"**  
And with that he turned pale and cried, "A!"
- 1079 **As though he stongen were unto the herte.**  
As though he were stabbed unto the heart.
- 1080 **And with that cry Arcite anon up sterte**  
And with that cry Arcite immediately leaped up
- 1081 **And seyde, "Cosyn myn, what eyleth thee,**  
And said, "My cousin, what ails thee,
- 1082 **That art so pale and deedly on to see?**  
Who art so pale and deadly to look upon?
- 1083 **Why cridestow? Who hath thee doon offence?**  
Why didst thou cry out? Who has done thee offence?
- 1084 **For Goddes love, taak al in pacience**  
For the love of God, take all in patience
- 1085 **Oure prisoun, for it may noon oother be.**  
(Regarding) our prison, for it may not be otherwise.
- 1086 **Fortune hath yeven us this adversitee.**  
Fortune has given us this adversity.
- 1087 **Som wikke aspect or disposicioun**  
Some wicked aspect or disposition

- 1088 **Of Saturne, by som constellacioun,**  
Of Saturn, by some arrangement of the heavenly bodies,
- 1089 **Hath yeven us this, although we hadde it sworn;**  
Has given us this, although we had sworn it would not be;
- 1090 **So stood the hevene whan that we were born.**  
So stood the heavens when we were born.
- 1091 **We moste endure it; this is the short and playn."**  
We must endure it; this is the short and plain."
- 1092 **This Palamon answerde and seyde agayn,**  
This Palamon answered and said in reply,
- 1093 **"Cosyn, for sothe, of this opinioun**  
"Cousin, truly, concerning this opinion
- 1094 **Thow hast a veyn ymaginacioun.**  
Thou hast a foolish conception.
- 1095 **This prison caused me nat for to crye,**  
This prison did not cause me to cry out,
- 1096 **But I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye**  
But I was hurt right now through my eye
- 1097 **Into myn herte, that wol my bane be.**  
Into my heart, so that it will be the death of me.
- 1098 **The fairnesse of that lady that I see**  
The fairness of that lady whom I see
- 1099 **Yond in the gardyn romen to and fro**  
Yonder in the garden roaming to and fro
- 1100 **Is cause of al my cryng and my wo.**  
Is cause of all my crying and my woe.
- 1101 **I noot wher she be womman or goddesse,**  
I know not whether she is woman or goddess,
- 1102 **But Venus is it soothly, as I gesse."**  
But truly it is Venus, as I suppose."
- 1103 **And therwithal on knees doun he fil,**  
And with that he fell down on his knees,
- 1104 **And seyde, "Venus, if it be thy wil**  
And said, "Venus, if it be thy will
- 1105 **Yow in this gardyn thus to transfigure**  
Thus to transfigure yourself in this garden
- 1106 **Bifore me, sorweful, wrecched creature,**  
Before me, sorrowful, wretched creature,
- 1107 **Out of this prisoun help that we may scapen.**  
Help that we may escape out of this prison.
- 1108 **And if so be my destyne be shapen**  
And if it be so that my destiny is shaped
- 1109 **By eterne word to dyen in prisoun,**  
By eternal decree to die in prison,
- 1110 **Of oure lynage have som compassioun,**  
Have some compassion on our (noble) lineage
- 1111 **That is so lowe ybrought by tyrannye."**  
Which is brought so low by tyranny."
- 1112 **And with that word Arcite gan espye**  
And with that word Arcite did see

- 1113 **Wher as this lady romed to and fro,**  
Where this lady roamed to and fro,
- 1114 **And with that sighte hir beautee hurte hym so,**  
And with that sight her beauty hurt him so,
- 1115 **That, if that Palamon was wounded sore,**  
That, if Palamon was sorely wounded,
- 1116 **Arcite is hurt as muche as he, or moore.**  
Arcite is hurt as much as he, or more.
- 1117 **And with a sigh he seyde pitously,**  
And with a sigh he said piteously,
- 1118 **"The fresshe beautee sleeth me sodeynly**  
"The fresh beauty slays me suddenly
- 1119 **Of hire that rometh in the yonder place;**  
Of her who roams in the yonder place;
- 1120 **And but I have hir mercy and hir grace,**  
And unless I have her mercy and her grace,
- 1121 **That I may seen hire atte leeste weye,**  
So that I can at least see her,
- 1122 **I nam but deed; ther nis namoore to seye."**  
I am as good as dead; there is no more to say."
- 1123 **This Palamon, whan he tho wordes herde,**  
This Palamon, when he heard those words,
- 1124 **Dispitously he looked and answerde,**  
Angrily he looked and answered,
- 1125 **"Wheither seistow this in earnest or in pley?"**  
"Sayest thou this in earnest or in play?"
- 1126 **"Nay," quod Arcite, "in earnest, by my fey!**  
"Nay," said Arcite, "in earnest, by my faith!
- 1127 **God helpe me so, me list ful yvele pleye."**  
So help me God, I have no desire to play."
- 1128 **This Palamon gan knytte his browes tweye.**  
This Palamon did knit his two brows.
- 1129 **"It nere," quod he, "to thee no greet honour**  
"It would not be," said he, "any great honor to thee
- 1130 **For to be fals, ne for to be traitour**  
To be false, nor to be traitor
- 1131 **To me, that am thy cosyn and thy brother**  
To me, who am thy cousin and thy brother
- 1132 **Ysworn ful depe, and ech of us til oother,**  
Sworn very sincerely, and each of us to the other,
- 1133 **That nevere, for to dyen in the peyne,**  
That never, though we had to die by torture,
- 1134 **Til that the deeth departe shal us tweyne,**  
Until death shall part us two,
- 1135 **Neither of us in love to hyndre oother,**  
Neither of us in love (is) to hinder the other,
- 1136 **Ne in noon oother cas, my leeve brother,**  
Nor in any other case, my dear brother,

- 1137 **But that thou sholdest trewely forthren me**  
But rather thou shouldest truly further (help) me
- 1138 **In every cas, as I shal forthren thee --**  
In every case, as I shall further thee --
- 1139 **This was thyn ooth, and myn also, certeyn;**  
This was thy oath, and mine also, certainly;
- 1140 **I woot right wel, thou darst it nat withseyn.**  
I know right well, thou darest not deny it.
- 1141 **Thus artow of my conseil, out of doute,**  
Thus thou art one of my confidential advisors, without doubt,
- 1142 **And now thow woldest falsly ben aboute**  
And now thou wouldest falsely busy be preparing
- 1143 **To love my lady, whom I love and serve,**  
To love my lady, whom I love and serve,
- 1144 **And evere shal til that myn herte sterve.**  
And ever shall until my heart dies.
- 1145 **Nay, certes, false Arcite, thow shalt nat so.**  
Nay, certainly, false Arcite, thou shalt not (do) so.
- 1146 **I loved hire first, and tolde thee my wo**  
I loved hire first, and told thee my woe
- 1147 **As to my conseil and my brother sworn**  
As to my confidant and my sworn brother
- 1148 **To forthre me, as I have toold biforn.**  
To further me, as I have told before.
- 1149 **For which thou art ybounden as a knyght**  
For which thou art bound as a knight
- 1150 **To helpen me, if it lay in thy myght,**  
To help me, if it lay in thy power,
- 1151 **Or elles artow fals, I dar wel seyn."**  
Or else thou art false, I dare well say."
- 1152 **This Arcite ful proudly spak ageyn:**  
This Arcite full proudly spoke in return:
- 1153 **"Thow shalt," quod he, "be rather fals than I;**  
"Thou shalt," said he, "be rather false than I;
- 1154 **And thou art fals, I telle thee outrely,**  
And thou art false, I tell thee flatly,
- 1155 **For paramour I loved hire first er thow.**  
As a mistress I loved her first before thou.
- 1156 **What wiltow seyen? Thou woost nat yet now**  
What wilt thou say? Thou knowest not yet now
- 1157 **Whether she be a womman or goddesse!**  
Whether she is a woman or goddess!
- 1158 **Thyn is affeccoun of hoolynesse,**  
Thine is a feeling of holiness,
- 1159 **And myn is love as to a creature;**  
And mine is love as to a creature;
- 1160 **For which I tolde thee myn aventure**  
For which I told thee my circumstance
- 1161 **As to my cosyn and my brother sworn.**  
As to my cousin and my sworn brother.

- 1162 **I pose that thou lovedest hire biforn;**  
I posit (this assumption): that thou lovedest her first;
- 1163 **Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,**  
Knowest thou not well the old clerks' saying,
- 1164 **That `who shal yeve a love any lawe?'**  
That `who shall give a lover any law?'
- 1165 **Love is a gretter lawe, by my pan,**  
Love is a greater law, by my skull,
- 1166 **Than may be yeve to any erthely man;**  
Than may be given to any earthly man;
- 1167 **And therefore positif lawe and swich decree**  
And therefore positive (man-made) law and such decree
- 1168 **Is broken al day for love in ech degree.**  
Is broken every day for love in every way.
- 1169 **A man moot nedes love, maugree his heed;**  
A man must of necessity love, in spite of all he can do;
- 1170 **He may nat fleen it, thogh he sholde be deed,**  
He can not flee (from) it, though he should be dead,
- 1171 **Al be she mayde, or wydwe, or elles wyf.**  
Whether she be maid, or widow, or else wife.
- 1172 **And eek it is nat likly al thy lyf**  
And also it is not likely all thy life
- 1173 **To stonden in hir grace; namoore shal I;**  
To stand in her good graces; no more shall I;
- 1174 **For wel thou woost thyselven, verraily,**  
For well thou thyself knowest, truly,
- 1175 **That thou and I be dampned to prisoun**  
That thou and I are condemned to prison
- 1176 **Perpetuelly; us gayneth no raunsoun.**  
Perpetually; no ransom can help us.
- 1177 **We stryve as dide the houndes for the boon;**  
We strive as the hounds did for the bone;
- 1178 **They foughte al day, and yet hir part was noon.**  
They fought all day, and yet their share was nothing.
- 1179 **Ther cam a kyte, whil that they were so wrothe,**  
There came a kite, while they were so angry,
- 1180 **And baar away the boon bitwixe hem bothe.**  
And carried away the bone between them both.
- 1181 **And therefore, at the kynges court, my brother,**  
And therefore, at the king's court, my brother,
- 1182 **Ech man for hymself, ther is noon oother.**  
Each man for himself, there is no other (way).
- 1183 **Love, if thee list, for I love and ay shal;**  
Love, if it please thee, for I love and always shall;
- 1184 **And soothly, leeve brother, this is al.**  
And truly, dear brother, this is all.
- 1185 **Heere in this prisoun moote we endure,**  
Here in this prison we must endure,
- 1186 **And everich of us take his aventure."**  
And each one of us take his chance."

- 1187 **Greet was the strif and long bitwix hem tweye,**  
Great and long was the strife between them two,
- 1188 **If that I hadde leyser for to seye;**  
If I had leisure to tell (it);
- 1189 **But to th'effect. It happed on a day,**  
But to the point. It happened on a day,
- 1190 **To telle it yow as shortly as I may,**  
To tell it to you as briefly as I can,
- 1191 **A worthy duc that highte Perotheus,**  
A worthy duke that was called Perotheus,
- 1192 **That felawe was unto duc Theseus**  
Who was a friend to duke Theseus
- 1193 **Syn thilke day that they were children lite,**  
Since that same time that they were little children,
- 1194 **Was come to Atthenes his felawe to visite,**  
Had come to Athens to visit his friend,
- 1195 **And for to pleye as he was wont to do;**  
And to amuse himself as he was accustomed to do;
- 1196 **For in this world he loved no man so,**  
For in this world he loved no man so (much),
- 1197 **And he loved hym als tendrely agayn.**  
And he (Theseus) loved him as tenderly in turn.
- 1198 **So wel they lovede, as olde bookes sayn,**  
So well they loved, as old books say,
- 1199 **That whan that oon was deed, soothly to telle,**  
That when one was dead, truly to tell,
- 1200 **His felawe wente and soughte hym doun in helle --**  
His friend went and sought him down in hell --
- 1201 **But of that storie list me nat to write.**  
But of that story I do not desire to write.
- 1202 **Duc Perotheus loved wel Arcite,**  
Duke Perotheus loved well Arcite,
- 1203 **And hadde hym knowe at Thebes yeer by yere,**  
And had known him at Thebes year after year,
- 1204 **And finally at requeste and preyere**  
And finally at request and prayer
- 1205 **Of Perotheus, withouten any raunsoun,**  
Of Perotheus, without any ransom,
- 1206 **Duc Theseus hym leet out of prisoun**  
Duke Theseus let him out of prison
- 1207 **Frely to goon wher that hym liste over al,**  
Freely to go all over, wherever he wishes,
- 1208 **In swich a gyse as I you tellen shal.**  
In such a manner as shall I tell you.
- 1209 **This was the forward, pleyedly for t'endite,**  
This was the agreement, plainly to write,
- 1210 **Bitwixen Theseus and hym Arcite:**  
Between Theseus and this Arcite:
- 1211 **That if so were that Arcite were yfounde**



- 1212 **Evere in his lif, by day or nyght, oo stounde**  
 Ever in his life, by day or night, at any moment
- 1213 **In any contree of this Theseus,**  
 In any country of this Theseus,
- 1214 **And he were caught, it was acorded thus,**  
 And if he were caught, it was agreed thus,
- 1215 **That with a swerd he sholde lese his heed.**  
 That with a sword he should lose his head.
- 1216 **Ther nas noon oother remedie ne reed;**  
 There was no other remedy nor course of action;
- 1217 **But taketh his leve, and homward he him spedde.**  
 But (he) takes his leave, and homeward he sped.
- 1218 **Lat hym be war! His nekke lith to wedde.**  
 Let him be ware! His neck lies as a pledge.
- 1219 **How greet a sorwe suffreth now Arcite!**  
 How great a sorrow now suffers Arcite!
- 1220 **The deeth he feeleth thurgh his herte smyte;**  
 He feels the death smite through his heart;
- 1221 **He wepeth, wayleth, crieth pitously;**  
 He weeps, wails, cries piteously;
- 1222 **To sleen hymself he waiteth prively.**  
 To slay himself he secretly awaits (an opportunity).
- 1223 **He seyde, "Allas that day that I was born!**  
 He said, "Alas that day that I was born!
- 1224 **Now is my prisoun worse than biforn;**  
 Now my prison is worse than before;
- 1225 **Now is me shape eternally to dwelle**  
 Now I am destined eternally to dwell
- 1226 **Noght in purgatorie, but in helle.**  
 Not in purgatory, but in hell.
- 1227 **Allas, that evere knew I Perotheus!**  
 Alas, that ever I knew Perotheus!
- 1228 **For elles hadde I dwelled with Theseus,**  
 For else I would have remained with Theseus,
- 1229 **Yfetered in his prisoun everemo.**  
 Fettered in his prison evermore.
- 1230 **Thanne hadde I been in blisse and nat in wo.**  
 Then would I have been in bliss and not in woe.
- 1231 **Only the sighte of hire whom that I serve,**  
 Only the sight of her whom I serve,
- 1232 **Though that I nevere hir grace may deserve,**  
 Though I never can deserve her grace,
- 1233 **Wolde han suffised right ynough for me.**  
 Would have sufficed right enough for me.
- 1234 **O deere cosyn Palamon," quod he,**  
 O dear cousin Palamon," said he,
- 1235 **"Thyn is the victorie of this aventure.**  
 "The victory of this adventure is thine.
- 1236 **Ful blisfully in prison maistow dure --**

