The Canterbury Tales: Prologue

Here bygynneth the Book of the tales of Caunterbury

1: Whan that aprill with his shoures soote
2: The droghte of march hath perced to the roote,
3: And bathed every veyne in swich licour
4: Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
5: Whan zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
6: Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
7: Tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
8: Hath in the ram his halve cours yronne,
9: And smale foweles maken melodye,
10: That slepen al the nyght with open ye
11: (so priketh hem nature in hir corages);
12: Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
13: And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
14: To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londe
15: And specially from every shires ende
16: Of engelond to caunterbury they wende,
17: The hooly blisful martir for to seke,
18: That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
19: Bifil that in that seson on a day,
20: In southwerk at the tabard as I lay
21: Redy to wenden on my pilgrymage
22: To caunterbury with ful devout corage,
23: At nyght was come into that hostelrye
24: Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,
25: Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
26: In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
27: That toward Canterbury would ride.  
28: The chambers and the stables were wide,  
29: And well we were eased at the best.  
30: And shortly, when the sun was to rest,  
31: So had I spoken with them, every one,  
32: That I was of their fellowship anon,  
33: And made forward early to rise,  
34: To take our way ther as I yow devise.

That toward Canterbury town would ride.  
The rooms and stables spacious were and wide,  
And well we there were eased, and of the best.  
And briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,  
So had I spoken with them, every one,  
That I was of their fellowship anon,  
And made agreement that we'd early rise  
To take the road, as you I will apprise.

35: But natheles, whilst I have time and space,  
36: Er that I farther in this tale pace,  
37: Me thinketh it accordant to reason  
38: To tell you all the condition  
39: Of each of them, as it seemed to me,  
40: And which they were, and of what degree,  
41: And even how arrayed there at the inn;  
42: And at a knyght than wol I first bigynne.

But none the less, whilst I have time and space,  
Before yet farther in this tale I pace,  
It seems to me accordant with reason  
To inform you of the state of every one  
Of all of these, as it appeared to me,  
And who they were, and what was their degree,  
And even how arrayed there at the inn;  
And with a knight thus will I first begin.

The Knight's Portrait
43: A knyght ther was, and that a worthy man,  
44: That fro the tyme that he first bigan  
45: To riden out, he loved chivalrie,  
46: Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie.  
47: Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,  
48: And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,  
49: As wel in cristendom as in hethenesse,  
50: And evere honoured for his worthynesse.  
51: At alisaundre he was whan it was wonne.  
52: Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne  
53: Aboven alle nacions in pruce;  
54: In lettow hadde he reysed and in ruce,  
55: No cristen man so ofte of his degree.  
56: In gernade at the seege eek hadde he be  
57: Of algezir, and riden in belmarye.  
58: At lyeys was he and at satalye,  
59: Whan they were wonne; and in the grete see  
60: At many a noble armee hadde he be.  
61: At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,  
62: And foughten for oure feith at tramysene  
63: In lystes thries, and ay slayn his foo.  
64: This ilke worthy knyght hadde been also  
65: Somtyme with the lord of palatyne

A knight there was, and he a worthy man,  
Who, from the moment that he first began  
To ride about the world, loved chivalry,  
Truth, honour, freedom and all courtesy.  
Full worthy was he in his liege-lord's war,  
And therein had he ridden (none more far)  
As well in Christendom as heathenesse,  
And honoured everywhere for worthiness.  
At Alexandria, he, when it was won;  
Full oft the table's roster he'd begun  
Above all nations' knights in Prussia.  
In Latvia raided he, and Russia,  
No christened man so oft of his degree.  
In far Granada at the siege was he  
Of Algeciras, and in Belmarie.  
At Ayas was he and at Satalye  
When they were won; and on the Middle Sea  
At many a noble meeting chanced to be.  
Of mortal battles he had fought fifteen,  
And he'd fought for our faith at Tramissene  
Three times in lists, and each time slain his foe.  
This self-same worthy knight had been also  
At one time with the lord of Palatye
Against another heathen in Turkey:
And always won he sovereign fame for prize.
Though so illustrious, he was very wise
And bore himself as meekly as a maid.
He never yet had any viliness said,
In all his life, to whatsoever wight.
He was a truly perfect, gentle knight.
But now, to tell you all of his array,
His steeds were good, but yet he was not gay.
Of simple fustian wore he a jupon
Sadly discoloured by his habergeon;
For he had lately come from his voyage
And now was going on this pilgrimage.

The Squire's Portrait

With him there was his son, a youthful squire,
A lover and a lusty bachelor,
With locks well curled, as if they'd laid in press.
Some twenty years of age he was, I guess.
In stature he was of an average length,
Wondrously active, aye, and great of strength.
He'd ridden sometime with the cavalry
In Flanders, in Artois, and Picardy,
And borne him well within that little space
In hope to win thereby his lady's grace.
Prinked out he was, as if he were a mead,
All full of fresh-cut flowers white and red.
Singing he was, or fluting, all the day;
He was as fresh as is the month of May.
Short was his gown, with sleeves both long and wide.
Well could be sit on horse, and fairly ride.
He could make songs and words thereto indite,
Joust, and dance too, as well as sketch and write.
So hot he loved that, while night told her tale,
He slept no more than does a nightingale.
Courteous he, and humble, willing and able,
And carved before his father at the table.
The Yeoman's Portrait

101: A yeman hadde he and servantz namo
102: At that tyme, for hym liste ride so,
103: And he was clad in cote and hood of grene.
104: A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene,
105: Under his belt he bar ful thriftily,
106: (wel koude he dresse his takel yemanly:
107: His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe)
108: And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe.
109: A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage.
110: Of wodecraft wel koude he al the usage.
111: Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,
112: And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler,
113: And on that oother syde a gay daggere
114: Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere;
115: A cristopher on his brest of silver sheene.
116: An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene;
117: A forster wa

