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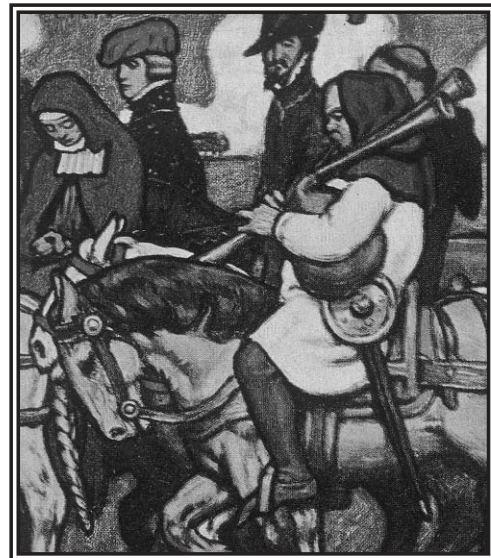
GEOFFREY CHAUCER

The Canterbury Tales

Volume II

READ BY

FRANCES JEATER, CHARLES SIMPSON,
JOHN ROWE & JOHN MOFFATT
WITH PHILIP MADOC AS HOST



DIGITAL
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CLASSIC LITERATURE WITH CLASSICAL MUSIC

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

The Canterbury Tales

Volume II

The Wife of Bath's Tale · The Clerk's Tale
The Reeve's Tale · The Nun's Priest's Tale

The Canterbury Tales, written near the end of Chaucer's life and hence towards the close of the fourteenth century, is perhaps the greatest English literary work of the Middle Ages: yet it speaks to us today with almost undimmed clarity and relevance.

Chaucer imagines a group of twenty-nine pilgrims who meet in the Tabard Inn in Southwark, intent on making the traditional journey to the martyr's shrine of St. Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. Harry Bailly, the landlord, proposes that the company should entertain themselves on the road with a story-telling competition. The tellers of the best tale will be rewarded with a free supper when the travelers return to London.

Chaucer never completed this elaborate scheme — each pilgrim was supposed to tell four tales, but in fact we only have twenty-four altogether — yet, with the pieces of linking narrative and the prologues to each tale, the work as a whole constitutes a marvelously varied evocation of the medieval world which also goes beyond its period to penetrate (humorously, gravely and tolerantly) human nature itself.

Chaucer, as a member of this company of pilgrims, presents himself with mock innocence as the admiring observer of his fellows, depicted in the *General Prologue*. Many of these are clearly rogues — the coarse, cheating Miller, the repulsive yet compelling Pardoner — yet in each of them Chaucer finds something human, often a sheer vitality or love of life which is irresistible: the Monk may prefer hunting to prayer, but he is after all “a manly man, to be an abbot able”. Perhaps only the unassuming, devoted Parson rises entirely above Chaucer's teasing irony — certainly his fellow clergy and religious officers belong to a church riddled with gross corruption. Everyone, it seems, is on the

make, in a world still recovering from the ravages of the Black Death.

The first tale, told quite properly by the most important pilgrim, the Knight, is devoted to the high ideals of chivalry and romantic love. Then the Miller drunkenly interrupts the Host, Harry Bailly, to impose on the company his splendidly bawdy tale about a cuckolded carpenter. As the Reeve listens, he (a trained carpenter himself) becomes enraged by what he sees as a slight on his original profession.

The Reeve's Tale

The Reeve's Tale is a vigorous attempt at revenge on the Miller. Two Cambridge students plan to outwit the fictional miller, Simkin, who grinds their college's corn and regularly takes a dishonest cut; at first, Simkin gets the better of the under-graduates, but the tale reaches a brilliantly farcical conclusion in which the two young men seduce both the Miller's wife and his young daughter and give Simkin a sound beating. The comic world of the tale is un sentimentally concrete and morally ruthless, suggesting that life is little more than a physical and intellectual contest.