- 1237 **Very blissfully in prison thou can remain --**  
**In prison? Certes nay, but in paradys!**  
 In prison? Certainly not, but in paradise!
- 1238 **Wel hath Fortune yturned thee the dys,**  
 Well has Fortune turned the dice for thee,
- 1239 **That hast the sighte of hire, and I th'absence.**  
 That hast the sight of her, and I the absence.
- 1240 **For possible is, syn thou hast hire presence,**  
 For it is possible, since thou hast her presence,
- 1241 **And art a knyght, a worthy and an able,**  
 And art a knight, a worthy and an able (one),
- 1242 **That by som cas, syn Fortune is chaungeable,**  
 That by some chance, since Fortune is changeable,
- 1243 **Thow maist to thy desir somtyme atteyne.**  
 Thou mayest sometime attain thy desire.
- 1244 **But I, that am exiled and bareyne**  
 But I, who am exiled and barren
- 1245 **Of alle grace, and in so greet dispeir**  
 Of all grace, and in so great despair
- 1246 **That ther nys erthe, water, fir, ne eir,**  
 That there is not earth, water, fire, nor air,
- 1247 **Ne creature that of hem maked is,**  
 Nor creature that is made of them,
- 1248 **That may me helpe or doon confort in this,**  
 That can help me or do comfort (to me) in this,
- 1249 **Wel oughte I sterve in wanhope and distresse.**  
 Well ought I to die in despair and distress.
- 1250 **Farwel my lif, my lust, and my gladnesse!**  
 Farwell my life, my desire, and my gladness!
- 1251 **"Allas, why pleynen folk so in commune**  
 "Alas, why do folk so commonly complain
- 1252 **On purveiaunce of God, or of Fortune,**  
 About the providence of God, or of Fortune,
- 1253 **That yeveth hem ful ofte in many a gyse**  
 That gives them full often in many a manner
- 1254 **Wel bettre than they kan hemself devyse?**  
 Much better than they can themselves imagine?
- 1255 **Som man desireth for to han richesse,**  
 One man desires to have riches,
- 1256 **That cause is of his mordre or greet siknesse;**  
 Which is the cause of his murder or great sickness;
- 1257 **And som man wolde out of his prisoun fayn,**  
 And one man would happily (go) out of his prison,
- 1258 **That in his hous is of his meynee slayn.**  
 Who is slain in his house by members of his household.
- 1259 **Infinite harmes been in this mateere.**  
 Infinite harms are in this matter.
- 1260 **We witen nat what thing we preyen heere;**  
 We know not what thing we pray for here;

- 1261 **We faren as he that dronke is as a mous.**  
 We act like one who is drunk as a mouse.
- 1262 **A dronke man woot wel he hath an hous,**  
 A drunk man knows well he has a house,
- 1263 **But he noot which the righte wey is thider,**  
 But he does not know which is the right way to it,
- 1264 **And to a dronke man the wey is slider.**  
 And to a drunk man the way is slippery.
- 1265 **And certes, in this world so faren we;**  
 And certainly, so we fare in this world;
- 1266 **We seken faste after felicitee,**  
 We seek eagerly after felicity,
- 1267 **But we goon wrong ful often, trewely.**  
 But we go wrong very often, truly.
- 1268 **Thus may we seyen alle, and namely I,**  
 Thus can we all say, and especially I,
- 1269 **That wende and hadde a greet opinioun**  
 Who supposed and had a firm belief
- 1270 **That if I myghte escapen from prisoun,**  
 That if I might escape from prison,
- 1271 **Thanne hadde I been in joye and parfit heele,**  
 Then I would have been in joy and perfect well-being,
- 1272 **Ther now I am exiled fro my wele.**  
 Whereas now I am exiled from my source of happiness.
- 1273 **Syn that I may nat seen you, Emelye,**  
 Since I can not see you, Emelye,
- 1274 **I nam but deed; ther nys no remedye."**  
 I am as good as dead; there is not any remedy."
- 1275 **Upon that oother syde Palamon,**  
 Upon that other side Palamon,
- 1276 **Whan that he wiste Arcite was agon,**  
 When he knew Arcite was gone,
- 1277 **Swich sorwe he maketh that the grete tour**  
 He makes such sorrow that the great tour
- 1278 **Resouneth of his youlyng and clamour.**  
 Resounds with his yowling and clamor.
- 1279 **The pure fettres on his shynes grete**  
 The great fetters themselves on his shins
- 1280 **Weren of his bittre, salte teeres wete.**  
 Were wet from his bitter, salt tears.
- 1281 **"Allas," quod he, "Arcita, cosyn myn,**  
 "Alas," said he, "Arcite, cousin mine,
- 1282 **Of al oure strif, God woot, the fruyt is thyn.**  
 Of all our strife, God knows, the profit is thine.
- 1283 **Thow walkest now in Thebes at thy large,**  
 Thou walkest freely now in Thebes,
- 1284 **And of my wo thow yevest litel charge.**  
 And thou care little about my woe.
- 1285 **Thou mayst, syn thou hast wisdom and manhede,**  
 Thou mayest, since thou hast wisdom and manhood,

- 1286 **Assemblen alle the folk of oure kynrede,**  
Assemble all the folk of our family,
- 1287 **And make a werre so sharp on this citee**  
And make a war so sharp on this city
- 1288 **That by som aventure or some tretee**  
That by some chance or some treaty
- 1289 **Thow mayst have hire to lady and to wyf**  
Thou mayest have her as lady and as wife
- 1290 **For whom that I moste nedes lese my lyf.**  
For whom I must of necessity lose my life.
- 1291 **For, as by wey of possibilitee,**  
For, as by way of possibility,
- 1292 **Sith thou art at thy large, of prisoun free,**  
Since thou art at thy liberty, free of prison,
- 1293 **And art a lord, greet is thyn avauntage**  
And art a lord, thy advantage is great,
- 1294 **Moore than is myn, that sterve here in a cage.**  
More than is mine, who die here in a cage.
- 1295 **For I moot wepe and wayle, whil I lyve,**  
For I must weep and wail, while I live,
- 1296 **With al the wo that prison may me yive,**  
With all the woe that prison may give me,
- 1297 **And eek with peyne that love me yeveth also,**  
And also with pain that love gives me also,
- 1298 **That doubleth al my torment and my wo."**  
That doubles all my torment and my woe."
- 1299 **Therwith the fyr of jalousie up sterte**  
Therewith the fire of jealousy started up
- 1300 **Withinne his brest, and hente him by the herte**  
Within his breast, and seized him by the heart
- 1301 **So woodly that he lyk was to biholde**  
So madly that he was to look upon like
- 1302 **The boxtree or the asshen dede and colde.**  
The box tree or the ash dead and cold.
- 1303 **Thanne seyde he, "O crueel goddes that governe**  
Then said he, "O cruel gods that govern
- 1304 **This world with byndyng of youre word eterne,**  
This world with binding of your eternal word,
- 1305 **And writen in the table of atthamaunt**  
And write in the table of adamant (hardest of stones)
- 1306 **Youre parlement and youre eterne graunt,**  
Your decision and your eternal decree,
- 1307 **What is mankynde moore unto you holde**  
Why is mankind more obligated unto you
- 1308 **Than is the sheep that rouketh in the folde?**  
Than is the sheep that cowers in the sheepfold?
- 1309 **For slayn is man right as another beest,**  
For man is slain exactly like another beast,
- 1310 **And dwelleth eek in prison and arrest,**

- 1311 **And hath siknesse and greet adversitee,**  
And has sickness and great adversity,
- 1312 **And ofte tymes giltelees, pardee.**  
And often times guiltless, indeed.
- 1313 **"What governance is in this prescience,**  
"What (sort of) governance is in this foreknowledge,
- 1314 **That giltelees tormenteth innocence?**  
That torments guiltless innocence?
- 1315 **And yet encresseth this al my penaunce,**  
And yet this increases all my suffering,
- 1316 **That man is bounden to his observaunce,**  
That man is bound to his duty,
- 1317 **For Goddes sake, to letten of his wille,**  
For God's sake, to refrain from his desire,
- 1318 **Ther as a beest may al his lust fulfille.**  
Whereas a beast may fulfill all his desire.
- 1319 **And whan a beest is deed he hath no peyne;**  
And when a beast is dead he has no pain;
- 1320 **But man after his deeth moot wepe and pleyne,**  
But man after his death must weep and lament,
- 1321 **Though in this world he have care and wo.**  
Though in this world he may have (had) care and woe.
- 1322 **Withouten doute it may stonden so.**  
Without doubt such is the case.
- 1323 **The answeere of this lete I to dyvynys,**  
The answer to this I leave to theologians,
- 1324 **But wel I woot that in this world greet pyne ys.**  
But well I know that great pain is in this world.
- 1325 **Allas, I se a serpent or a theef,**  
Alas, I see a serpent or a thief,
- 1326 **That many a trewe man hath doon mescheef,**  
That has done mischief to many a true man,
- 1327 **Goon at his large, and where hym list may turne.**  
Go at his liberty, and can go where he pleases.
- 1328 **But I moot been in prisoun thurgh Saturne,**  
But I must be in prison because of Saturn,
- 1329 **And eek thurgh Juno, jalous and eek wood,**  
And also because of Juno, jealous and also mad,
- 1330 **That hath destroyed wel ny al the blood**  
Who has destroyed well nigh all the blood
- 1331 **Of Thebes with his waste walles wyde;**  
Of Thebes with its wide devastated walls;
- 1332 **And Venus sleeth me on that oother syde**  
And Venus slays me on that other side
- 1333 **For jalousie and fere of hym Arcite."**  
For jealousy and fear of this Arcite."
- 1334 **Now wol I stynte of Palamon a lite,**  
Now will I cease (speaking of) of Palamon for a little while,

- 1335 **And lete hym in his prisoun stille dwelle,**  
And leave him to dwell in his prison still,
- 1336 **And of Arcita forth I wol yow telle.**  
And of Arcite forth I will tell you.
- 1337 **The somer passeth, and the nyghtes longe**  
The summer passes, and the long nights
- 1338 **Encressen double wise the peynes stronge**  
Increase doubly the strong pains
- 1339 **Bothe of the lovere and the prisoner.**  
Both of the lover and the prisoner.
- 1340 **I noot which hath the wofuller mester.**  
I know not which has the more woeful task.
- 1341 **For, shortly for to seyn, this Palamoun**  
For, briefly to say (it), this Palamon
- 1342 **Perpetuely is dampned to prisoun,**  
Is damned perpetually to prison,
- 1343 **In cheynes and in fettres to been deed;**  
In chains and in fetters to be dead;
- 1344 **And Arcite is exiled upon his heed**  
And Arcite is exiled on threat of losing his head
- 134e **For everemo, as out of that contree,**  
For evermore, out of that country,
- 1346 **Ne nevere mo ne shal his lady see.**  
Nor nevermore shall (he) see his lady.
- 1347 **Yow loveres axe I now this questioun:**  
Yow lovers now I ask this question:
- 1348 **Who hath the worse, Arcite or Palamoun?**  
Who has the worse, Arcite or Palamon?
- 1349 **That oon may seen his lady day by day,**  
That one may see his lady every day,
- 1350 **But in prison he moot dwelle alway;**  
But in prison he must always dwell;
- 1351 **That oother wher hym list may ride or go,**  
That other where he pleases may ride or walk,
- 1352 **But seen his lady shal he nevere mo.**  
But he shall see his lady nevermore.
- 1353 **Now demeth as yow liste, ye that kan,**  
Now judge as it pleases you, you who know (of such things),
- 1354 **For I wol telle forth as I bigan.**  
For I will tell forth as I began.

*Explicit prima pars*

The first part ends

If you wish, [take a quiz](#) to test your knowledge of the Middle English.

Or go to [Part 2](#). Or go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#). Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.

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## **Explanatory Notes to The Knight's Tale, A Check List (Lines I.859-3108)**

Here are a list of subjects, a sample of the Explanatory Notes for The Knight's Tale in *The Canterbury Tales Complete* and *The Riverside Chaucer*. Jot down a brief explanation of each of the following terms; then check your answers against the notes cited in parentheses at the end of each entry.

- 1) Teseida (Expl. Notes, p. 359)
- 2) occupatio (I.875-88)
- 3) Mars the red (I.975)
- 4) Love's fatal glance (I.1977-97)
- 5) sworn brothers (I.1132)
- 6) positif lawe (I.1167)
- 7) demande d'amour, love-problem (I.1347)
- 8) loveris maladye of Heroes (I.1355-76)
- 9) humour malencolik (I.1374-76)
- 10) May, The thridde night (I.1462-64)
- 11) claree (I.1471)
- 12) Friday as changeable day (I.1534-39)
- 13) destiny and purveiaunce (I.1663-72)
- 14) pitee renneth sone (I.1761)
- 15) symbolism of colors (I.1929)
- 16) the two-fold Venus (I.1955-66)
- 17) heure inequal (I.2271)
- 18) Three forms of Diana (I.2313)
- 19) Saturn (I.2443-78)
- 20) alliterating poetry (I.2601-16)



- 21) vertu expulsif (l.2749)
- 22) pilgrimage as metaphor (l.2848)
- 23) gloves white (l.2874).

If you get nineteen or more of these right, you have done very well; if you got less than that, you should browse through those notes once more. You need not read every note nor every part of the notes you do read. However, some time spent on the notes will increase your understanding of Chaucer's world and his art.

Return to [Lesson 8](#). Or go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#). Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.



# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 9: The Miller's Reeve's, and Cook's Tales

At this point you may no longer need the interlinear translations. There will always be a few unfamiliar words and puzzling phrases in any work of so inventive an author as Chaucer. These are for the most part handled in the page glosses and Explanatory notes in *The Riverside Chaucer*, *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, or any other well annotated edition.

Begin with The Miller's Tale. First read through the summary of the action at the beginning of the page on [The Miller's Tale](#) on the Geoffrey Chaucer Page. Then read the tale carefully in your printed edition, making full use of the page glosses and Explanatory Notes. If you still find lines that seem obscure look at them in the interlinear edition of [The Miller's Tale](#) (use your "find" button -- Control F -- to search for the relevant line number). If this happens frequently, move from the printed text to the interlinear edition and read carefully through it, taking the quizzes at the end (or take the first test after you have read to line 3396). To start now, [click here](#). Then read the printed text (and, if you wish and have not already done so, take the [quiz](#) on the vocabulary).

When you have finished reading the Miller's Tale in your printed text (and have taken the quiz or feel confident in your reading) go back to the page on the [Miller's Tale](#) and browse through the materials there.

Follow the same procedures for reading the Reeve's and Cook's Tales: first try them in your printed edition (you may want to read the summary of the [Reeve's Tale](#) before you begin). And if that reading goes well, with only occasional reference to the the interlinear editions of [The Reeve's Tale](#) and [The Cook's Tale](#) you are ready to read on Chaucer on your own. You may want to take a [quiz on the vocabulary of The Reeve's Tale](#) and a [quiz on the Cook's Tale](#), just to be sure.

In working your way through the printed texts, you have probably acquired a good deal of background information. To test this, take a sort of [check-list quiz](#) on the materials in glosses and notes to those tales. If, on the other hand, you find the printed text is going too slow for you, go carefully through the interlinear editions of [The Reeve's Tale](#) and [The Cook's Tale](#); then go through the printed text again.