The Prioress' Portrait

118: Ther was also a nonne, a prioresse,
119: That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
120: Hire gretteste ooth was but by seinte loy;
121: And she was cleped madame eglentyne.
122: Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,
123: Entuned in hir nose ful seme
124: And frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
125: After the scole of stratford atte bowe,
126: For frenssh of parys was to hire unknowe.
127: At mete wel ytaught was she with alle:
128: She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
129: Ne wette hir fingres in hir sauce depe;
130: Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
131: That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
132: In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.
133: Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene
134: That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
135: Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte.
136: Ful semely after hir mete she raughte.
137: And sikerly she was of greet desport,
138: And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,  
139: And peyned hire to countrefete cheere  
140: Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,  
141: And to ben holden digne of reverence.  
142: But, for to spoken of hire conscience,  
143: She was so charitable and so pitous  
144: She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous  
145: Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.  
146: Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde  
147: With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.  
148: But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,  
149: Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;  
150: And al was conscience and tendre herte.  
151: Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was,  
152: Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,  
153: Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed;  
154: But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;  
155: It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe;  
156: For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.  
157: Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.  
158: Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar  
159: A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,  
160: And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,  
161: On which ther was first write a crowned a,  
162: And after amor vincit omnia.

The Second Nun's Portrait

163: Another nonne with hire hadde she,  

THE NUN  
Another little nun with her had she,

THE THREE PRIESTS

164: That was hir chapeleyne, and preestes thre.  

Who was her chaplain; and of priests she'd three.

The Monk's Portrait

165: A monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie,  
166: An outridere, that lovede venerie,  
167: A manly man, to been an abbot able.  
168: Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable,  
169: And whan he rood, men myghte his brydel heere  
170: Gynglen in a whistlynge wynd als cleere  
171: And eek as loude as dooth the chapel belle.  

THE MONK  
A monk there was, one made for mastery,  
An outrider, who loved his venery;  
A manly man, to be an abbot able.  
Full many a blooded horse had he in stable:  
And when he rode men might his bridle hear  
A-jingling in the whistling wind as clear,  
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell  
Where this brave monk was of the cell.
Ther as this lord was kepere of the celle,
The rule of Maurus or Saint Benedict,
By reason it was old and somewhat strict,
This said monk let such old things slowly pace
And followed new-world manners in their place.
He cared not for that text a clean-plucked hen
Which holds that hunters are not holy men;
Nor that a monk, when he is cloisterless,
Is like unto a fish that’s waterless;
That is to say, a monk out of his cloister.
But this same text he held not worth an oyster;
And I said his opinion was right good.
What? Should he study as a madman would
Upon a book in cloister cell? Or yet
Go labour with his hands and swink and sweat,
As Austin bids? How shall the world be served?
Let Austin have his toil to him reserved.
Therefore he was a rider day and night;
Greyhounds he had, as swift as bird in flight.
Since riding and the hunting of the hare
Were all his love, for no cost would he spare.
I saw his sleeves were purfled at the hand
With fur of grey, the finest in the land;
Also, to fasten hood beneath his chin,
He had of good wrought gold a curious pin:
A love-knot in the larger end there was.
His head was bald and shone like any glass,
And smooth as one anointed was his face.
Fat was this lord, he stood in goodly case.
His bulging eyes he rolled about, and hot
They gleamed and red, like fire beneath a pot;
His boots were soft; his horse of great estate.
Now certainly he was a fine prelate:
He was not pale as some poor wasted ghost.
A fat swan loved he best of any roast.
His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.

A friar there was, a wanton and a merry,
A limiter, a very festive man.
In all the Orders Four is none that can 
Equal his gossip and his fair language.
He had arranged full many a marriage
Of women young, and this at his own cost.
Unto his order he was a noble post.
Well liked by all and intimate was he
With franklins everywhere in his country,
And with the worthy women of the town:
For at conferring he'd more power in gown
(As he himself said) than it good curate,
For of his order he was licentiate.
He heard confession gently, it was said,
Gently absolved too, leaving naught of dread.
He was an easy man to give penance
When knowing he should gain a good pittance;
For to a begging friar, money given
Is sign that any man has been well shriven.
For if one gave (he dared to boast of this),
He took the man's repentance no amiss.
For many a man there is so hard of heart
He cannot weep however pains may smart.
Therefore, instead of weeping and of prayer,
Men should give silver to poor friars all bare.
His tippet was stuck always full of knives
And pins, to give to young and pleasing wives.
And certainly he kept a merry note:
Well could he sing and play upon the rote.
At balladry he bore the prize away.
His throat was white as lily of the May;
Yet strong he was as ever champion.
In towns he knew the taverns, every one,
And every good host and each barmaid too-
Better than begging lepers, these he knew.
For unto no such solid man as he
Accorded it, as far as he could see,
To have sick lepers for acquaintances.
There is no honest advantageousness
In dealing with such poverty-stricken curs;
It's with the rich and with big victuallers.
And so, wherever profit might arise,
Courteous he was and humble in men's eyes.
There was no other man so virtuous.
He was the finest beggar of his house;
A certain district being farmed to him,
None of his brethren dared approach its rim;
For though a widow had no shoes to show,
So pleasant was his In principio,
He always got a farthing ere he went.
He lived by pickings, it is evident.
And he could romp as well as any whelp.
On love days could he be of mickle help.
For there he was not like a cloisterer,
With threadbare cope as is the poor scholar,
But he was like a lord or like a pope.
Of double worsted was his semi-cope,
That rounded like a bell, as you may guess.
He lisped a little, out of wantonness,
To make his English soft upon his tongue;
And in his harping, after he had sung,
His two eyes twinkled in his head as bright
As do the stars within the frosty night.
This worthy limiter was named Hubert.