The Wife of Bath's Tale

The Wife of Bath's Tale is the first of the three told by women in the collection. Her story is commonly regarded as initiating the so-called ‘marriage debate’ in *The Canterbury Tales*: marriage is a subject upon which she is clearly an expert, at least if the long life-story she tells in her brilliantly vivid and pungently argued *Prologue* is anything to go by. She has had no fewer than five husbands — perhaps the Canterbury pilgrimage may yield the sixth. Her tale is a relatively brisk and aggressively feminist affair, set in Arthurian England: a knight is compelled to seek an answer to the question, ‘what do women most desire?’ After suitable humiliation, he discovers the correct response.

The Clerk's Tale

The Clerk's Tale, which Chaucer knew from versions by Boccaccio and Petrarch, amongst others, appears to continue the marriage debate. The Clerk is, according to the *General Prologue*, an unworldly Oxford scholar, but the tale he tells is curiously ruthless. With little explicit awareness of its less attractive

aspects, the Clerk relates how the humbly born, 'patient' Griselda has to endure a succession of appalling humiliations before her 'noble' husband finally accepts her unconditionally. It seems, therefore, to be a riposte to *The Wife of Bath's Tale*.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

The last tale in this collection is that of the Nun's Priest. Chaucer here draws on the French fable tradition, telling a story, which wonderfully mocks boastful pride as the clever fox eventually loses out to the supposedly vain and gullible cock. Packed with ironically deployed rhetorical devices, the tale may be said to celebrate the ingenuity, variety and folly of human behavior, allegorized in the form of the animal fable. George Orwell was to do something similar, if infinitely more sinister, with *Animal Farm* in 1945.

Chaucer derives almost all his tales from known sources, often Italian or French – as may be seen above – but he is brilliantly successful in giving them a tone and feeling which are very English (concrete, ironic) and very much his own. Most of *The Canterbury Tales* are written in heroic couplets – a form of rhyming verse, which Chaucer effectively introduced to English literature.

Geoffrey Chaucer, son of a vintner, was born in London in 1340, or thereabouts. He enjoyed a successful and varied career as courtier and diplomat, traveling extensively in France and Italy, where he may have met Boccaccio and Petrarch. In 1374 he was made Controller of Customs in the port of London; in 1386 he represented Kent as knight of the shire, and may have lived there until his death in 1400. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Chaucer wrote prolifically and in a variety of styles: other works include the great *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Book of the Duchess*, and *A Treatise on the Astrolabe*. He also translated *The Romance of the Rose*. His range of subject matter, width of reading and sophistication are remarkable; his most notable qualities are perhaps his deeply sympathetic view of human aspiration and weakness, and (when required) his capacity for close, ironic observation.

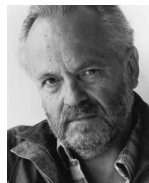
Notes by Perry Keenlyside

Modern English Verse Translation by Frank Ernest Hill, 1935

THE CANTERBURY TALES II — CAST

HOST	PHILIP MADOC
WIFE OF BATH	FRANCES JEATER
THE CLERK	CHARLES SIMPSON
THE REEVE	JOHN ROWE
THE NUN'S PRIEST	JOHN MOFFATT

DIRECTOR JOHN TYDEMAN

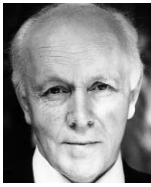


PHILIP MADOC's extensive theater work includes the roles of Othello and Iago, Faust and Macbeth and recently, with the Royal Shakespeare Company, The Duke in *Measure for Measure* and Professor Raat in *The Blue Angel*. Television roles include Lloyd George, Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Brookside* and *A Mind to Kill*.

FRANCES JEATER's theater work has included Gertrude in *Hamlet*; an American tour of *Much Ado About Nothing*; Middle and Far-East tours of *Harvey*; and *Prisoner of Second Avenue*, Haymarket Theatre, London. Favorite Television: *Gift of the Nile*, filmed in Egypt. Frances has always enjoyed working for BBC Radio Drama and recording audiobooks.