Finally, browse through the pages on [The Reeve's Tale](#) and [The Cook's Tale](#).

Then go on to the [Conclusion](#) | or use the back button to return to the previous page.

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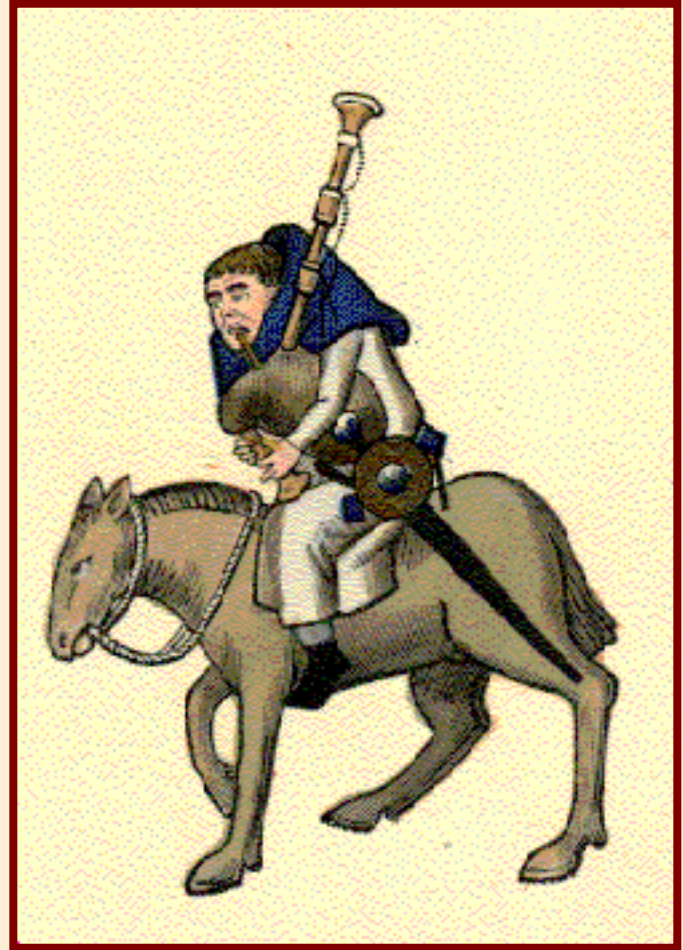
## The Miller's Tale

**A swerd and bokeler bar he by his syde.**

...

**A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.**

**A bagpipe wel koude he blow and sowne,  
And therwithal he brought us out of towne.**



[John, a rich old carpenter of Oxford has a young wife, the eighteen-year-old Alisoun, whom he guards carefully, for he is very jealous. He has a boarder, the clerk Nicholas, who makes advances to Alisoun; she quickly agrees and they determine to consummate the affair. Absolon, the parish clerk and village dandy, also lusts for Alisoun, but he woos her in vain, for Nicholas is there first.

Nicholas tricks John into thinking that Noah's flood is coming again; John rigs up three kneading tubs, in which he, Nicholas, and Alisoun can float until the waters recede. When the flood is due, all three climb up into the tubs. John goes to sleep, Alisoun and Nicholas go back to the bedroom. They are interrupted by Absolon, who has come to woo Alisoun at the window. She promises him a kiss and puts her backside out the window. Absolon kisses it.

He soon realizes his mistake. He gets a hot coulter (plow blade) from Gervase, the smith, and returns to ask for another kiss. Nicholas puts his backside out, Absolon strikes it with the red-hot coulter, Nicholas yells for water; the carpenter awakes and thinks the flood has come, cuts lose his tub and falls and breaks his arm. The neighbors rush in, and all are convinced old John is mad.]

(Students reading this text for the first time may find an [interlinear translation](#) helpful.)

The Miller's Tale is Chaucer's finest fabliau; indeed, it is the best of all the [fabliaux](#) in English or French. It embodies two widespread motifs -- "The Misdirected Kiss." and the "Second Flood."

The "Misdirected Kiss" can appear in a simple form:

[Old Hogyn's Aventure](#), for example, is a sixteenth-century ballad version of the climax in the Miller's Tale. It is late enough to have been influenced by Chaucer's Tale, but it may also reflect an oral version of the motif in its most primitive form.

The motif can also be developed in an elaborate manner:

[Massucio's "Viola and Her Lovers"](#) shows the tale in its fully-developed form, complete with the hot metal implement.

[Bèrenger of the Long Arse](#), employs the motif in a quite different manner, as a means of punishing snobbery of the sort Absolon displays (though the punishment and its effect are quite different).

The motif of prophesying some disaster as part of arranging a lovers' tryst also appears in a simple form:

Morlini's ["The Monk Who Prophesied an Earthquake"](#) renders the simple tale in elegant Latin verse.

The combination of the two motifs in one tale does not

appear until after Chaucer's time and then only in German sources:

Hans Sachs' [The Smith in the Kneading Tub](#).

This version, by the famous German Meistersinger, has almost all the elements of the tale as it appears in Chaucer, though in a highly condensed form.

Perhaps Chaucer knew the tale in a form similar to that in Hans Sach's version, or the combination may have been Chaucer's own independent work. However it came about, in the Miller's Tale the two motifs are interwoven into a plot of breath-taking perfection. That moment when all the themes of the tale come together -- when Nicholas is burned in the tout, yells for water, and thus makes the old carpenter think Noah's flood is come again -- approaches the sublime. One critic, Henry Seidel Canby, who regarded the Miller's Tale as a perfect short story, wrote that at that moment when all the strings of the plot are drawn together it seems "as if the heavens opened, and the gods looked down and smiled."

Noah's Flood is a theme that runs throughout the tale; it is mentioned nine times. Some critics see typological significance in this; Jane Zatta's Chaucer page contains some interesting commentary on the significance of Noah, his ark, and his [sons](#). Moreover, Nicholas' interest in astrology fits well with Noah and the Flood:

John J. O'Connor, The Astrological Background of the Miller's Tale, *Speculum* 31 (1956), 120-25. (This article is in [JSTOR](#); click here for an [explanation](#)).

That, however, is for the intellectuals; the old cuckold who knows not [Cato](#) gets his information about the deluge from the popular drama:

"Hastou nat herd," quod Nicholas, "also  
The sorwe of Noe with his felaweshipe,  
Er that he myghte gete his wyf to shipe?" (MILT  
(1).3538-40)

For Noah's difficulties with his wife, see:

The Townley [Play of Noah](#)

The Miller's Tale also makes full use of the parodic echoes of courtly love so often found in the [fabliaux](#), though Alisoun is more a barnyard beauty than a courtly lady. This is clear in the way that Chaucer parodies the now old fashioned diction of earlier English attempts at the courtly style, such as the Harley Lyrics (see E.T. Donaldson, *Speaking of Chaucer*, pp. 22-24 [On reserve]; Chaucer uses the familiar method of description recommended by the rhetoricians, but he draws on country life for his imagery (See Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition*, p. 229 [PR1912.A3 M8; On reserve]). Critics have noted similarities between the description of Alisoun and the description in the Harley Lyric "[The Fair Maid of Ribbesdale](#)."

The Miller is a churl who attempts to "quit" the Knight's Tale, so admired by the "gentils." A good many critics have thus been interested in the problems of class that the Tale seems to raise. Two good starting points for considering such matters are:

D. S. Brewer, Class Distinction in Chaucer [Speculum](#), Vol. 43, No. 2. (Apr., 1968), pp. 290-305 (This article is in JSTOR; [click here for an explanation](#)).

Lee Patterson, [A Lecture delivered 9/14/94 in English 125, Yale University](#). (For a more detailed treatment of the issues discussed in this lecture, and for an account of the Miller's Tale itself, see Lee Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1991).

For a bibliography of critical and scholarly works on the Miller's Tale (and fabliaux in general) [click here](#).

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# The Miller's Prologue and Tale

## An Interlinear Translation

The Middle English text is from Larry D. Benson., Gen. ed., *The Riverside Chaucer*,  
Houghton Mifflin Company; used with permission of the publisher.

(How to use the [interlinear translations.](#))

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## The Miller's Prologue

*Heere folwen the wordes betwene the Hoost and the Millere*  
Here follow the words between the Host and the Miller

- 3109 **Whan that the Knyght had thus his tale ytoold,**  
When the Knight had thus told his tale,  
3110 **In al the route nas ther yong ne oold**  
In all the company there was no one young nor old  
3111 **That he ne seyde it was a noble storie**  
Who did not say it was a noble story  
3112 **And worthy for to drawen to memorie,**  
And worthy to draw into memory,  
3113 **And namely the gentils everichon.**

- And especially the gentlefolk every one.
- 3114 **Oure Hooste lough and swoor, "So moot I gon,**  
Our Host laughed and swore, "As I may move about (I swear),
- 3115 **This gooth aright; unboked is the male.**  
This goes well; the bag is opened.
- 3116 **Lat se now who shal telle another tale;**  
Let's see now who shall tell another tale;
- 3117 **For trewely the game is wel bigonne.**  
For truly the game is well begun.
- 3118 **Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye konne,**  
Now tell you, sir Monk, if you can,
- 3119 **Somwhat to quite with the Knyghtes tale."**  
Something to equal the Knight's tale."
- 3120 **The Millere, that for dronken was al pale,**  
The Miller, who for drunkenness was all pale,
- 3121 **So that unnethe upon his hors he sat,**  
So that he hardly sat upon his horse,
- 3122 **He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,**  
He would not doff neither hood nor hat,
- 3123 **Ne abyde no man for his curteisie,**  
Nor give preference to any man out of courtesy,
- 3124 **But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,**  
But in Pilate's voice he began to cry,
- 3125 **And swoor, "By armes, and by blood and bones,**  
And swore, "By (Christ's) arms, and by blood and bones,
- 3126 **I kan a noble tale for the nones,**  
I know a noble tale for this occasion,
- 3127 **With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale."**  
With which I will now requite the Knight's tale."
- 3128 **Oure Hooste saugh that he was dronke of ale,**  
Our Host saw that he was drunk on ale,
- 3129 **And seyde, "Abyd, Robyn, my leeve brother;**  
And said, "Wait, Robin, my dear brother;
- 3130 **Som better man shal telle us first another.**  
Some better man shall first tell us another (tale).
- 3131 **Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily."**  
Wait, and let us act properly."
- 3132 **"By Goddes soule," quod he, "that wol nat I;**  
"By God's soul," said he, "that will not I;
- 3133 **For I wol speke or elles go my wey."**  
For I will speak or else go my way."
- 3134 **Oure Hoost answerde, "Tel on, a devel wey!**  
Our Host answered, "Tell on, in the devil's name!
- 3135 **Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome."**  
Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome."
- 3136 **"Now herkneth," quod the Millere, "alle and some!**  
"Now listen," said the Miller, "everyone!
- 3137 **But first I make a protestacioun**

- 3138 **But first I make a protestation**  
**That I am dronke; I knowe it by my soun.**  
That I am drunk; I know it by my sound.
- 3139 **And therfore if that I mysspeke or seye,**  
And therefore if that I misspeak or say (amiss),
- 3140 **Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye.**  
Blame it on ale of Southwerk, I you pray.
- 3141 **For I wol telle a legende and a lyf**  
For I will tell a legend and a life
- 3142 **Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf,**  
Both of a carpenter and of his wife,
- 3143 **How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe."**  
How a clerk has set the carpenter's cap (fooled him)."
- 3144 **The Reve answerde and seyde, "Stynt thy clappe!**  
The Reeve answered and said, "Hold your tongue!
- 3145 **Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye.**  
Let be thy ignorant drunken ribaldry.
- 3146 **It is a synne and eek a greet folye**  
It is a sin and also a great folly
- 3147 **To apeyren any man, or hym defame,**  
To slander any man, or defame him,
- 3148 **And eek to bryngen wyves in swich fame.**  
And also to bring wives in such ill fame.
- 3149 **Thou mayst ynogh of othere thynges seyn."**  
Thou can say enough about other things."
- 3150 **This dronke Millere spak ful soone ageyn**  
This drunken Miller spoke very quickly in reply
- 3151 **And seyde, "Leve brother Osewold,**  
And said, "Dear brother Oswald,
- 3152 **Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold.**  
He who has no wife, he is no cuckold.
- 3153 **But I sey nat therfore that thou art oon;**  
But I say not therefore that thou art one;
- 3154 **Ther been ful goode wyves many oon,**  
There are very good wives, many a one,
- 3155 **And evere a thousand goode ayeyns oon badde.**  
And ever a thousand good against one bad.
- 3156 **That knowestow wel thyself, but if thou madde.**  
Thou knowest that well thyself, unless thou art mad.
- 3157 **Why artow angry with my tale now?**  
Why art thou angry with my tale now?
- 3158 **I have a wyf, pardee, as wel as thow;**  
I have a wife, by God, as well as thou;
- 3159 **Yet nolde I, for the oxen in my plough,**  
Yet I would not, for the oxen in my plow,
- 3160 **Take upon me moore than ynogh,**  
Take upon me more than enough (trouble),
- 3161 **As demen of myself that I were oon;**

- As to believe of myself that I were one (a cuckold);  
3162 **I wol bileve wel that I am noon.**  
I will believe well that I am not one.
- 3163 **An housbonde shal nat been inquisityf**  
A husband must not be inquisitive
- 3164 **Of Goddes pryvetee, nor of his wyf.**  
Of God's secrets, nor of his wife.
- 3165 **So he may fynde Goddes foyson there,**  
So long as he can find God's plenty there,
- 3166 **Of the remenant nedeth nat enquere."**  
Of the rest one needs not enquire."
- 3167 **What sholde I moore seyn, but this Millere**  
What more should I say, but this Miller
- 3168 **He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,**  
He would not refrain from speaking for any man,
- 3169 **But tolde his cherles tale in his manere.**  
But told his churl's tale in his manner.
- 3170 **M'athynketh that I shal reherce it heere.**  
I regret that I must repeat it here.
- 3171 **And therefore every gentil wight I preye,**  
And therefore every gentle person I pray,
- 3172 **For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye**  
For God's love, think not that I speak
- 3173 **Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce**  
Out of evil intention, but because I must repeat
- 3174 **Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,**  
All their tales, be they better or worse,
- 3175 **Or elles falsen som of my mateere.**  
Or else (I must) falsify some of my material.
- 3176 **And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,**  
And therefore, whoever does not want to hear it,
- 3177 **Turne over the leef and chese another tale;**  
Turn over the leaf and choose another tale;
- 3178 **For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,**  
For he shall find enough, of every sort,
- 3179 **Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,**  
Of historical matter that concerns nobility,
- 3180 **And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.**  
And also morality and holiness.
- 3181 **Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.**  
Blame not me if you choose amiss.
- 3182 **The Millere is a cherl; ye knowe wel this.**  
The Miller is a churl; you know this well.
- 3183 **So was the Reve eek and othere mo,**  
So was the Reeve also and many others,
- 3184 **And harlotrie they tolden bothe two.**  
And ribaldry they told, both of the two.
- 3185 **Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame;**  
Think about this, and don't blame me;

3186 **And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game.**  
And also people should not take a joke too seriously.

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## The Miller's Tale

*Heere bigynneth the Millere his tale.*  
Here begins The Miller's Tale.