The Merchant's Portrait

There was a merchant with forked beard, and girt
In motley gown, and high on horse he sat,
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat;
His boots were fastened rather elegantly.
His spoke his notions out right pompously,
Stressing the times when he had won, not lost.
He would the sea were held at any cost
Across from Middleburgh to Orwell town.
At money-changing he could make a crown.
This worthy man kept all his wits well set;
There was no one could say he was in debt,
So well he governed all his trade affairs
With bargains and with borrowings and with shares.
Indeed, he was a worthy man withal,
But, sooth to say, his name I can't recall.
The Clerk’s Portrait

285: A clerk ther was of oxenford also,
286: That unto logyk hadde longe ygo.
287: As leene was his hors as is a rake,
288: And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
289: But looked holwe, and therto sobrely.
290: Ful thredbare was his overeste courtepy;
291: For he hadde geten hym yet no benefice,
292: Ne was so worldly for to have office.
293: For hym was levere have at his beddes heed
294: Twenty bookes, clad in bla
295: Of aristotle and his philosophie,
296: Than robes riche, or fithele, or gay sautrie.
297: But al be that he was a philosophre,
298: Yet hadde he but litel gold in cofre;
299: But al that he myghte of his freendes hente,
300: On bookes and o
301: Of hem that yaf hym wherwith to scoleye.
302: Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede,
303: Noght o word spak he moore than was neede,
304: And that was seyd in forme and reverence,
305: And short and quyk and ful of hy sentence;
306: Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,
307: And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche.

The Man of Law’s Portrait

309: A sergeant of the lawe, war and wys,
310: That often hadde been at the parvys,
311: Ther was also, ful riche of excellence.
312: Discreet he was and of greet reverence --
313: He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise.
314: Justice he was ful often in assise,
315: By patente and by pleyn commisioun.
316: For his science and for his heig renoun,
317: Of fees and robes hadde he many oon.
318: So greet a purchasour was nowher noon:
319: AI was fee symple to hym in effect;
320: His purchaseyng myghte nat been infect.
321: Nowher so bisy a man as he ther nas,

THE CLERK

A clerk from Oxford was with us also,
Who’d turned to getting knowledge, long ago.
As meagre was his horse as is a rake,
Nor he himself too fat, I'll undertake,
But he looked hollow and went soberly.
Right thredbare was his overcoat; for he
Had got him yet no churchly benefice,
Nor was so worldly as to gain office.
For he would rather have at his bed's head
Some twenty books, all bound in black and red,
Of Aristotle and his philosophy
Than rich robes, fiddle, or gay psaltery.
Yet, and for all he was philosopher,
He had but little gold within his coffer;
But all that he might borrow from a friend
On books and learning he would swiftly spend,
And then he'd pray right busily for the souls
Of those who gave him wherewithal for schools.
Of study took he utmost care and heed.
Not one word spoke he more than was his need;
And that was said in fullest reverence
And short and quick and full of high good sense.
Pregnant of moral virtue was his speech;
And gladly would he learn and gladly teach.

THE LAWYER

A sergeant of the law, wary and wise,
Who'd often gone to Paul's walk to advise,
There was also, compact of excellence.
Discreet he was, and of great reverence;
At least he seemed so, his words were so wise.
Often he sat as justice in assize,
By patent or commission from the crown;
Because of learning and his high renown,
He took large fees and many robes could own.
So great a purchaser was never known.
All was fee simple to him, in effect,
Wherefore his claims could never be suspect.
Nowhere a man so busy of his class,
And yet he seemed much busier than he was.
All cases and all judgments could he cite
That from King William’s time were apposite.
And he could draw a contract so explicit
Not any man could fault therefrom elicit;
And every statute he’d verbatim quote.
He rode but badly in a medley coat,
Belted in a silken sash, with little bars,
But of his dress no more particulars.

The Franklin’s Portrait

There was a franklin in his company;
White was his beard as is the white daisy.
Of sanguine temperament by every sign,
He loved right well his morning sop in wine.
Delightful living was the goal he’d won,
For he was Epicurus’ very son,
That held opinion that a full delight
Was true felicity, perfect and right.
A householder, and that a great, was he;
Saint Julian he was in his own country.
His bread and ale were always right well done;
A man with better cellars there was none.
Baked meat was never wanting in his house,
Of fish and flesh, and that so plenteous
It seemed to snow therein both food and drink
Of every dainty that a man could think.
According to the season of the year
He changed his diet and his means of cheer.
Full many a fattened partridge did he mew,
And many a bream and many a luce in stuwe. And many a bream and pike in fish-pond too.
Woe to his cook, except the sauces were
Poignant and sharp, and ready all his gear.
His table, waiting in his hall alway
Stood ready covered through the livelong day.
Stood county sessions he was lord and sire,
And often acted as a knight of shire.
A dagger and a trinket-bag of silk
Hung from his girdle, white as morning milk.
He had been sheriff and been auditor;
And nowhere was a worthier vavasour.
The Guildsmen's Portrait

361: An haberdasshere and a carpenter,
362: A webbe, a dyere, and a tapycer, --
363: And they were clothed alle in o lyveree
364: Of a solempne and a greet fraternitee.
365: Ful fresh and newe hir geere apiked was;
366: Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras
367: But al with silver; wroght ful clene and weel
368: Hire girdles and hir pouches everydeel.
369: Wel semed ech of hem a fair burgey
370: To sitten in a yeldehalle on a deys.
371: Everich, for the wisdom that he kan,
372: Was shaply for to been an alderman.
373: For catel hadde they ynogh and rente,
374: And eek hir wyves wolde it wel assente;
375: And elles certeyn were they to blame.
376: It is ful fair to been ycleped madame,
377: And goon to vigilies al bifore,
378: And have a mantel roialliche ybore.