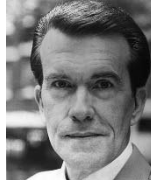


CHARLES SIMPSON won the Carleton Hobbs Radio Award in 1989 and the Best New Actor in Radio – Radio Times Comedy and Drama Awards in 1992. His television credits include *The Bill*, *Kavanagh QC* and *Soldier Soldier*. His theater work includes *Romeo and Juliet* and *The Tempest* for the English Shakespeare Company and *The Blue Angel* at the Gielgud Theatre.



JOHN ROWE trained at Birmingham School of Speech Training and Dramatic Art. His most recent theater work includes *Our Town* (Shaftesbury Theatre) and *Jenkin's Ear* (Royal Court). His extensive television credits include *Peak Practice*, *Dangerfield*, *Brother Cadfael*, *Chalkface*, *Bergerac*, *Coriolanus* and *Macbeth*. His film credits include *The English Wife*, *The Fourth Protocol*, *Sakharov* and *Nikolai*.

JOHN MOFFATT's distinguished theater career encompasses two hundred roles across the UK, forty-two major London productions and two Broadway appearances. He played Malvolio in *Twelfth Night* at the Open Air Theatre, Regents Park, appeared in Ingmar Bergman's production of *Hedda Gabler* and in *Married Love*, directed by Joan Plowright. Film credits include *Prick Up Your Ears*, and he has been seen on UK television in productions as varied as *Love in a Cold Climate* and *Maigret*.



JOHN TYDEMAN played a key role in BBC radio drama for nearly four decades, as producer, Assistant Head and then Head of Radio Drama. During that time he directed most of the major plays in the classical repertory, from Greek drama to Shakespeare, Chekhov and Shaw. He was also active in contemporary theater, directing works by Osborne, Stoppard, Albee, Pinter and many others. Directing for television and the stage has been a regular feature throughout his busy career. He has worked with Paul Scofield on many occasions, including radio productions of *Macbeth* and *Othello*.



CASSETTE INFORMATION

Cassette 1, Side 1 (38:57)

Prologue to *The Wife of Bath's Tale*

And tell me also, why there was creation
Now sires, I shall proceed to tell my tale
We love no man that spies or gives us charge
Such words I had always, and
brought them forth
And so it happened on a day in Lent

Cassette 2, Side 1 (37:46)

The Clerk's Tale

Here begins the Tale of the Clerk from Oxford
Not far from that same stately palace bright
The thoughtful Marquis spoke then to this maid
It happened, as it would again, indeed

Cassette 3, Side 1 (34:34)

The Prologue of the Reeve's Tale

Here the Reeve's Tale begins
Among the Cambridge students there were two
The Miller smiled at their simplicity.
Like cattle in the rain, wet through and through
Soon after this the wife left of her snoring
Yea, hast thou, lecherous rogue?

The Prologue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

Here begins the Nun's Priest's Tale

Cassette 1, Side 2 (35:40)

Now I will tell you truly, by St. Thomas
Who would believe, who could indeed suppose
Behold the words between the
Summoner and the Friar
Here begins the Tale of the Wife of Bath
This Knight, of whom in chief I tell this tale
Now, some men, it may be, will take offense

Total Time on Cassette 1: 1:14:37

Cassette 2, Side 2 (31:21)

This ugly sergeant, in the same rude way
So in this way went by four years or more
But meanwhile, after all his wickedness
This great earl from Bologna now is there
And when he saw her stand so patiently
Chaucer's Envoy: Grisilda and her patience
Both are dead

Total Time on Cassette 2: 1:09:07

Cassette 3, Side 2 (32:35)

So once it fell, as day began to break
"Madam," quoth he, "grand merci
for your lore"
But unto one befell a marvelous thing
Now, when the month in which the world began
Women's advice is oftentimes ill-fated!
This simple widow and her daughters two

Epilogue to the Nun's Priest's Tale

Total Time on Cassette 3: 1:07:09

Total Time on Cassettes 1-3: 3:30:53