3187 **Whilom ther was dwellynge at Oxenford**  
There was once dwelling at Oxford  
3188 **A riche gnof, that gestes heeld to bord,**  
A rich churl, who took in boarders,  
3189 **And of his craft he was a carpenter.**  
And of his craft he was a carpenter.  
3190 **With hym ther was dwellynge a poure scoler,**  
With him there was dwelling a poor scholar,  
3191 **Hadde lerned art, but al his fantasye**  
Who had learned the arts curriculum, but all his desire  
3192 **Was turned for to lerne astrologye,**  
Was turned to learning astrology,  
3193 **And koude a certeyn of conclusiouns,**  
And he knew a certain (number of) of astronomical operations,  
3194 **To demen by interrogaciouns,**  
To determine by scientific calculations,  
3195 **If that men asked hym, in certein houres**  
If men asked him, in specific (astronomical) hours  
3196 **Whan that men sholde have droghte or elles shoures,**  
When men should have drought or else showers,  
3197 **Or if men asked hym what sholde bifalle**  
Or if people asked him what should happen  
3198 **Of every thyng; I may nat rekene hem alle.**  
Concerning every thing; I can not reckon them all.  
  
3199 **This clerk was cleped hende Nicholas.**  
This clerk was called courtly Nicholas.  
3200 **Of deerne love he koude and of solas;**  
Of secret love he knew and of its satisfaction;  
3201 **And therto he was sleigh and ful privee,**  
And moreover he was sly and very discreet,

- 3202 **And lyk a mayden meke for to see.**  
And like a maiden meek in appearance.
- 3203 **A chambre hadde he in that hostelrye**  
A room had he in that hostelry
- 3204 **Allone, withouten any compaignye,**  
Alone, without any company,
- 3205 **Ful fetisly ydight with herbes swoote;**  
Very elegantly strewn with sweet-smelling herbs;
- 3206 **And he hymself as sweete as is the roote**  
And he himself as sweet as is the root
- 3207 **Of lycorys or any cetewale.**  
Of licorice or any zedoary (a ginger-like herb).
- 3208 **His Almageste, and bookes grete and smale,**  
His Almagest, and books large and small,
- 3209 **His astrelabie, longynge for his art,**  
His astrolabe, belonging to his art (of astronomy),
- 3210 **His augrym stones layen faire apart,**  
His counting stones (for his abacus) lie neatly apart,
- 3211 **On shelves couched at his beddes heed;**  
Arranged on shelves at his bed's head;
- 3212 **His presse ycovered with a faldyng reed;**  
His linen press covered with a red woolen cloth;
- 3213 **And al above ther lay a gay sautrie,**  
And all above there lay a gay psaltery (stringed instrument),
- 3214 **On which he made a-nyghtes melodie**  
On which at night he made melody
- 3215 **So swetely that all the chambre rong;**  
So sweetly that all the room rang;
- 3216 **And Angelus ad virginem he song;**  
And "The angel to the Virgin" he sang;
- 3217 **And after that he song the Kynges Noote.**  
And after that he sang the King's Tune.
- 3218 **Ful often blessed was his myrie throte.**  
Very often his merry throat was blessed.
- 3219 **And thus this sweete clerk his tyme spente**  
And thus this sweet clerk spent his time
- 3220 **After his freendes fyndyng and his rente.**  
Living on his friends' support and his (own) income.
- 3221 **This carpenter hadde wedded neue a wyf,**  
This carpenter had recently wedded a wife,
- 3222 **Which that he lovede moore than his lyf;**  
Whom he loved more than his life;
- 3223 **Of eighteteene yeer she was of age.**  
She was eighteen years of age.
- 3224 **Jalous he was, and heeld hire narwe in cage,**  
Jealous he was, and held her narrowly in confinement,
- 3225 **For she was wylde and yong, and he was old**  
For she was wild and young, and he was old
- 3226 **And demed hymself been lik a cokewold.**

- And believed himself likely to be a cuckold.  
3227 **He knew nat Catoun, for his wit was rude,**  
He knew not Cato, for his wit was rude,  
3228 **That bad man sholde wedde his simylitude.**  
Who advised that man should wed his equal.  
3229 **Men sholde wedden after hire estaat,**  
Men should wed according to their status in life,  
3230 **For youthe and elde is often at debaat.**  
For youth and old age are often in conflict.  
3231 **But sith that he was fallen in the snare,**  
But since he was fallen in the snare,  
3232 **He moste endure, as oother folk, his care.**  
He must endure, like other folk, his troubles.
- 3233 **Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal**  
Fair was this young wife, and moreover  
3234 **As any wezele hir body gent and smal.**  
As any weasel was her body graceful and slender.  
3235 **A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,**  
A belt she wore, with decorative strips all of silk,  
3236 **A barmclooth as whit as morne milk**  
An apron as white as morning milk  
3237 **Upon hir lendes, ful of many a goore.**  
Upon her loins, full of many a flounce.  
3238 **Whit was hir smok, and broyden al bifoore**  
White was her smock, and embroidered all in front  
3239 **And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,**  
And also behind, around her collar,  
3240 **Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.**  
With coal-black silk, within and also without.  
3241 **The tapes of hir white voluper**  
The ribbons of her white cap  
3242 **Were of the same suyte of hir coler;**  
Were of the same color as her collar;  
3243 **Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.**  
Her headband broad of silk, and set very high.  
3244 **And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye;**  
And surely she had a wanton eye;  
3245 **Ful smale ypulled were hire browes two,**  
Her two eyebrows were plucked very thin,  
3246 **And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.**  
And those were bent and black as any sloe.  
3247 **She was ful moore blisful on to see**  
She was much more blissful to look upon  
3248 **Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,**  
Than is the new early-ripe pear tree,  
3249 **And softer than the wolle is of a wether.**  
And softer than the wool is of a sheep.  
3250 **And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,**  
And by her girdle hung a purse of leather,

- 3251 **Tasseled with silk and perled with latoun.**  
Tasseled with silk and pearled with latten (a brass-like metal).
- 3252 **In al this world, to seken up and down,**  
In all this world, to seek up and down,
- 3253 **There nys no man so wys that koude thenche**  
There is no man so wise that he could imagine
- 3254 **So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.**  
So gay a little doll or such a wench.
- 3255 **Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe**  
Much brighter was the shining of her complexion
- 3256 **Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.**  
Than the newly minted noble in the Tower.
- 3257 **But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne**  
But of her song, it was as loud and lively
- 3258 **As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.**  
As any swallow sitting on a barn.
- 3259 **Therto she koude skippe and make game,**  
Moreover she could skip and play,
- 3260 **As any kyde or calf folwyng his dame.**  
Like any kid or calf following its mother.
- 3261 **Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,**  
Her mouth was sweet as bragot (ale and honey) or mead,
- 3262 **Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.**  
Or a hoard of apples laid in hay or heather.
- 3263 **Wynsyng she was, as is a joly colt,**  
Skittish she was, as is a spirited colt,
- 3264 **Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.**  
Tall as a mast, and straight as an arrow.
- 3265 **A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,**  
A brooch she wore upon her low collar,
- 3266 **As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.**  
As broad as is the boss of a shield.
- 3267 **Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye.**  
Her shoes were laced high on her legs.
- 3268 **She was a prymerole, a piggesnye,**  
She was a primrose, a pig's eye (a flower),
- 3269 **For any lord to leggen in his bedde,**  
For any lord to lay in his bed,
- 3270 **Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.**  
Or yet for any good yeoman to wed.
- 3271 **Now, sire, and eft, sire, so bifel the cas**  
Now, sir, and again, sir, it so happened
- 3272 **That on a day this hende Nicholas**  
That one day this courtly Nicholas
- 3273 **Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye,**  
Happened with this young wife to flirt and play,
- 3274 **Whil that hir housbonde was at Oseneye,**  
While her husband was at Oseneye,
- 3275 **As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte;**



- 3276 **And prively he caughte hire by the queynte,**  
 And intimately he caught her by her crotch,
- 3277 **And seyde, "Ywis, but if ich have my wille,**  
 And said, "Indeed, unless I have my will,
- 3278 **For deerne love of thee, lemman, I spille."**  
 For secret love of thee, sweetheart, I die."
- 3279 **And heeld hire harde by the haunchebones,**  
 And held her hard by the thigh,
- 3280 **And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones,**  
 And said, "Sweetheart, love me immediately
- 3281 **Or I wol dyen, also God me save!"**  
 Or I will die, so save me God!"
- 3282 **And she sproong as a colt dooth in the trave,**  
 And she sprang as a colt does when restrained,
- 3283 **And with hir heed she wryed faste away,**  
 And with her head she twisted fast away,
- 3284 **And seyde, "I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey!**  
 And said, "I will not kiss thee, by my faith!
- 3285 **Why, lat be!" quod she. "Lat be, Nicholas,**  
 Why, let me be!" said she. "Let me be, Nicholas,
- 3286 **Or I wol crie `out, harrow' and `allas'!**  
 Or I will cry `out, help' and `alas'!
- 3287 **Do wey youre handes, for youre curteisye!"**  
 Do away your hands, for your courtesy!"
- 3288 **This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye,**  
 This Nicholas began to cry for mercy,
- 3289 **And spak so faire, and profred him so faste,**  
 And spoke so fair, and pressed his suit so fast,
- 3290 **That she hir love hym graunted atte laste,**  
 That she granted him her love at the last,
- 3291 **And swoor hir ooth, by Seint Thomas of Kent,**  
 And swore her oath, by Saint Thomas of Kent,
- 3292 **That she wol been at his comandement,**  
 That she will be at his commandment,
- 3293 **Whan that she may hir leyser wel espie.**  
 When she may well espy her opportunity.
- 3294 **"Myn housbonde is so ful of jalousie**  
 "My husband is so full of jealousy
- 3295 **That but ye wayte wel and been privee,**  
 That unless you wait patiently and are secretive,
- 3296 **I woot right wel I nam but deed," quod she.**  
 I know right well I am as good as dead," said she.
- 3297 **"Ye moste been ful deerne, as in this cas."**  
 "You must be very secret in this matter."
- 3298 **"Nay, therof care thee noght," quod Nicholas.**  
 "No, care thee not about that," said Nicholas.
- 3299 **"A clerk hadde litherly biset his hyle,**

- 3300        "A clerk had badly wasted his time (studying),  
**But if he koude a carpenter bigyle."**  
              If he could not outwit a carpenter."
- 3301        **And thus they been accorded and ysworn**  
              And thus they are agreed and sworn
- 3302        **To wayte a tyme, as I have told biforn.**  
              To wait for a time, as I have told before.
- 3303        **Whan Nicholas had doon thus everideel**  
              When Nicholas had done thus every bit
- 3304        **And thakked hire aboute the lendes weel,**  
              And well patted her about the loins,
- 3305        **He kiste hire sweete and taketh his sawtrie,**  
              He kissed her sweetly and takes his psaltery,
- 3306        **And pleyeth faste, and maketh melodie.**  
              And plays fast, and makes melody.
- 3307        **Thanne fil it thus, that to the paryssh chirche,**  
              Then it thus happened, that to the parish church,
- 3308        **Cristes owene werkes for to wirche,**  
              Christ's own works to do,
- 3309        **This goode wyf went on an haliday.**  
              This good wife went on an holiday.
- 3310        **Hir forheed shoon as bright as any day,**  
              Her forehead shone as bright as any day,
- 3311        **So was it wasshen whan she leet hir werk.**  
              It was so washed when she left her work.
- 3312        **Now was ther of that chirche a pariss clerk,**  
              Now was there of that church a parish clerk,
- 3313        **The which that was ycleped Absolon.**  
              Who was called Absolon.
- 3314        **Crul was his heer, and as the gold it shoon,**  
              Curly was his hair, and as the gold it shone,
- 3315        **And strouted as a fanne large and brode;**  
              And stretched out like a fan large and broad;
- 3316        **Ful streight and even lay his joly shode.**  
              Very straight and even lay his pretty parted hair.
- 3317        **His rode was reed, his eyen greye as goos.**  
              His complexion was ruddy, his eyes gray as a goose.
- 3318        **With Poules wyndow corven on his shoos,**  
              With St. Paul's window carved on his shoos,
- 3319        **In hoses rede he wente fetisly.**  
              In red hoses he went elegantly.
- 3320        **Yclad he was ful smal and proprely**  
              Clad he was very trimly and properly
- 3321        **Al in a kirtel of a lyght waget;**  
              All in a tunic of a light blue;
- 3322        **Ful faire and thikke been the poyntes set.**  
              Very fair and thick are the laces set.
- 3323        **And therupon he hadde a gay surplys**

- 3324 **As whit as is the blosme upon the rys.**  
As white as is the blossom upon the branch.
- 3325 **A myrie child he was, so God me save.**  
A merry lad he was, so save me God.
- 3326 **Wel koude he laten blood, and clippe and shave,**  
Well could he draw blood, and cut hair and shave,
- 3327 **And maken a chartre of lond or acquitaunce.**  
And make a charter of land or a legal release.
- 3328 **In twenty manere koude he trippe and daunce**  
In twenty different ways could he trip and dance
- 3329 **After the scole of Oxenforde tho,**  
After the school of Oxford as it was then,
- 3330 **And with his legges casten to and fro,**  
And with his legs kick to and fro,
- 3331 **And pleyen songes on a smal rubible;**  
And play songs on a small rebeck (a kind of fiddle),
- 3332 **Therto he song som tyme a loud quynyble;**  
To which he some times sang a loud high treble;
- 3333 **And as wel koude he pleye on a giterne.**  
And he could play as well on a guitar.
- 3334 **In al the toun nas brewhous ne taverne**  
In all the town there was no brew house nor tavern
- 3335 **That he ne visited with his solas,**  
That he did not visit with his entertainment,
- 3336 **Ther any gaylard tappestere was.**  
Where any merry barmaid was.
- 3337 **But sooth to seyn, he was somdeel squaymous**  
But to say the truth, he was somewhat squeamish
- 3338 **Of fartyng, and of speche daungerous.**  
About farting, and fastidious in his speech.
- 3339 **This Absolon, that jolif was and gay,**  
This Absolon, who was jolly and gay,
- 3340 **Gooth with a sencer on the haliday,**  
Goes with a censer on the holiday,
- 3341 **Sensynge the wyves of the parisshe faste;**  
Censing the wives of the parish eagerly;
- 3342 **And many a lovely look on hem he caste,**  
And many a lovely look he cast on them,
- 3343 **And namely on this carpenteris wyf.**  
And especially on this carpenter's wife.
- 3344 **To looke on hire hym thoughte a myrie lyf,**  
To look on her he thought a merry life,
- 3345 **She was so propre and sweete and likerous.**  
She was so attractive and sweet and flirtatious.
- 3346 **I dar wel seyn, if she hadde been a mous,**  
I dare well say, if she had been a mouse,
- 3347 **And he a cat, he wolde hire hente anon.**  
And he a cat, he would have grabbed her at once.