The Cook's Portrait

379: A cook they hadde with hem for the nones
380: To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
381: And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.
382: Wel koude he knowe a draughte of londoun ale.
383: He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
384: Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
385: But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
386: That on his shyne a mormal hadde he.
387: For blankmanger, that made he with the beste

The Shipman's Portrait

388: A shipman was ther, wonynge fer by weste;
389: For aught I woot, he was of dertemouthe.
390: He rood upon a rounce, as he kouthe,
391: In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.
392: A daggere hangynge on a laas hadde he

THE HABERDASHER AND THE CARPENTER
THE WEAVER, THE DYER, AND THE ARRAS-MAKER

A haberdasher and a carpenter,
An arras-maker, dyer, and weaver
Were with us, clothed in similar livery,
All of one sober, great fraternity.
Their gear was new and well adorned it was;
Their weapons were not cheaply trimmed with brass,
But all with silver; chastely made and well
Their girdles and their pouches too, I tell.
Each man of them appeared a proper burges
To sit in guildhall on a high dais.
And each of them, for wisdom he could span,
Was fitted to have been an alderman;
For chattels they'd enough, and, too, of rent;
To which their goodwives gave a free assent,
Or else for certain they had been to blame.
It's good to hear "Madam" before one's name,
And go to church when all the world may see,
Having one's mantle borne right royally.

THE COOK

A cook they had with them, just for the nonce,
To boil the chickens with the marrow-bones,
And flavour tartly and with galingale.
Well could he tell a draught of London ale.
And he could roast and seethe and broil and fry,
And make a good thick soup, and bake a pie.
But very ill it was, it seemed to me,
That on his shin a deadly sore had he;
For sweet blanc-mange, he made it with the best.

THE SAILOR

There was a sailor, living far out west;
For aught I know, he was of Dartmouth town.
He sadly rode a hackney, in a gown,
Of thick rough cloth falling to the knee.
A dagger hanging on a cord had he
12

393: Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun.  
394: The hoote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun;  
395: And certeiny he was a good felawe.  
396: Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe  
397: Fro burdeux-ward, whil that the chapmen sleep.  
398: Of nyce conscience took he no keep.  
399: If that he faught, and hadde the hyer hond,  
400: By water he sente hem hoom to every lond.  
401: But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,  
402: His stremes, and his daungers hym bisides,  
403: His herberwe, and his moone, his lodemenage,  
404: Ther nas noon swich from hulle to cartage.  
405: Hardy he was and wys to undertake;  
406: With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.  
407: He knew alle the havenes, as they were,  
408: Fro gootlond to the cape of finystere,  
409: And every cryke in britaigne and in spayne.  
410: His barge ycleped was the maudelayne.

With us ther was a doctour of phisik;  
In al this world ne was the noon hym lik,  
To speke of phisik and of surgerye  
For he was grounded in astronomye.  
He kepeth his pacient a ful greet deel  
In houres by his magyk natureel.  
Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent  
Within the houses for his pacient.  
He knew the cause of everich maladye,  
Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,  
And where they engendred, and of what humour.

With us there was a doctor of physic;  
In all this world was none like him to pick  
For talk of medicine and surgery;  
For he was grounded in astronomy.  
He often kept a patient from the pall  
By horoscopes and magic natural.  
Well could he tell the fortune ascendent  
Within the houses for his sick patient.

The Physician's Portrait  
THE PHYSICIAN

411: With us ther was a doctour of phisik;  
412: In al this world ne was the noon hym lik,  
413: To speke of phisik and of surgerye  
414: For he was grounded in astronomye.  
415: He kepeth his pacient a ful greet deel  
416: In houres by his magyk natureel.  
417: Wel koude he fortunen the ascendent  
418: Of his ymages for his pacient.  
419: He knew the cause of everich maladye,  
420: Were it of hoot, or coold, or moyste, or drye,  
421: And where they engendred, and of what humour.  
422: He was a verray, parfit praktisour:  
423: The cause yknowe, and of his harm the roote,  
424: Anon he yaf the sike man his boote.  
425: Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries  
426: To sende hym drogges and his letuaries,  
427: For ech of hem made oother for to wynne --  
428: Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigyne.  
429: Wel knew he the olde esculapius,  
430: And deyscorides, and eek rufus,  
431: Olde ypocras, haly, and galyen,
Serapion, razis, and avycen,
Averrois, damascien, and constantyn,
Bernard, and gatisden, and gilbertyn.
Of his diete mesurable was he,
For it was of no superfluitee,
But of greet norissyng and digestible.
His studie was but litel on the bible.
In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,
Lyned with taffata and with sendal;
And yet he was but esy of dispence;
He kepte that he wan in pestilence.
For gold in phisik is a cordial,
And therefore lovede gold in special.

The Wife of Bath's Portrait
A good wif was ther of biside bathe,
But she was somdel deef, and that was scathe.
Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt,
She passed hem of ypres and of gaunt.
In al the parisshe wif ne was ther noon
That to the offryn ge bifore hire sholde goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee.
Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
Which, of a Sunday, she wore on her head.
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
Close gartered, and her shoes were soft and new.
Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe.
She was a worthy womman al hir lyve:
With five churched husbands bringing joy and strife,
Not counting other company in youth;
But therof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe.
Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
Withouten oother compaignye in youthe, --
But thereof there's no need to speak, in truth.
Withouten oother compaignye in youthe, --