- 3348 **This parissch clerk, this joly Absolon,**  
This parish clerk, this handsome Absolon,
- 3349 **Hath in his herte swich a love-longynge**  
Has in his heart such a love-longing
- 3350 **That of no wyf took he noon offrynge;**  
That of no wife took he any offering;
- 3351 **For curteisie, he seyde, he wolde noon.**  
For courtesy, he said, he would have none.
- 3352 **The moone, whan it was nyght, ful brighte shoon,**  
The moon, when it was night, very brightly shone,
- 3353 **And Absolon his gyterne hath ytake;**  
And Absolon his guitar has taken;
- 3354 **For paramours he thoghte for to wake.**  
For the sake of love he intended to stay awake.
- 3355 **And forth he gooth, jolif and amorous,**  
And forth he goes, jolly and amorous,
- 3356 **Til he cam to the carpenteres hous**  
Until he came to the carpenter's house
- 3357 **A litel after cokkes hadde ycrowe,**  
A little after cocks had crowed,
- 3358 **And dressed hym up by a shot-wyndowe**  
And took his place up by a casement window
- 3359 **That was upon the carpenteris wal.**  
That was upon the carpenter's wall.
- 3360 **He syngeth in his voys gentil and smal,**  
He sings in his voice gentle and high,
- 3361 **"Now, deere lady, if thy wille be,**  
"Now, dear lady, if it be thy will,
- 3362 **I praye yow that ye wole rewe on me,"**  
I pray yow that you will have pity on me,"
- 3363 **Ful wel acordaunt to his gyternynge.**  
Very well in harmony with his guitar-playing.
- 3364 **This carpenter awook, and herde him synge,**  
This carpenter awoke, and heard him sing,
- 3365 **And spak unto his wyf, and seyde anon,**  
And spoke unto his wife, and said at once,
- 3366 **"What! Alison! Herestow nat Absolon,**  
"What! Alison! Hearest thou not Absolon,
- 3367 **That chaunteth thus under oure boures wal?"**  
That chants thus next to our bedroom's wall?"
- 3368 **And she answerde hir housbonde therwithal,**  
And she answered her husband immediately,
- 3369 **"Yis, God woot, John, I heere it every deel."**  
"Yes indeed, God knows, John, I hear it every bit."
- 3370 **This passeth forth; what wol ye bet than weel?**  
This goes on; what more would you have?
- 3371 **Fro day to day this joly Absolon**  
From day to day this handsome Absolon

- 3372 **So woweth hire that hym is wo bigon.**  
So woes her that he is in a sorry state.
- 3373 **He waketh al the nyght and al the day;**  
He stays awake all the night and all the day;
- 3374 **He kembeth his lokkes brode, and made hym gay;**  
He combs his flowing locks, and dressed himself elegantly;
- 3375 **He woweth hire by meenes and brocage,**  
He woos her by go-betweens and agents,
- 3376 **And swoor he wolde been hir owene page;**  
And swore he would be her own servant;
- 3377 **He syngeth, brokkyng as a nyghtyngale;**  
He sings, trilling like a nightingale;
- 3378 **He sente hire pyment, meeth, and spiced ale,**  
He sent her sweetened wine, mead, and spiced ale,
- 3379 **And wafres, pipyng hoot out of the gleede;**  
And wafers, piping hot out of the fire;
- 3380 **And, for she was of town, he profred meede;**  
And, because she was of town, he offered money;
- 3381 **For som folk wol ben wonnen for richesse,**  
For some folk will be won for riches,
- 3382 **And somme for strokes, and somme for gentillesse.**  
And some by force, and some for noble character.
- 3383 **Somtyme, to shewe his lightnesse and maistrye,**  
Sometimes, to show his agility and skill,
- 3384 **He pleyeth Herodes upon a scaffold hye.**  
He plays Herod upon a high stage.
- 3385 **But what availleth hym as in this cas?**  
But what good does it do him in this case?
- 3386 **She loveth so this hende Nicholas**  
She so loves this clever Nicholas
- 3387 **That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;**  
That Absolon may go whistle;
- 3388 **He ne hadde for his labour but a scorn.**  
He had for his labor nothing but scorn.
- 3389 **And thus she maketh Absolon hire ape,**  
And thus she makes Absolon her fool,
- 3390 **And al his earnest turneth til a jape.**  
And all his earnestness turns into a joke.
- 3391 **Ful sooth is this proverbe, it is no lye,**  
Very true is this proverb, it is no lie,
- 3392 **Men seyn right thus: "Alwey the nye slye**  
Men say right thus: "Always the nearby sly one
- 3393 **Maketh the ferre leeve to be looth."**  
Makes the distant loved one to be disliked."
- 3394 **For though that Absolon be wood or wrooth,**  
For though Absolon be crazed or angry,
- 3395 **By cause that he fer was from hire sight,**  
Because he was far from her sight,
- 3396 **This nye Nicholas stood in his light.**  
This nearby Nicholas cast him in the shadow.

3397 **Now ber thee wel, thou hende Nicholas,**  
Now bear thyself well, thou clever Nicholas,  
3398 **For Absolon may waille and synge "allas."**  
For Absolon may wail and sing "alas."

(If you wish to take a quiz on lines 3109-3398 of The Miller's Prologue and Tale [click here](#))

3399 **And so bifel it on a Saturday,**  
And so it happened on a Saturday,  
3400 **This carpenter was goon til Osenay;**  
This carpenter was gone to Osenay;  
3401 **And hende Nicholas and Alisoun**  
And clever Nicholas and Alisoun  
3402 **Acorded been to this conclusioun,**  
Are agreed on this plan,  
3403 **That Nicholas shal shapen hym a wyle**  
That Nicholas shall devise a trick  
3404 **This sely jealous housbonde to bigyle;**  
To beguile this hapless jealous husband;  
3405 **And if so be the game wente aright,**  
And if it so be the game went right,  
3406 **She sholde slepen in his arm al nyght,**  
She should sleep in his arms all night,  
3407 **For this was his desir and hire also.**  
For this was his desire and hers also.  
3408 **And right anon, withouten wordes mo,**  
And right away, without more words,  
3409 **This Nicholas no lenger wolde tarie,**  
This Nicholas no longer would tarry,  
3410 **But dooth ful softe unto his chambre carie**  
But has carried very quietly unto his chamber  
3411 **Bothe mete and drynke for a day or tweye,**  
Both food and drink for a day or two,  
3412 **And to hire housbonde bad hire for to seye,**  
And told her to say to her husband,  
3413 **If that he axed after Nicholas,**  
If he asked after Nicholas,  
3414 **She sholde seye she nyste where he was;**  
She should say she knew not where he was;  
3415 **Of al that day she saugh hym nat with ye;**  
Of all that day she saw him not with eye;  
3416 **She trowed that he was in maladye,**

- 3417        She believed that he was ill,  
**For, for no cry hir mayde koude hym calle,**  
              Because, for no shout could her maid call him,  
3418        **He nolde answeere for thyng that myghte falle.**  
              He would not answer for anything that might befall.
- 3419        **This passeth forth al thilke Saterdag,**  
              This goes on all that same Saturday,  
3420        **That Nicholas stille in his chambre lay,**  
              That Nicholas still in his chamber lay,  
3421        **And eet and sleep, or dide what hym leste,**  
              And ate and slept, or did what he pleased,  
3422        **Til Sondag, that the sonne gooth to reste.**  
              Until Sunday, when the sun goes to rest.  
3423        **This sely carpenter hath greet merveyale**  
              This hapless carpenter has great marvel  
3424        **Of Nicholas, or what thyng myghte hym eyde,**  
              About Nicholas, or what thing might ail him,  
3425        **And seyde, "I am adrad, by Seint Thomas,**  
              And said, "I am afraid, by Saint Thomas,  
3426        **It stondeh nat aright with Nicholas.**  
              Things are not right with Nicholas.  
3427        **God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!**  
              God forbid that he should suddenly die!  
3428        **This world is now ful tikel, sikerly.**  
              This world is now very ticklish, surely.  
3429        **I saugh today a cors yborn to chirche**  
              I saw today a corpse carried to church  
3430        **That now, on Monday last, I saugh hym wirche.**  
              That just now, on last Monday, I saw him work.
- 3431        **"Go up," quod he unto his knave anoon,**  
              "Go up," he said unto his servant at once,  
3432        **"Clepe at his dore, or knocke with a stoon.**  
              "Call at his door, or knock with a stone.  
3433        **Looke how it is, and tel me boldely."**  
              Look how it is, and tell me quickly."
- 3434        **This knave gooth hym up ful sturdily,**  
              This servant goes up very resolutely,  
3435        **And at the chambre dore whil that he stood,**  
              And at the chamber door while he stood,  
3436        **He cride and knocked as that he were wood,**  
              He cried and knocked as if he were crazy,  
3437        **"What, how! What do ye, maister Nicholay?**  
              "What, hey! What do you, master Nicholay?  
3438        **How may ye slepen al the longe day?"**  
              How can you sleep all the long day?"

- 3439 **But al for noght; he herde nat a word.**  
But all for naught; he heard not a word.
- 3440 **An hole he foond, ful lowe upon a bord,**  
He found a hole, very low upon a board,
- 3441 **Ther as the cat was wont in for to crepe,**  
Where the cat was accustomed to creep in,
- 3442 **And at that hole he looked in ful depe,**  
And through that hole he looked in very carefully,
- 3443 **And at the laste he hadde of hym a sight.**  
And at the last he had a sight of him.
- 3444 **This Nicholas sat evere capyng upright,**  
This Nicholas sat ever gaping upward,
- 3445 **As he had kiked on the newe moone.**  
As if he were gazing on the new moon.
- 3446 **Adoun he gooth, and tolde his maister soone**  
Down he goes, and told his master immediately
- 3447 **In what array he saugh this ilke man.**  
In what condition he saw this same man.
- 3448 **This carpenter to blessen hym bigan,**  
This carpenter began to bless himself,
- 3449 **And seyde, "Help us, Seinte Frydeswyde!**  
And said, "Help us, Saint Frideswide!
- 3450 **A man woot litel what hym shal bityde.**  
A man knows little what shall happen to him.
- 3451 **This man is falle, with his astromye,**  
This man is fallen, because of his astronomy,
- 3452 **In some woodnesse or in som agonye.**  
In some madness or in some fit.
- 3453 **I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!**  
I always thought well how it should be!
- 3454 **Men sholde nat knowe of Goddes pryvetee.**  
Men should not know of God's secrets.
- 3455 **Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed man**  
Yes, blessed be always an unlearned man
- 3456 **That noght but oonly his bileve kan!**  
Who knows nothing but only his belief!
- 3457 **So ferde another clerk with astromye;**  
So fared another clerk with astronomy;
- 3458 **He walked in the feeldes for to pry**  
He walked in the fields to look
- 3459 **Upon the sterres, what ther sholde bifalle,**  
Upon the stars, (to find) there what should happen,
- 3460 **Til he was in a marle-pit yfalle;**  
Until he was fallen in a fertilizer pit;
- 3461 **He saugh nat that. But yet, by Seint Thomas,**  
He did not see that. But yet, by Saint Thomas,
- 3462 **Me reweth soore of hende Nicholas.**  
I feel very sorry for clever Nicholas.
- 3463 **He shal be rated of his studyng,**



- 3464 **He shall be scolded for his studying,**  
**If that I may, by Jhesus, hevene kyng!**  
If that I may, by Jesus, heaven's king!
- 3465 **Get me a staf, that I may underspore,**  
Get me a staff, that I may pry up from below,
- 3466 **Whil that thou, Robyn, hevest up the dore.**  
While thou, Robyn, lift up the door.
- 3467 **He shal out of his studyng, as I gesse."**  
He shall (come) out of his studying, as I guess."
- 3468 **And to the chambre dore he gan hym dresse.**  
And to the chamber door he turned his attention.
- 3469 **His knave was a strong carl for the nones,**  
His servant was a strong fellow for this purpose,
- 3470 **And by the haspe he haaf it of atones;**  
And by the hasp he heaved it off at once;
- 3471 **Into the floor the dore fil anon.**  
Onto the floor the door fell straightway.
- 3472 **This Nicholas sat ay as stille as stoon,**  
This Nicholas sat ever as still as stone,
- 3473 **And ever caped upward into the eir.**  
And ever gaped upward into the air.
- 3474 **This carpenter wende he were in despeir,**  
This carpenter supposed he was in despair,
- 3475 **And hente hym by the sholdres myghtily,**  
And seized him by the shoulders vigorously,
- 3476 **And shook hym harde, and cride spitously,**  
And shook him hard, and cried loudly,
- 3477 **"What! Nicholay! What, how! What, looke adoun!**  
"What! Nicholay! What, how! What, look down!
- 3478 **Awak, and thenk on Cristes passioun!**  
Awake, and think on Christ's passion!
- 3479 **I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes."**  
I bless thee from elves and from evil creatures."
- 3480 **Therwith the nyght-spel seyde he anon-rightes**  
Therewith the night-charm he said straightway
- 3481 **On foure halves of the hous aboute,**  
On four corners of the house about,
- 3482 **And on the thressfold of the dore withoute:**  
And on the threshold of the door outside:
- 3483 **"Jhesu Crist and Seinte Benedight,**  
"Jesus Christ and Saint Benedict,
- 3484 **Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,**  
Bless this house from every wicked creature,
- 3485 **For nyghtes verye, the white pater-noster!**  
For evil spirits of the nights, the white pater-noster!
- 3486 **Where wentestow, Seinte Petres soster?"**  
Where went thou, Saint Peter's sister?"
- 3487 **And atte laste this hende Nicholas**  
And at the last this clever Nicholas

- 3488 **Gan for to sik soore, and seyde, "Allas!**  
Began to sigh deeply, and said, "Alas!
- 3489 **Shal al the world be lost eftsoones now?"**  
Shall all the world be lost right now?"
- 3490 **This carpenter answerde, "What seystow?**  
This carpenter answered, "What sayest thou?
- 3491 **What! Thynk on God, as we doon, men that swynke."**  
What! Think on God, as we do, men that work."
- 3492 **This Nicholas answerde, "Fecche me drynke,**  
This Nicholas answered, "Fetch me drink,
- 3493 **And after wol I speke in pryvetee**  
And after will I speak in private
- 3494 **Of certeyn thyng that toucheth me and thee.**  
Of a certain matter that concerns me and thee.
- 3495 **I wol telle it noon oother man, certeyn."**  
I will tell it to no other man, certainly."
- 3496 **This carpenter goth doun, and comth ageyn,**  
This carpenter goes down, and comes again,
- 3497 **And broghte of myghty ale a large quart;**  
And brought of strong ale a large quart;
- 3498 **And whan that ech of hem had dronke his part,**  
And when each of them had drunk his part,
- 3499 **This Nicholas his dore faste shette,**  
This Nicholas shut fast his door,
- 3500 **And doun the carpenter by hym he sette.**  
And the carpenter sat down by him.
- 3501 **He seyde, "John, myn hooste, lief and deere,**  
He said, "John, my host, beloved and dear,
- 3502 **Thou shalt upon thy trouthe swere me heere**  
Thou shalt upon thy pledged word swear to me here
- 3503 **That to no wight thou shalt this conseil wreye,**  
That to no person thou shalt this counsel reveal,
- 3504 **For it is Cristes conseil that I seye,**  
For it is Christ's secrets that I say,
- 3505 **And if thou telle it man, thou art forlore;**  
And if thou tell it to anyone, thou art completely lost;
- 3506 **For this vengeance thou shalt han therefore,**  
For this vengeance thou shalt have therefore,
- 3507 **That if thou wreye me, thou shalt be wood."**  
That if thou betray me, thou shalt go mad."
- 3508 **"Nay, Crist forbede it, for his hooly blood!"**  
"Nay, Christ forbid it, for his holy blood!"
- 3509 **Quod tho this sely man, "I nam no labbe,**  
Said then this hapless man, "I am no blabbermouth,
- 3510 **Ne, though I seye, I nam nat lief to gabbe.**  
And, though I say it, I do not like to gab.

- 3511 **Sey what thou wolt, I shal it nevere telle**  
Say what thou will, I shall never tell it
- 3512 **To child ne wyf, by hym that harwed helle!"**  
To child nor wife, by Him that rescued souls from hell!"
- 3513 **"Now John," quod Nicholas, "I wol nat lye;**  
"Now John," said Nicholas, "I will not lie;
- 3514 **I have yfounde in myn astrologye,**  
I have found in my astrology,
- 3515 **As I have looked in the moone bright,**  
As I have looked on the bright moon,
- 3516 **That now a Monday next, at quarter nyght,**  
That now on Monday next, after midnight,
- 3517 **Shal falle a reyn, and that so wilde and wood**  
Shall fall a rain, and that so wild and raging
- 3518 **That half so greet was nevere Noes flood.**  
That Noah's flood was never half so large.
- 3519 **This world," he seyde, "in lasse than an hour**  
This world," he said, "in less than an hour
- 3520 **Shal al be dreynt, so hidous is the shour.**  
Shall all be drowned, so hideous is the shower.
- 3521 **Thus shal mankynde drenche, and lese hir lyf."**  
Thus shall mankind drown, and lose their lives."
- 3522 **This carpenter answerde, "Allas, my wyf!**  
This carpenter answered, "Alas, my wife!
- 3523 **And shal she drenche? Allas, myn Alisoun!"**  
And shall she drown? Alas, my Alisoun!"
- 3524 **For sorwe of this he fil almoost adoun,**  
For sorrow of this he almost fell down,
- 3525 **And seyde, "Is ther no remedie in this cas?"**  
And said, "Is there no remedy in this case?"
- 3526 **"Why, yis, for Gode," quod hende Nicholas,**  
"Why, yes indeed, by God," said clever Nicholas,
- 3527 **"If thou wolt werken after loore and reed.**  
"If thou will act in accordance with learning and (good) advice.
- 3528 **Thou mayst nat werken after thyn owene heed;**  
Thou mayst not act according to thine own ideas;
- 3529 **For thus seith Salomon, that was ful trewe:**  
For thus says Salomon, which was very true:
- 3530 **`Werk al by conseil, and thou shalt nat rewe.'**  
`Do all in accordance with good advice, and thou shalt not rue (it).'
- 3531 **And if thou werken wolt by good conseil,**  
And if thou will act in accordance with good advice,
- 3532 **I undertake, withouten mast and seyl,**  
I guarantee, without mast and sail,
- 3533 **Yet shal I saven hire and thee and me.**  
Yet shall I save her and thee and me.

- 3534 **Hastow nat herd hou saved was Noe,**  
Hast thou not heard how Noah was saved,
- 3535 **Whan that oure Lord hadde warned hym biforn**  
When our Lord had warned him before
- 3536 **That al the world with water sholde be lorn?"**  
That all the world should be destroyed by water?"
- 3537 **"Yis," quod this Carpenter, "ful yoore ago."**  
"Yes indeed," said this Carpenter, "very long ago."
- 3538 **"Hastou nat herd," quod Nicholas, "also**  
"Hast thou not heard," said Nicholas, "also
- 3539 **The sorwe of Noe with his felaweshipe,**  
The sorrow of Noah with his fellowship,
- 3540 **Er that he myghte gete his wyf to shipe?**  
Before he could get his wife onto the ship?
- 3541 **Hym hadde be levere, I dar wel undertake,**  
He would rather, I dare well guarantee,
- 3542 **At thilke tyme, than alle his wetheres blake**  
At that time, than have all his black sheep
- 3543 **That she hadde had a ship hirself allone.**  
That she had had a ship for herself alone.
- 3544 **And therefore, woostou what is best to doone?**  
And therefore, knowest thou what is best to do?
- 3545 **This asketh haste, and of an hastif thyng**  
This needs haste, and of a hasty thing
- 3546 **Men may nat preche or maken tariyng.**  
Men may not preach nor make tarrying.
- 3547 **"Anon go gete us faste into this in**  
"Right now go bring us quickly into this dwelling
- 3548 **A knedyng trogh, or ellis a kymelyn,**  
A kneading trough, or else a large vat,
- 3549 **For ech of us, but looke that they be large,**  
For each of us, but see that they be large,
- 3550 **In which we mowe swymme as in a barge,**  
In which we may float as in a barge,
- 3551 **And han therinne vitaille suffisant**  
And have therein sufficient victuals
- 3552 **But for a day -- fy on the remenant!**  
But for a day -- fie on the remnant!
- 3553 **The water shal aslake and goon away**  
The water shall recede and go away
- 3554 **Aboute pryme upon the nexte day.**  
About nine a.m. on the next day.
- 3555 **But Robyn may nat wite of this, thy knave,**  
But Robin, thy knave, may not know of this,
- 3556 **Ne eek thy mayde Gille I may nat save;**  
And also thy maid Gille I can not save;

- 3557 **Axe nat why, for though thou aske me,**  
Ask not why, for though thou ask me,
- 3558 **I wol nat tellen Goddes pryvetee.**  
I will not tell God's secrets.
- 3559 **Suffiseth thee, but if thy wittes madde,**  
It suffices thee, unless thy wits go mad,
- 3560 **To han as greet a grace as Noe hadde.**  
To have as great a grace as Noah had.
- 3561 **Thy wyf shal I wel saven, out of doute.**  
Thy wife shall I well save, beyond doubt.
- 3562 **Go now thy way, and speed thee heer-aboute.**  
Go now thy way, and speed thee on this business.
- 
- 3563 **"But whan thou hast, for hire and thee and me,**  
"But when thou hast, for her and thee and me,
- 3564 **Ygeten us thise knedyng tubbes thre,**  
Got us these three kneading tubs,
- 3565 **Thanne shaltow hange hem in the roof ful hye,**  
Then shalt thou hang them in the roof very high,
- 3566 **That no man of oure purveiaunce espye.**  
In a way that no man may espy our preparations.
- 3567 **And whan thou thus hast doon as I have seyde,**  
And when thou thus hast done as I have said,
- 3568 **And hast oure vitaille faire in hem yleyd,**  
And hast laid our victuals carefully in them,
- 3569 **And eek an ax to smyte the corde atwo,**  
And also an axe to smite the cord in two,
- 3570 **Whan that the water comth, that we may go**  
When the water comes, so that we may go
- 3571 **And breke an hole an heigh, upon the gable,**  
And break a hole on high, upon the gable,
- 3572 **Unto the gardyn-ward, over the stable,**  
Toward the garden, over the stable,
- 3573 **That we may frely passen forth oure way,**  
That we may freely pass forth on our way,
- 3574 **Whan that the grete shour is goon away.**  
When the great shower is gone away.
- 3575 **Thanne shaltou swymme as myrie, I undertake,**  
Then shalt thou float as merry, I guarantee,
- 3576 **As dooth the white doke after hire drake.**  
As does the white duck after her drake.
- 3577 **Thanne wol I clepe, `How, Alison! How, John!**  
Then will I call, `How, Alison! How, John!
- 3578 **Be myrie, for the flood wol passe anon.'**  
Be merry, for the flood will soon pass.'
- 3579 **And thou wolt seyn, `Hayl, maister Nicholay!**  
And thou will say, `Hail, master Nicholay!
- 3580 **Good morwe, I se thee wel, for it is day.'**  
Good morrow, I see thee well, for it is day.'
- 3581 **And thanne shul we be lordes al oure lyf**

- 3582       And then shall we be lords all our life  
**Of al the world, as Noe and his wyf.**  
          Of all the world, like Noah and his wife.
- 3583       **"But of o thyng I warne thee ful right:**  
          "But of one thing I warn thee very sternly:  
3584       **Be wel avysed on that ilke nyght**  
          Be well advised on that same night  
3585       **That we ben entred into shippes bord,**  
          On which we are entered onto shipboard,  
3586       **That noon of us ne speke nat a word,**  
          That not one of us speak a word,  
3587       **Ne clepe, ne crie, but be in his preyere;**  
          Nor call, nor cry, but be in his prayer;  
3588       **For it is Goddes owene heeste deere.**  
          For it is God's own dear command.
- 3589       **"Thy wyf and thou moote hange fer atwynne,**  
          "Thy wife and thou must hang far apart,  
3590       **For that bitwixe yow shal be no synne,**  
          So that between yow shall be no sin,  
3591       **Namoore in lookyng than ther shal in deede.**  
          No more in looking than there shall be in deed.  
3592       **This ordinance is seyed. Go, God thee speede!**  
          This ordinance is said. Go, God give thee success!  
3593       **Tomorwe at nyght, whan men ben alle aslepe,**  
          Tomorrow at night, when people are all asleep,  
3594       **Into oure knedyng-tubbes wol we crepe,**  
          Into our kneading-tubs will we creep,  
3595       **And sitten there, abidyng Goddes grace.**  
          And sit there, awaiting God's grace.  
3596       **Go now thy wey; I have no lenger space**  
          Go now thy way; I have no more time  
3597       **To make of this no lenger sermonyng.**  
          To make of this any longer preaching.  
3598       **Men seyn thus, `sende the wise, and sey no thyng.'**  
          Men say thus, `send the wise, and say nothing.'  
3599       **Thou art so wys, it needeth thee nat teche.**  
          Thou art so wise, one needs not teach thee.  
3600       **Go, save oure lyf, and that I the biseche."**  
          Go, save our life, and that I beseech thee."
- 3601       **This sely carpenter goth forth his wey.**  
          This hapless carpenter goes forth his way.  
3602       **Ful ofte he seide "Allas and weylawey,"**  
          Very often he said "Alas and woe is me,"  
3603       **And to his wyf he tolde his pryvetee,**  
          And to his wife he told his secret,  
3604       **And she was war, and knew it bet than he,**

- 3605 **What al this queynte cast was for to seye.**  
What all this ingenious scheme meant.
- 3606 **But nathelees she ferde as she wolde deye,**  
But nonetheless she acted as if she would die,
- 3607 **And seyde, "Allas! go forth thy wey anon,**  
And said, "Alas! go forth thy way quickly,
- 3608 **Help us to scape, or we been dede echon!**  
Help us to escape, or we are dead each one of us!
- 3609 **I am thy trewe, verray wedded wyf;**  
I am thy faithful, truly wedded wife;
- 3610 **Go, deere spouse, and help to saveoure lyf."**  
Go, dear spouse, and help to save our lives."
- 3611 **Lo, which a greet thyng is affeccion!**  
Lo, what a great thing is emotion!
- 3612 **Men may dyen of ymaginacion,**  
One can die of imagination,
- 3613 **So depe may impressioun be take.**  
So deeply may a mental image be taken.
- 3614 **This sely carpenter bigynneth quake;**  
This hapless carpenter begins to tremble;
- 3615 **Hym thynketh verrailly that he may see**  
He thinks truly that he can see
- 3616 **Noes flood come walwyng as the see**  
Noah's flood come surging like the sea
- 3617 **To drenchen Alisoun, his hony deere.**  
To drown Alisoun, his honey dear.
- 3618 **He wepeth, weyleth, maketh sory cheere;**  
He weeps, wails, looks wretched;
- 3619 **He siketh with ful many a sory swogh;**  
He sighs with very many a sorry groan;
- 3620 **He gooth and geteth hym a knedyng trogh,**  
He goes and gets him a kneading trough,
- 3621 **And after that a tubbe and a kymelyn,**  
And after that a tub and a large vat,
- 3622 **And pryvely he sente hem to his in,**  
And secretly he sent them to his dwelling,
- 3623 **And heng hem in the roof in pryvetee.**  
And hanged them in the roof secretly.
- 3624 **His owene hand he made laddres thre,**  
With his own hand he made three ladders,
- 3625 **To clymben by the ronges and the stalkes**  
To climb by the rungs and the uprights
- 3626 **Unto the tubbes hangyng in the balkes,**  
Unto the tubs hanging in the beams,
- 3627 **And hem vitailed, bothe trogh and tubbe,**  
And provisioned them, both trough and tub,
- 3628 **With breed, and chese, and good ale in a jubbe,**  
With bread, and cheese, and good ale in a jug,

- 3629 **Suffisynghe right ynogh as for a day.**  
Sufficing just enough for a day.
- 3630 **But er that he hadde maad al this array,**  
But before he had made all this preparation,
- 3631 **He sente his knave, and eek his wenche also,**  
He sent his servant, and also his servant girl,
- 3632 **Upon his nede to London for to go.**  
Upon his business to go to London.
- 3633 **And on the Monday, whan it drow to nyght,**  
And on the Monday, when it drew toward night,
- 3634 **He shette his dore withoute candel-lyght,**  
He shut his door without candlelight,
- 3635 **And dressed alle thyng as it sholde be.**  
And prepared everything as it should be.
- 3636 **And shortly, up they clomben alle thre;**  
And shortly, up they climbed all three;
- 3637 **They seten stille wel a furlong way.**  
They sat still a good two and one-half minutes.
- 3638 **"Now, Pater-noster, clom!" seyde Nicholay,**  
"Now, Pater-noster, quiet!" said Nicholay,
- 3639 **And "Clom!" quod John, and "Clom!" seyde Alisoun.**  
And "Quiet!" said John, and "Quiet!" said Alisoun.
- 3640 **This carpenter seyde his devocioun,**  
This carpenter said his devotion,
- 3641 **And stille he sit, and biddeth his preyere,**  
And still he sits, and says his prayer,
- 3642 **Awaitynge on the reyn, if he it heere.**  
Awaiting the rain, if he might hear it.
- 3643 **The dede sleep, for very bisynesse,**  
The dead sleep, for weary business,
- 3644 **Fil on this carpenter right, as I gesse,**  
Fell on this carpenter right, as I guess,
- 3645 **Aboute corfew-tyme, or litel moore;**  
About curfew time, or a little more;
- 3646 **For travaille of his goost he groneth soore,**  
For suffering of his spirit he groans deeply,
- 3647 **And eft he routeth, for his heed myslay.**  
And also he snores, for his head lay wrong.
- 3648 **Doun of the laddre stalketh Nicholay,**  
Down on the ladder stalks Nicholay,
- 3649 **And Alisoun ful softe adoun she spedde;**  
And Alisoun very quietly down she sped;
- 3650 **Withouten wordes mo they goon to bedde,**  
Without more words they go to bed,
- 3651 **Ther as the carpenter is wont to lye.**  
Where the carpenter is accustomed to lie.
- 3652 **Ther was the revel and the melodye;**  
There was the revel and the sounds of festivity;