THE WIFE OF BATH
There was a housewife come from Bath, or near,
Who- sad to say- was deaf in either ear.
At making cloth she had so great a bent
She bettered those of Ypres and even of Ghent.
In all the parish there was no goodwife
Should offering make before her, on my life;
And if one did, indeed, so wroth was she
It put her out of all her charity.
Her kerchiefs were of finest weave and ground;
I dare swear that they weighed a full ten pound
Which, of a Sunday, she wore on her head.
Her hose were of the choicest scarlet red,
Close gartered, and her shoes were soft and new.
Bold was her face, and fair, and red of hue.
She'd been respectable throughout her life,
With five churched husbands bringing joy and strife,
Not counting other company in youth;
But thereof there's no need to speak, in truth.
Three times she'd journeyed to Jerusalem;
And many a foreign stream she'd had to stem;
At Rome she'd been, and she'd been in Boulogne,
In Spain at Santiago, and at Cologne.
She could tell much of wandering by the way:
Gap-toothed was she, it is no lie to say.
Upon an ambler easily she sat,
Well wimpled, aye, and over all a hat
As broad as is a buckler or a targe;
472: A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large, A rug was tucked around her buttocks large, And on her feet a pair of sharpened spurs.
473: And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe. In company well could she laugh her slurs.
474: In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe. The remedies of love she knew, perchance,
475: Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce, For she koude of that art the olde daunce.
476: For she koude of that art the olde daunce.

The Parson's Portrait

477: A good man was ther of religioun, There was a good man of religion, too,
478: And was a povre persoun of a toun, A country parson, poor, I warrant you;
479: But riche he was of hooly thoght and werk. But rich he was in holy thought and work.
480: He was also a lerned man, a clerk, He was a learned man also, a clerk,
481: That cristes gospel trewely wolde preche; Who Christ's own gospel truly sought to preach;
482: His parishens devoutly wolde he teche. Devoutly his parishioners would he teach.
483: Benygne he was, and wonder diligent, Benign he was and wondrous diligent,
484: And in adversitee ful pacient, Patient in adverse times and well content,
485: And swich he was ypreved ofte sithes. As he was oftimes proven; always blithe,
486: Ful looth were hym to cursen for his tithes, He was right loath to curse to get a tithe,
487: But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute, But rather would he give, in case of doubt,
488: Unto his povre parishens aboute Unto those poor parishioners about,
489: Of his offryng and eek of his substaunce. Part of his income, even of his goods.
490: He koude in litel thyng have suffisaunce. Enough with little, coloured all his moods.
491: Wyd was his parisshe, and houses fer asonder, Wide was his parish, houses far asunder,
492: But he ne lefte nat, for reyn ne thonder, But never did he fail, for rain or thunder,
493: In siknesse nor in meschief to visite In sickness, or in sin, or any state,
494: The ferreste in his parisshe, muche and lite, To visit to the farthest, small and great,
495: Upon his feet, and in his hand a staf. Going afoot, and in his hand, a stave.
496: This noble enasple to his sheep he yaf, This fine example to his flock he gave,
497: That first he wroghte, and afterward he taughte. That first he wrought and afterwards he taught.
498: Out of the gospel he tho wordes caughte, Out of the gospel then that text he caught,
499: And this figure he added eek therto, And this figure he added thereunto-
500: That if gold ruste, what shal iren do? That, if gold rust, what shall poor iron do?
501: For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste, For if the priest be foul, in whom we trust,
502: No wonder is a lewed man to ruste; What wonder if a layman yield to lust?
503: And shame it is, if a prest take keep, And shame it is, if priest take thought for keep,
504: A shiten shepherde and a clene sheep. A shitty shepherd, shepherding clean sheep.
505: Wel oghte a preest ensample for to yive, Well ought a priest example good to give,
506: By his clennesse, how that his sheep sholde lyve. By his own cleanliness, how his flock should live.
507: He sette nat his benefice to hyre He never let his benefice for hire,
508: And leet his sheep encombred in the myre Leaving his flock to flounder in the mire,
509: And ran to londoun unto seinte poules And ran to London, up to old Saint Paul's
510: To seken hym a chaunterie for soules, To get himself a chantry there for souls,
511: Or with a brethered to been withholde; Nor in some brotherhood did he withhold;
512: But dwelte at hoom, and kepeth wel his folde, But dwelt at home and kept so well the fold
513: So that the wolf ne made it nat myscarie; That never wolf could make his plans miscarry;
514: He was a shepheard and noght a mercenarie. He was a shepherd and not mercenary.
515: And though he hooly were and vertuous, And holy though he was, and virtuous,
516: He was to synful men nat despitous, To sinners he was not impiteous,
517: Ne of his speche daungerous ne digne, Nor haughty in his speech, nor too divine,
518: But in his techyng discreet and benygne. But in all teaching prudent and benign.
519: To drawen folk to hevene by fairnesse, To lead folk into Heaven but by stress
520: By good ensample, this was his bisynesse. Of good example was his busyness.
521: But it were any persone obstinat, But if some sinful one proved obstinate,
522: What so he were, of heigh or lough estat, Be who it might, of high or low estate,
523: Hym wolde he snybben sharply for the nonys. Him he reproved, and sharply, as I know.
524: A bettre preest I trowe that nowher noon ys. There is nowhere a better priest, I trow.
525: He waited after no pompe and reverence, He had no thirst for pomp or reverence,
526: Ne maked hym a spiced conscience, Nor made himself a special, spiced conscience,
527: But cristes loore and his apostles twelve But Christ's own lore, and His apostles' twelve
528: He taughte, but first he folwed it hymselfe. He taught, but first he followed it himselfe.