- 3653 **And thus lith Alison and Nicholas,**  
And thus lie Alison and Nicholas,
- 3654 **In bisynesse of myrthe and of solas,**  
In business of mirth and of pleasure,
- 3655 **Til that the belle of laudes gan to ryng,**  
Until the bell of the early morning service began to ring,
- 3656 **And freres in the chauncel gonne syng.**  
And friars in the chapel began to sing.
- 3657 **This parissch clerk, this amorous Absolon,**  
This parish clerk, this amorous Absolon,
- 3658 **That is for love alwey so wo bigon,**  
That is for love always so woebegone,
- 3659 **Upon the Monday was at Oseneye**  
Upon the Monday was at Oseneye
- 3660 **With compaignye, hym to disporte and pleye,**  
With company, to be merry and amuse himself,
- 3661 **And axed upon cas a cloisterer**  
And by chance asked a cloistered monk
- 3662 **Ful prively after John the carpenter;**  
Very discreetly about John the carpenter;
- 3663 **And he drough hym apart out of the chirche,**  
And he drew him apart out of the church,
- 3664 **And seyde, "I noot; I saugh hym heere nat wirche**  
And said, "I know not; I have not seen him working here
- 3665 **Syn Saterdag; I trowe that he be went**  
Since Saturday; I suppose that he is gone
- 3666 **For tymber, ther oure abbot hath hym sent;**  
For timber, where our abbot has sent him;
- 3667 **For he is wont for tymber for to go**  
For he is accustomed to go for timber
- 3668 **And dwellen at the grange a day or two;**  
And dwell at the grange a day or two;
- 3669 **Or elles he is at his hous, certeyn.**  
Or else he is at his house, certainly.
- 3670 **Where that he be, I kan nat soothly seyn."**  
Where he may be, I can not truly say."
- 3671 **This Absolon ful joly was and light,**  
This Absolon very jolly was and happy,
- 3672 **And thoghte, "Now is tyme to wake al nyght,**  
And thought, "Now is time to stay awake all night,
- 3673 **For sikirly I saugh hym nat stiryng**  
For surely I saw him not stirring
- 3674 **Aboute his dore, syn day bigan to spryng.**  
About his door, since day began to spring.
- 3675 **"So moot I thryve, I shal, at cokkes crowe,**  
"As I may prosper, I shall, at cock's crow,

- 3676 **Ful pryvely knokken at his wyndowe**  
Very quietly knock at his window
- 3677 **That stant ful lowe upon his boures wal.**  
That stands very low upon his bedroom's wall.
- 3678 **To Alison now wol I tellen al**  
To Alison now will I tell all
- 3679 **My love-longynge, for yet I shal nat mysse**  
My love-longing, for yet I shall not miss
- 3680 **That at the leeste wey I shal hire kisse.**  
That at the very least I shall her kiss.
- 3681 **Som maner confort shal I have, parfay.**  
Some sort of comfort shall I have, by my faith.
- 3682 **My mouth hath icched al this longe day;**  
My mouth has itched all this long day;
- 3683 **That is a signe of kissing atte leeste.**  
That is a sign of kissing at the least.
- 3684 **Al nyght me mette eek I was at a feeste.**  
All night I dreamed also I was at a feast.
- 3685 **Therefore I wol go slepe an houre or tweye,**  
Therefore I will go sleep an hour or two,
- 3686 **And al the nyght thanne wol I wake and pleye."**  
And all the night then will I stay awake and play."
- 3687 **Whan that the firste cok hath crowe, anon**  
When the first cock has crowed (about midnight), at once
- 3688 **Up rist this joly love Absolon,**  
Up rises this handsome lover Absolon,
- 3689 **And hym arraieth gay, at poynt-devys.**  
And dresses himself gaily, in every detail.
- 3690 **But first he cheweth greyn and lycorys,**  
But first he chews cardamom and licorice,
- 3691 **To smellen sweete, er he hadde kembd his heer.**  
To smell sweet, ere he had combed his hair.
- 3692 **Under his tonge a trewe-love he beer,**  
Under his tongue he had a true-love herb,
- 3693 **For therby wende he to ben gracious.**  
For thus he thought he would be gracious.
- 3694 **He rometh to the carpenteres hous,**  
He goes to the carpenter's house,
- 3695 **And stille he stant under the shot-wyndowe --**  
And still he stands under the casement window --
- 3696 **Unto his brest it raughte, it was so lowe --**  
Unto his breast it reached, it was so low --
- 3697 **And softe he cougheth with a semy soun:**  
And softly he coughs with a gentle sound:
- 3698 **"What do ye, hony-comb, sweete Alisoun,**  
"What do you, honey-comb, sweet Alisoun,
- 3699 **My faire bryd, my sweete cynamome?**  
My fair bird, my sweet cinnamon?
- 3700 **Awaketh, lemman myn, and speketh to me!**

- 3701 **Wel litel thynken ye upon my wo,**  
Well little you think upon my woe,
- 3702 **That for youre love I swete ther I go.**  
That for your love I sweat wherever I go.
- 3703 **No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete;**  
No wonder is though that I swelter and sweat;
- 3704 **I moorne as dooth a lamb after the tete.**  
I mourn as does a lamb after the tit.
- 3705 **Ywis, lemman, I have swich love-longyng**  
Indeed, sweetheart, I have such love-longing
- 3706 **That lik a turtel trewe is my moornyng.**  
That like a true turtledove is my mourning.
- 3707 **I may nat ete na moore than a mayde."**  
I can eat no more than a maiden."
- 3708 **"Go fro the wyndow, Jakke fool," she sayde;**  
"Go from the window, you idiot," she said;
- 3709 **"As help me God, it wol nat be `com pa me.'**  
"So help me God, it will not be `come kiss me.'
- 3710 **I love another -- and elles I were to blame --**  
I love another -- and else I were to blame --
- 3711 **Wel bet than thee, by Jhesu, Absolon.**  
Well better than thee, by Jesus, Absolon.
- 3712 **Go forth thy wey, or I wol caste a ston,**  
Go forth thy way, or I will cast a stone,
- 3713 **And lat me slepe, a twenty devel wey!"**  
And let me sleep, in the name of twenty devils!"
- 3714 **"Allas," quod Absolon, "and weylawey,**  
"Alas," said Absolon, "and woe is me,
- 3715 **That trewe love was evere so yvel biset!**  
That true love was ever in such miserable circumstances!
- 3716 **Thanne kysse me, syn it may be no bet,**  
Then kiss me, since it can be no better,
- 3717 **For Jhesus love, and for the love of me."**  
For Jesus' love, and for the love of me."
- 3718 **"Wiltow thanne go thy wey therwith?" quod she.**  
"Will thou then go thy way with that?" said she.
- 3719 **"Ye, certes, lemman," quod this Absolon.**  
"Yes, certainly, sweetheart," said this Absolon.
- 3720 **"Thanne make thee redy," quod she, "I come anon."**  
"Then make thee ready," said she, "I come right now."
- 3721 **And unto Nicholas she seyde stille,**  
And unto Nicholas she said quietly,
- 3722 **"Now hust, and thou shalt laughen al thy fille."**  
"Now hush, and thou shalt laugh all thy fill."

- 3723 **This Absolon doun sette hym on his knees**  
This Absolon set himself down on his knees
- 3724 **And seyde, "I am a lord at alle degrees;**  
And said, "I am a lord in every way;
- 3725 **For after this I hope ther cometh moore.**  
For after this I hope there comes more.
- 3726 **Lemman, thy grace, and sweete bryd, thyn oore!"**  
Sweetheart, thy grace, and sweet bird, thy mercy!"
- 3727 **The wyndow she undoth, and that in haste.**  
The window she undoes, and that in haste.
- 3728 **"Have do," quod she, "com of, and speed the faste,**  
"Get done with it," said she, "come on, and hurry up,
- 3729 **Lest that oure neighebores thee espie."**  
Lest our neighbors espy thee."
- 3730 **This Absolon gan wype his mouth ful drie.**  
This Absolon wiped his mouth very dry.
- 3731 **Derk was the nyght as pich, or as the cole,**  
Dark was the night as pitch, or as the coal,
- 3732 **And at the wyndow out she putte hir hole,**  
And at the window out she put her hole,
- 3733 **And Absolon, hym fil no bet ne wers,**  
And Absolon, to him it happened no better nor worse,
- 3734 **But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers**  
But with his mouth he kissed her naked ass
- 3735 **Ful savourly, er he were war of this.**  
With great relish, before he was aware of this.
- 3736 **Abak he stirte, and thoughte it was amys,**  
Back he jumped, and thought it was amiss,
- 3737 **For wel he wiste a womman hath no berd.**  
For well he knew a woman has no beard.
- 3738 **He felte a thyng al rough and long yherd,**  
He felt a thing all rough and long haired,
- 3739 **And seyde, "Fy! allas! what have I do?"**  
And said, "Fie! alas! what have I done?"
- 3740 **"Tehee!" quod she, and clapte the wyndow to,**  
"Tehee!" said she, and clapped the window to,
- 3741 **And Absolon gooth forth a sory pas.**  
And Absolon goes forth walking sadly.
- 3742 **"A berd! A berd!" quod hende Nicholas,**  
"A beard! A beard!" said clever Nicholas,
- 3743 **"By Goddes corpus, this goth faire and weel."**  
"By God's body, this goes fair and well."
- 3744 **This sely Absolon herde every deel,**

- 3745 **This hapless Absolon heard every bit,**  
**And on his lippe he gan for anger byte,**  
 And on his lip he began for anger to bite,
- 3746 **And to hymself he seyde, "I shal thee quyte."**  
 And to himself he said, "I shall pay thee back."
- 3747 **Who rubbeth now, who froteth now his lippes**  
 Who rubs now, who now scrubs his lips
- 3748 **With dust, with sond, with straw, with clooth, with chippes,**  
 With dust, with sand, with straw, with cloth, with chips,
- 3749 **But Absolon, that seith ful ofte, "Allas!"**  
 But Absolon, who says very often, "Alas!"
- 3750 **"My soule bitake I unto Sathanas,**  
 "My soul I entrust to Satan,
- 3751 **But me were levere than al this toun," quod he,**  
 If I would not rather than (have) all this town," said he,
- 3752 **"Of this despit awroken for to be.**  
 "Be avenged for this insult.
- 3753 **Allas," quod he, "allas, I ne hadde ybleynt!"**  
 Alas," said he, "alas, I did not turn away!"
- 3754 **His hoote love was coold and al yqueynt;**  
 His hot love was cold and all extinguished;
- 3755 **For fro that tyme that he hadde kist hir ers,**  
 For from that time that he had kissed her ass,
- 3756 **Of paramours he sette nat a kers,**  
 Love-making he thought not worth not a watercress,
- 3757 **For he was heeled of his maladie.**  
 For he was healed of his malady.
- 3758 **Ful ofte paramours he gan deffie,**  
 Very often he did renounce love-making,
- 3759 **And weep as dooth a child that is ybete.**  
 And wept as does a child that is beaten.
- 3760 **A softe paas he wente over the strete**  
 At a slow pace he went down the street
- 3761 **Until a smyth men cleped daun Gerveys,**  
 To a smith men called dan Gerveys,
- 3762 **That in his forge smythed plough harneys;**  
 Who in his forge made plowing equipment;
- 3763 **He sharpeth shaar and kultour bisily.**  
 He sharpens ploughshares and plough blades busily.
- 3764 **This Absolon knokketh al esily,**  
 This Absolon knocked all gently,
- 3765 **And seyde, "Undo, Gerveys, and that anon."**  
 And said, "Open up, Gerveys, and that right now."
- 3766 **"What, who artow?" "It am I, Absolon."**  
 "What, who art thou?" "It am I, Absolon."
- 3767 **"What, Absolon! for Cristes sweete tree,**  
 "What, Absolon! for Christ's sweet cross,
- 3768 **Why rise ye so rathe? Ey, benedicitee!**

- 3769 **Why rise you so early? Ay, bless me!**  
**What eyleth yow? Som gay gerl, God it woot,**  
What ails yow? Some gay girl, God knows it,
- 3770 **Hath broght yow thus upon the viritoot.**  
Hath broght yow thus astir [see n.].
- 3771 **By Seinte Note, ye woot wel what I mene."**  
By Saint Note, you know well what I mean."
- 3772 **This Absolon ne roghte nat a bene**  
This Absolon cared not a bean
- 3773 **Of al his pley; no word agayn he yaf;**  
For all his joking; no word he gave in reply;
- 3774 **He hadde moore tow on his distaf**  
He had more business on hand
- 3775 **Than Gerveys knew, and seyde, "Freend so deere,**  
Than Gerveys knew, and said, "Friend so dear,
- 3776 **That hote kultour in the chymenee heere,**  
That hot plough blade in the hearth here,
- 3777 **As lene it me; I have therwith to doone,**  
Lend it to me; I have something to do with it,
- 3778 **And I wol brynge it thee agayn ful soone."**  
And I will bring it back to thee very soon."
- 3779 **Gerveys answerde, "Certes, were it gold,**  
Gerveys answered, "Certainly, were it gold,
- 3780 **Or in a poke nobles alle untold,**  
Or in a sack countless silver coins,
- 3781 **Thou sholdest have, as I am trewe smyth.**  
Thou sholdest have it, as I am true smith.
- 3782 **Ey, Cristes foo! What wol ye do therwith?"**  
Ay, Christ's foe! What will you do with it?"
- 3783 **"Therof," quod Absolon, "be as be may.**  
"Concerning that," said Absolon, "be as be may.
- 3784 **I shal wel telle it thee to-morwe day" --**  
I shall well tell it to thee to-morrow" --
- 3785 **And caughte the kultour by the colde stele.**  
And caught the plough blade by the cold handle.
- 3786 **Ful softe out at the dore he gan to stele,**  
Very softly out at the door he began to steal,
- 3787 **And wente unto the carpenteris wal.**  
And went unto the carpenter's wall.
- 3788 **He cogheth first, and knokketh therwithal**  
He coughs first, and knocks then
- 3789 **Upon the wyndowe, right as he dide er.**  
Upon the window, just as he did before.
- 3790 **This Alison answerde, "Who is ther**  
This Alison answered, "Who is there

- 3791 **That knokketh so? I warante it a theef."**  
That knocks so? I swear it is a thief."
- 3792 **"Why, nay," quod he, "God woot, my sweete leef,**  
"Why, nay," said he, "God knows, my sweet beloved,
- 3793 **I am thyn Absolon, my deerelyng.**  
I am thy Absolon, my darling.
- 3794 **Of gold," quod he, "I have thee broght a ryng.**  
Of gold," said he, "I have brought thee a ring.
- 3795 **My mooder yaf it me, so God me save;**  
My mother gave it to me, as God may save me;
- 3796 **Ful fyn it is, and therto wel ygrave.**  
Very fine it is, and also nicely engraved.
- 3797 **This wol I yeve thee, if thou me kisse."**  
This will I give thee, if thou kiss me."
- 3798 **This Nicholas was risen for to pisse,**  
This Nicholas was risen to piss,
- 3799 **And thoughte he wolde amenden al the jape;**  
And thought he would make the joke even better;
- 3800 **He sholde kisse his ers er that he scape.**  
He should kiss his ass before he escapes.
- 3801 **And up the wyndowe dide he hastily,**  
And he opened up the window hastily,
- 3802 **And out his ers he putteth pryvely**  
And he puts out his ass stealthily
- 3803 **Over the buttock, to the haunche-bon;**  
Over the buttock, to the thigh;
- 3804 **And therwith spak this clerk, this Absolon,**  
And then spoke this clerk, this Absolon,
- 3805 **"Spek, sweete bryd, I noot nat where thou art."**  
"Speak, sweet bird, I know not where thou art."
- 3806 **This Nicholas anon leet fle a fart**  
This Nicholas immediately let fly a fart
- 3807 **As greet as it had been a thonder-dent,**  
As great as if it had been a thunder-bolt,
- 3808 **That with the strook he was almoost yblent;**  
So that with the stroke he was almost blinded;
- 3809 **And he was redy with his iren hoot,**  
And he was ready with his hot iron,
- 3810 **And Nicholas amydde the ers he smoot.**  
And he smote Nicholas in the middle of the ass.
- 3811 **Of gooth the skyn an hande-brede aboute,**  
Off goes the skin a hand's breadth about,
- 3812 **The hote kultour brende so his toute,**  
The hot plough blade so burned his rump
- 3813 **And for the smert he wende for to dye.**

- And for the pain he thought he would die.  
3814 **As he were wood, for wo he gan to crye,**  
As if he were crazy, for woe he began to cry,  
3815 **"Help! Water! Water! Help, for Goddes herte!"**  
"Help! Water! Water! Help, for God's heart!"
- 3816 **This carpenter out of his slomber sterte,**  
This carpenter woke suddenly out of his slumber,  
3817 **And herde oon crien "water!" as he were wood,**  
And heard someone cry "water!" as if he were crazy,  
3818 **And thoughte, "Allas, now comth Nowelis flood!"**  
And thought, "Alas, now comes Nowell's flood!"  
3819 **He sit hym up withouten wordes mo,**  
He sits up without more words,  
3820 **And with his ax he smoot the corde atwo,**  
And with his ax he smote the cord in two,  
3821 **And doun gooth al; he foond neither to selle,**  
And down goes all; he found nothing to sell (wasted no time),  
3822 **Ne breed ne ale, til he cam to the celle**  
Neither bread nor ale, until he came to the pavement  
3823 **Upon the floor, and ther aswowne he lay.**  
Upon the floor, and there he lay in a swoon.
- 3824 **Up stirte hire Alison and Nicholay,**  
Up started Alison and Nicholay,  
3825 **And criden "Out" and "Harrow" in the strete.**  
And cried "Out" and "Help" in the street.  
3826 **The neighebores, bothe smale and grete,**  
The neighbors, both low-ranking and high,  
3827 **In ronnen for to gauren on this man,**  
Run in to gawk at this man,  
3828 **That yet aswowne lay, bothe pale and wan,**  
That yet lay in a swoon, both pale and wan,  
3829 **For with the fal he brosten hadde his arm.**  
For with the fall he had broken his arm.  
3830 **But stonde he moste unto his owene harm;**  
But he had to stand up for himself, though it went badly;  
3831 **For whan he spak, he was anon bore doun**  
For when he spoke, he was immediately put down  
3832 **With hende Nicholas and Alisoun.**  
By clever Nicholas and Alisoun.  
3833 **They tolden every man that he was wood;**  
They told every one that he was crazy;  
3834 **He was agast so of Nowelis flood**  
He was so afraid of Nowell's flood  
3835 **Thurgh fantasie that of his vanytee**  
Because of his imagination that in his foolishness  
3836 **He hadde yboght hym knedyng tubbes thre,**  
He had bought himself three kneading tubs,  
3837 **And hadde hem hanged in the roof above;**



- And had hanged them in the roof above;  
3838 **And that he preyed hem, for Goddes love,**  
And that he begged them, for God's love,  
3839 **To sitten in the roof, par compaignye.**  
To sit in the roof, to keep him company.
- 3840 **The folk gan laughen at his fantasye;**  
The folk did laugh at his foolishness;  
3841 **Into the roof they kiken and they cape,**  
Into the roof they stare and they gape,  
3842 **And turned al his harm unto a jape.**  
And turned all his harm into a joke.  
3843 **For what so that this carpenter answerde,**  
For whatever this carpenter answered,  
3844 **It was for nought; no man his reson herde.**  
It was for naught; no one listened to his explanation,  
3845 **With othes grete he was so sworn adoun**  
With oaths great he was so sworn down  
3846 **That he was holde wood in al the toun;**  
That he was considered crazy in all the town;  
3847 **For every clerk anonright heeld with oother.**  
For every clerk immediately agreed with the other.  
3848 **They seyde, "The man is wood, my leeve brother";**  
They said, "The man is crazy, my dear brother";  
3849 **And every wight gan laughen at this stryf.**  
And every person did laugh at this strife.  
3850 **Thus swyved was this carpenteris wyf,**  
Thus screwed was this carpenter's wife,  
3851 **For al his keypyng and his jalousye,**  
In spite of all his guarding and his jealousy,  
3852 **And Absolon hath kist hir nether ye,**  
And Absolon has kissed her lower eye,  
3853 **And Nicholas is scalded in the towte.**  
And Nicholas is scalded in the rump.  
3854 **This tale is doon, and God save al the rowte!**  
This tale is done, and God save all this company!

*Heere endeth the Millere his Tale*

To take a quiz on lines 3399-3854 (The Miller's Tale) [click here](#)

Or go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#). Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.

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## Test your reading of The Miller's Prologue

(Lines 3109-3396)

Translate each of the bold-faced words in the following lines into clear modern English (it is best to write out your translation):

3112 And worthy for to **drawen to memorie**,

3115 This gooth aright; **unbokeled is the male**.

3121 So that **unnethe** upon his hors he sat,

3129 And seyde, "**Abyd**, Robyn, my **leeve** brother;

3140 **Wyte it** the ale of Southwerk, I you preye.

3147 To **apeyren** any man, or hym defame,

3170 **M'athynketh** that I shal **reherce** it heere.

3185 **Avyseth yow**, and put me out of blame;

3188 A riche **gnof**, that **gestes** heeld **to bord**,

3199 This clerk was cleped **hende** Nicholas.

3212 His **presse** ycovered with a **faldyng reed**;

3237 Upon hir **lendes**, ful of many a **goore**.

3242 Were of the **same suyte of** hir coler;

3247 She was ful moore **blisful on to see**

3253 There nys no man so wys that koude **thenche**

3260 As any kyde or calf folwyng his **dame**.

3275 As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful **queynte**;

3289 And spak so faire, and **profred him** so faste,

3299 "A clerk hadde **litherly biset his whyle**,

3315 And **strouted as a fanne** large and brode;

3325 A myrie **child** he was, **so** God me save.

3330 And with his legges **casten** to and fro,

3336 Ther any **gaylard tappestere** was.

3360 He syngeth in his voys gentil and **smal**,

3370 This passeth forth; what wol ye **bet than weel**?

3393 Maketh the **ferre leeve to be looth**."

Compare your translation with the page [glosses](#) for these lines

Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.

## Test #1, The Reeve's Prologue and Tale

Translate each of bold-faced words in the following lines into clear modern English (it is best to write out your translation):

3855 Whan folk hadde laughen at this **nyce cas**

3863 He gan to **grucche**, and blamed it a lite.

3866 If that me liste speke of **ribaudy**.

3871 But if I fare as dooth an **open-ers** --

3878 To have an **hoor** heed and a grene tayl,

3884 **Avauntyng**, liyng, anger, coveitise;

3885 Thise foure sparkles longen unto **eelde**.

3892 Deeth **drough the tappe** of lyf and leet it gon,

3901 He seide, "**What amounteth al this wit?**

3912 **For levelful is with force force of-showve**.

3918 I pray to God his nekke mote **to-breke**;

3923 Upon the whiche brook ther **stant** a melle;

3931 A joly **poppere** baar he in his **pouche**;

3936 He was a **market-betere** atte fulle.

3941 His name was **hoote deynous** Symkyn.

3949 **To saven his estaat of yomanrye**.

3958 That with hire dorste **rage** or ones pleye,

3964 She was **as digne as water in a dich**,

3967 What for hire **kynrede** and hir **nortelrie**

3972 In cradel it lay and was a propre **page**.

3981 His purpos was for to bistowe hire **hye**

3992 And on a day it happed, **in a stounde**,

3999 For which the **wardeyn chidde and made fare**.

4000 But therof sette the millere nat a **tare**;

4005 And, oonly for hire myrthe and **revelrye**,

4020 John knew the wey -- **hem nedede no gyde** --

**Compare your translation with the page [glosses](#) for these lines**

**Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.**

## Test your reading of the Cook's Tale

(Lines 4325-4422)

Translate each of the bold-face words in the following lines into clear modern English (it is best to write out your translation):

4333 Wel oghte a man **avysed for to be**

4340 And therfore, if ye **vouche-sauf** to heere

4344 Oure Hoost answerde and seide, "I **graunte it thee**.

4357 But `**sooth pley, quaad pley**,' as the Flemyng seith.

4360 Though that my tale be of an **hostileer**.

4365 A **prentys** whilom dwelled in oure citee,

4367 **Gaillard** he was as goldfynch in the **shawe**,

4372 He was as ful of love and **paramour**

4375 At every **bridale** wolde he synge and hoppe;

4381 And gadered hym a **meynee** of his sort

4383 And ther they **setten stevene** for to meete,

4389 That fond his maister wel in his **chaffare**,

4392 That **haunteth dys, riot**, or **paramour**,

4393 His maister shal it in his shoppe **abye**,

4395 For thefte and riot, they been **convertible**,

4399 This joly prentys with his maister **bood**,

4401 Al were he **snybbed** bothe erly and late,

4408 So fareth it **by** a **riotous** servaunt;

4410 Than he **shende** alle the servantz in the place.

4412 And bad hym go, with sorwe and with **meschance**!

4413 And thus this joly prentys hadde his **leve**.

4414 Now lat hym **riote** al the nyght or leve.

4415 **And for ther is no theef withoute a lowke,**

4417 Of that he **brybe** kan or borwe may,

4419 Unto a **compeer** of his owene sort,

4422 A shoppe, and **swyved** for hir sustenance.

**Compare your translation with the page [glosses](#) for these lines**

**Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.**



## Explanatory Notes to The Miller's, Reeve's, and Cook's Tale, A Check List (Lines I.859-3108)

Here are a list of subjects, a sample of the Explanatory Notes for The Miller's, Reeve's, and Cook's Tale in *The Canterbury Tales Complete* and *The Riverside Chaucer*. Jot down a brief explanation of each of the following terms; then check your answers against the notes cited in parentheses at the end of each entry.

- 1) fabliaux (see Expl. Note, p. 372)
- 2) a legende and a life (I.3141)
- 3) Almageste (I.3208)
- 4) clerk (see Expl. Notes, p. 344-45)
- 5) Catoun (or Cato) (I.3227).
- 6) lemman (I.3726).
- 7) Absolon (I.3312-38).
- 8) Herodes (I.3384)
- 9) Noah's flood (I.3538-43).
- 10) The Northern Dialect (I.4022).
- 11) sententia (I. 4320-21)
- 12) compline (I.4171).
- 13) the thridde cok (I.4233)
- 14) wilde fyr (I.4172, III.373).
- 15) Chepe (I.4377)

If you get twelve or more of these right, you have done well; if you got less than that, you should probably browse through those notes once more. Many of the subjects listed above are treated elsewhere in the notes or on pages in the Geoffrey Chaucer Website; follow up on the cross-references in the notes, use the Index to the Explanatory notes in *The Canterbury Tales Complete* and the Site Index on the Home Page of [The Geoffrey Chaucer Website](#) to find further information on these subjects.

Return to [Lesson 9](#) Or go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of](#)

[Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#). Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.



# Teach Yourself to Read Chaucer

## Lesson 10: Conclusion

You should now be able to read Chaucer's works in any edition without the help of interlinear translations and the discipline of quizzes and such.

But some may still need such help, if only occasionally. Therefore interlinear translations are provided for a number of other Canterbury Tales. [Click here](#) to see the list of tales now available (Others are in preparation).

Self tests are also available for the translations: [click here](#). There you will also find tests for tales not yet provided with interlinear translations, and you can use these, if you wish, to check your reading of your printed text.

With these materials you can in effect create your own tutorials:

First, read the summary of the tale in the relevant section of the [Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) (once there, click on "Canterbury Tales" and then on the Tale you want to read).

Then read through the tale, either in the interlinear translation (if one exists) or in your printed text.

Then take the test or tests provided for this tale and, when you are ready, read the Tale in your printed text, making full use of its page glosses and Explanatory Notes.

Then go back to the page for the tale on The Geoffrey Chaucer Page and browse through the materials there.

**Or ignore this advice and do as you will. So long as you enjoy reading Chaucer, it does not matter all that much how you go about it.**

**Go to [The Geoffrey Chaucer Page](#) | [The Index of Translations](#) | [The Teach Yourself Chaucer Page](#). Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.**

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## List of Self-Tests

These tests are intended for the use of those who are using the Learn to Read Chaucer Page (or anyone else who may find them useful). The tests for The Shipman's and Prioress's Tales concentrate on basic vocabulary. The rest are more or less randomly generated tests of the lines with page glosses in *The Riverside Chaucer* or *The Canterbury Tales Complete*, and they are therefore somewhat more difficult. See [How to grade](#) the self-tests. The first few tales are provided with tests (really checklists) on the Explanatory Notes.

### FRAGMENT I

**General Prologue:** [Test #1](#) [Test #2](#) [Test #3](#) [Test #4](#)  
[Check Notes to General Prologue](#)

**Knight's Tale:** [Test #1](#) [Test #2](#) [Test #3](#) [Test #4](#)  
[Check Notes to Knight's Tale](#)

**Miller's Prologue and Tale:** [Test #1](#) [Test #2](#)

**The Reeve's Prologue and Tale:** [Test #1](#) [Test #2](#)

**Cook's Tale:** [Test #1](#)  
[Check Notes to Miller's Reeve's, and Cook's Tales](#)

### FRAGMENT II

**Man of Law's Intro, Tale, and Epilogue:** [Test #1](#) [Test #2](#) [Test #3](#)  
[Check Notes to Man of Law's Tale](#)

### FRAGMENT III

**(From this point onward, only one test is provided for each tale (except for the Shipman's and Prioress's Tales; the**

assumption is that students' command of the language will be such that a single quiz is sufficient for diagnosis of their progress.)

The Wife of Bath's Prologue: [Test](#)

The Wife of Bath's Tale: [Test](#)

[Check Notes to Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale](#)

(No further quizzes on the explanatory notes are provided; the assumption is that the reader who is this far into the tales has acquired the habit of using the glosses and notes and therefore no further tests are needed.)

The Friar's Prologue and Tale [Test](#)

The Summoner's Prologue and Tale: [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT IV

The Clerk's Prologue and Tale: [Test](#)

The Merchant's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue: [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT V

The Squire's Introduction and Tale: [Test](#)

The Franklin's Prologue and Tale: [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT VI

The Physician's Tale [Test](#)

The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT VII

The Shipman's Tale (basic vocabulary): [Test #1](#) [Test #2](#) [Test #3](#)

The Prioress's Prologue and Tale (basic vocabulary): [Test #1](#)  
[Test #2](#)

The Prologue and Tale of Sir Thopas: [Test](#)

No test is set for the prose Tale of Melibee

The Monk's Prologue and Tale: [Test](#)

The Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue: [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT VIII

The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale: [Test](#)

The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale: [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT IX

The Manciple's Prologue and Tale; [Test](#)

#### FRAGMENT X

No test is set for the Parson's Prologue (too short) and Tale (in prose) nor for Chaucer's Retractions (in prose).

Back to the [Teach Yourself](#) Page | Or to [Lesson 10](#) | Or [The Geoffrey Chaucer Website](#) Home Page | Or use the back button on your browser to return to the previous page.

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