The Plowman's Portrait
529: With hym ther was a plowman, was his brother, With him there was a plowman, was his brother,
530: That hadde ylad of dong ful many a fother; That many a load of dung, and many another
531: A trewe swynkere and a good was he, Had scattered, for a good true toiler, he,
532: Lyvynge in pees and parfit charitie. Living in peace and perfect charity.
533: God loved he best with al his hooole herte He loved God most, and that with his whole heart
534: At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte, At all times, though he played or plied his art,
535: And thanne his neighebor right as hymselve. And next, his neighbour, even as himself.
536: He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve, He'd thresh and dig, with never thought of pelf,
537: For cristes sake, for every povre wight, For Christ's own sake, for every poor wight,
538: Withouten hire, if it lay in his myght. All without pay, if it lay in his might.
539: His tithes payde he ful faire and wel, He paid his taxes, fully, fairly, well,
540: Bothe of his propre swynk and his catel. Both by his own toil and by stuff he'd sell.
541: In a tabard he rood upon a mere. In a tabard he rode upon a mare.
542: Ther was also a reve, and a millere, There were also a reeve and miller there;
543: A somnour, and a pardonner also, A summoner, manciple and pardonner,
544: A maunciple, and myself -- ther were namo. And these, beside myself, made all there were.

THE PLOWMAN
With him there was a plowman, was his brother,
That many a load of dung, and many another
Had scattered, for a good true toiler, he,
Living in peace and perfect charity.
He loved God most, and that with his whole heart
At all times, though he played or plied his art,
And next, his neighbour, even as himself.
He'd thresh and dig, with never thought of pelf,
For Christ's own sake, for every poor wight,
All without pay, if it lay in his might.
He paid his taxes, fully, fairly, well,
Both by his own toil and by stuff he'd sell.
In a tabard he rode upon a mare.
There were also a reeve and miller there;
A summoner, manciple and pardonner,
And these, beside myself, made all there were.
The Miller's Portrait
545: The millere was a stout carl for the nones;
546: Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones.
547: That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,
548: At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram.
549: He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;
550: Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre,
551: Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.
552: His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
553: And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
554: Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
555: A werte, and theron stood a toft of herys,
556: Reed as th e brustles of a sowes erys;
557: His nosethirles blake were and wyde.
558: A swerd and bokeler bar he by his syde.
559: His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys.
560: He was a janglere and a goliardeys,
561: And that was moost of synne and harlotries.
562: Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;
563: And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.
564: A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.
565: A bagpipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
566: And therewithal he broghte us out of towne.

The Manciple's Portrait
567: A gentil maunciple was ther of a temple,
568: Of which achatours myghte take exemple
569: For to be wise in byynge of vitaille;
570: For wheither that he payde or took by taille,
571: Algate he wayted so in his achaat
572: That he was ay biforn and in good staat.
573: Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace
574: That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
575: The wisdom of an heep of lerned men?
576: Of maistres hadde he mo than thries ten,
577: That weren of lawe expert and curious,
578: Of which ther were a duszeyne in that hous
579: Worthy to been stywardes of rente and lon
580: Of any lord that is in engelond,
581: To make hym lyve by his propre good
582: In honour dettelees (but if he were wood),
583: Or lyve as scarsly as hym list desire;

THE MILLER
The miller was a stout churl, be it known,
Hardy and big of brawn and big of bone;
Which was well proved, for when he went on lam
At wrestling, never failed he of the ram.
He was a chunky fellow, broad of build;
He'd heave a door from hinges if he willed,
Or break it through, by running, with his head.
His beard, as any sow or fox, was red,
And broad it was as if it were a spade.

THE MANCIPLE
There was a manciple from an inn of court,
To whom all buyers might quite well resort
To learn the art of buying food and drink;
For whether he paid cash or not, I think
That he so knew the markets, when to buy,
He never found himself left high and dry.
Now is it not of God a full fair grace
That such a vulgar man has wit to pace
The wisdom of a crowd of learned men?
Of masters had he more than three times ten,
Who were in law expert and curious;
Whereoef there were a dozen in that house
Fit to be stewards of both rent and land
Of any lord in England who would stand
Upon his own and live in manner good,
In honour, debtless (save his head were wood),
Or live as frugally as he might desire;
584: And able for to helpen al a shire
585: In any caas that myghte falle or happe;
586: And yet this manciple sette hir aller cappe.

These men were able to have helped a shire
In any case that ever might befall;
And yet this manciple outguessed them all.

**The Reeve's Portrait**

587: The reve was a sclendre colerik man.
588: His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;
589: His heer was by his erys ful round yshorn;
590: His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn
591: Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,
592: Ylyk a staf, ther was no calf ysene.
593: Wel koude he kepe a gerner and a bynne;
594: Ther was noon auditour koud on him wynne.
595: Wel wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn
596: The yeldynge of his seed and of his greyn.
597: His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,
598: His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye
599: Was hoolly in this reves governynge,
600: And by his covenant yaf the rekenynge,
601: Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age.
602: Ther koude no man brynge hym in arrerage.
603: Ther nas baillif, ne hierde, nor oother hyne,
604: That he ne knew his sleighte and his covyne;
605: They were adrad of hym as of the deeth.
606: His wonyng was ful faire upon an heeth;
607: With grene trees yshadwed was his place.
608: He koude bettre than his lord purchace.
609: Ful riche he was astored pryvely:
610: His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,
611: To yeve and lene hym of his owene good,
612: And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.
613: In youthe he hadde lerned a good myster;
614: He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.
615: This reve sat upon a ful good stot,
616: That was al pomely grey and highte scot.
617: A long surcote of pers upon he hade,
618: And by his syde he baar a rusty blade.
619: Of northfolk was this reve of which I telle,
620: Biside a toune men clepen baleswelle.
621: Tukked he was as is a frere aboute,
622: And evere he rood the hyndrestre of our route.

The reeve he was a slender, choleric man
Who shaved his beard as close as razor can.
His hair was cut round even with his ears;
His top was tonsured like a pulpiter's.
Long were his legs, and they were very lean,
And like a staff, with no calf to be seen.
Well could he manage granary and bin;
No auditor could ever on him win.
He could foretell, by drought and by the rain,
The yielding of his seed and of his grain.
His lord's sheep and his oxen and his dairy,
His swine and horses, all his stores, his poultry,
Were wholly in this steward's managing;
And, by agreement, he'd made reckoning
Since his young lord of age was twenty years;
Yet no man ever found him in arrears.
There was no agent, hind, or herd who'd cheat
But he knew well his cunning and deceit;
They were afraid of him as of the death.
His cottage was a good one, on a heath;
By green trees shaded with this dwelling-place.
Much better than his lord could he purchase.
Right rich he was in his own private right,
Seeing he'd pleased his lord, by day or night,
By giving him, or lending, of his goods,
And so got thanked- but yet got coats and hoods.
In youth he'd learned a good trade, and had been
A carpenter, as fine as could be seen.
This steward sat a horse that well could trot,
And was all dapple-grey, and was named Scot.
A long surcoat of blue did he parade,
And at his side he bore a rusty blade.
Of Norfolk was this reeve of whom I tell,
From near a town that men call Badeswell.
Bundled he was like friar from chin to croup,
And ever he rode hindmost of our troop.
The Summoner's Portrait

623: A somonour was ther with us in that place,
624: That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
625: For saucefleem he was, with eyen narwe.
626: As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
627: With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
628: Of his visage children were aferd.
629: Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
630: Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
631: Ne oynement that wolde clense and byte,
632: That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,
633: Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes.
634: Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
635: And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;
636: Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood.
637: And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,
638: Thanne wolde he speke no word but latyn.
639: A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
640: That he had lerned out of som decree --
641: No wonder is, he herde it al the day;
642: And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay
643: Kan clepen wat as wel as kan the pope.
644: But whoso koude in oother thyng hym grope,
645: Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie;
646: Ay questio quid iuris wolde he crie.
647: He was a gentil harlot and a kynde;
648: A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde.
649: He wolde suffre for a quart of wyn
650: A good felawe to have his concubyn
651: A twelf month, and excuse hym atte fulle;
652: Ful prively a fynch eek koude he pulle.
653: And if he foond owher a good felawe,
654: He wolde techen him to have noon awe
655: In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs,
656: But if a mannes soule were in his purs;
657: For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.
658: Purs is the ercedekenes helle, seyde he.
659: But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;
660: Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him dredde,
661: For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,
662: And also war hym of a significavit.

THE SUMMONER

A summoner was with us in that place,
Who had a fiery-red, cherubic face,
For eczema he had; his eyes were narrow
As hot he was, and lecherous, as a sparrow;
With black and scabby brows and scanty beard;
He had a face that little children feared.
There was no mercury, sulphur, or litharge,
No borax, ceruse, tartar, could discharge,
Nor ointment that could cleanse enough, or bite,
To free him of his boils and pimples white,
Nor of the bosses resting on his cheeks.
Well loved he garlic, onions, aye and leeks,
And drinking of strong wine as red as blood.
Then would he talk and shout as madman would.
And when a deal of wine he'd poured within,
Then would. he utter no word save Latin.
Some phrases had he learned, say two or three,
Which he had garnered out of some decree;
No wonder, for he'd heard it all the day;
And all you know right well that even a jay
Can call out "Wat" as well as can the pope.
But when, for aught else, into him you'd grope,
'Twas found he'd spent his whole philosophy;
Just "Questio quid juris" would he cry.
He was a noble rascal, and a kind;
A better comrade 'twould be hard to find.
Why, he would suffer, for a quart of wine,
Some good fellow to have his concubine
A twelve-month, and excuse him to the full
(Between ourselves, though, he could pluck a gull).
And if he chanced upon a good fellow,
He would instruct him never to have awe,
In such a case, of the archdeacon's curse,
Except a man's soul lie within his purse;
For in his purse the man should punished be.
"The purse is the archdeacon's Hell," said he.
But well I know he lied in what he said;
A curse ought every guilty man to dread
(For curse can kill, as absolution save),
And 'ware significavit to the grave.
In his own power had he, and at ease,
The boys and girls of all the diocese,
And knew their secrets, and by counsel led.
A garland had he set upon his head,
Large as a tavern's wine-bush on a stake;
A buckler had he made of bread they bake.

The Pardoner's Portrait

With him there rode a gentle pardoner
Of Rouncival, his friend and his compeer;
Straight from the court of Rome had journeyed he.
Loudly he sang "Come hither, love, to me,"
The summoner joining with a burden round;
Was never horn of half so great a sound.

This pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,
But lank it hung as does a strike of flax;
In wisps hung down such locks as he'd on head,
And with them he his shoulders overspread;
But thin they dropped, and stringy, one by one.

As shiny eyes he had as has a hare.
He had a fine veronica sewed to cap.
His wallet lay before him in his lap,
Stuffed full of pardons brought from Rome all hot.
A voice he had that bleated like a goat.
No beard had he, nor ever should he have,
For smooth his face as he'd just had a shave;
I think he was a gelding or a mare.

But in his craft, from Berwick unto Ware,
Was no such pardoner in any place.
For in his bag he had a pillowcase
The which, he said, was Our True Lady's veil:
He said he had a piece of the very sail
That good Saint Peter had, what time he went
Upon the sea, till Jesus changed his bent.
He had a latten cross set full of stones,
And in a bottle had he some pig's bones.
But with these relics, when he came upon
Some simple parson, then this paragon
PROLOGUE

Now have I told you briefly, in a clause,
The state, the array, the number, and the cause
Of the assembling of this company
In Southwark, at this noble hostelry
Known as the Tabard Inn, hard by the Bell.
But now the time is come wherein to tell
How all we bore ourselves that very night
When at the hostelry we did alight.
And afterward the story I engage
To tell you of our common pilgrimage.
But first, I pray you, of your courtesy,
You'll not ascribe it to vulgarity
Though I speak plainly of this matter here,
Retailing you their words and means of cheer;
Nor though I use their very terms, nor lie.
For this thing do you know as well as I:
When one repeats a tale told by a man,
He must report, as nearly as he can,
Every least word, if he remember it,
However rude it be, or how unfit;
Or else he may be telling what's untrue,
Embellishing and fictionizing too.
He may not spare, although it were his brother;
He must as well say one word as another.
Christ spoke right broadly out, in holy writ,
In that one day more money stood to gain
Than the poor dupe in two months could attain.
And thus, with flattery and suchlike japes,
He made the parson and the rest his apes.
But yet, to tell the whole truth at the last,
He was, in church, a fine ecclesiast.
Well could he read a lesson or a story,
But best of all he sang an offertory;
For well he knew that when that song was sung,
Then might he preach, and all with polished tongue.
To win some silver, as he right well could;
Therefore he sang so merrily and so loud.
And, you know well, there's nothing low in it.
And Plato says, to those able to read:
"The word should be the cousin to the deed."
Also, I pray that you'll forgive me:
If I have not set folk, in their degree
Here in this tale, by rank as they should stand.
My wits are not the best, you'll understand.
Great cheer our host gave to us, every one,
And to the supper set us all anon;
And served us then with victuals of the best.
Strong was the wine and pleasant to each guest.
A seemly man our good host was, withal;
Fit to have been a marshal in some hall;
He was a large man, with protruding eyes,
As fine a burgher as in Cheapside lies;
Bold in his speech, and wise, and right well taught,
And as to manhood, lacking there in naught.
Also, he was a very merry man,
And after meat, at playing he began,
Speaking of mirth among some other things,
When all of us had paid our reckonings;
And saying thus: "Now masters, verily
You are all welcome here, and heartily:
For by my truth, and telling you no lie,
I have not seen, this year, a company
Here in this inn, fitter for sport than now.
Fain would I make you happy,
knew I how.
And of a game have I this moment thought
To give you joy, and it shall cost you naught.
"You go to Canterbury; may God speed
And the blest martyr soon requite your meed.
And well I know, as you go on your way,
You'll tell good tales and shape yourselves to play;
For truly there's no mirth nor comfort, none,
Riding the roads as dumb as is a stone;
And therefore will I furnish you a sport,
As I just said, to give you some comfort.
And if you like it, all, by one assent,
And will be ruled by me, of my judgment,
And will so do as I'll proceed to say,
Tomorrow, when you ride upon your way,
Now, by my father's spirit, who is dead,
If you're not gay, I'll give you up my head.
Hold up your hands, nor more about it speak."
Our full assenting was not far to seek;
We thought there was no reason to think twice,
And granted him his way without advice,
And bade him tell his verdict just and wise,
"Masters," quoth he, "here now is my advice;
But take it not, I pray you, in disdain;
This is the point, to put it short and plain,
That each of you, beguiling the long day,
Shall tell two stories as you wend your way
To Canterbury town; and each of you
On coming home, shall tell another two,
All of adventures he has known befall.
And who plays his part the best of all,
That is to say, who tells upon the road
Tales of best sense, in most amusing mode,
Shall have a supper at the others' cost
Here in this room and sitting by this post,
When we come back again from Canterbury.
And now, the more to warrant you'll be mer
I will myself, and gladly, with you ride
At my own cost, and I will be your guide.
But whosoever shall my rule gainsay
Shall pay for all that's bought along the way.
And if you are agreed that it be so,
Tell me at once, or if not, tell me no,
And I will act accordingly. No more."
This thing was granted, and our oaths we swore,
With right glad hearts, and prayed of him, also,
That he would take the office, nor forgo
The place of governor of all of us,
Judging our tales; and by his wisdom thus
Arrange that supper at a certain price,
We to be ruled, each one, by his advice
In things both great and small; by one assent,
We stood committed to his government.
And thereupon, the wine was fetched anon;
We drank, and then to rest went every one,
And that without a longer tarrying.
Next morning, when the day began to spring,
Up rose our host, and acting as our cock,
He gathered us together in a flock,
And forth we rode, a jog-trot being the pace,
Until we reached Saint Thomas’ watering-place.
And there our host pulled horse up to a walk,
And said: "Now, masters, listen while I talk.
You know what you agreed at set of sun.
If even-song and morning-song are one,
Let’s here decide who first shall tell a tale.
And as I hope to drink more wine and ale,
Whoso proves rebel to my government
Shall pay for all that by the way is spent.
Come now, draw cuts, before we farther win,
And he that draws the shortest shall begin.
Sir knight," said he, "my master and my lord,
You shall draw first as you have pledged your word.
Come near," quoth he, "my lady prioress:
And you, sir clerk, put by your bashfulness,
Nor ponder more; out hands, flow, every man!"
At once to draw a cut each one began,
And, to make short the matter, as it was,
Whether by chance or whatsoever cause,
The truth is, that the cut fell to the knight,
At which right happy then was every wight.
Thus that his story first of all he’d tell,
According to the compact, it befell,
As you have heard. Why argue to and fro?
And when this good man saw that it was so,
Being a wise man and obedient
To plighted word, given by free assent,
He slid: "Since I must then begin the game,
Why, welcome be the cut, and in God’s name!
Now let us ride, and hearken what I say."
And at that word we rode forth on our way;
And he began to speak, with right good cheer,
His tale anon, as it is written here.

HERE ENDS THE PROLOGUE OF THIS BOOK
AND HERE BEGINS THE FIRST TALE,
WHICH IS THE KNIGHT’S TALE