

The General Prologue is the first part of The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer. It introduces the frame story, in which a group of pilgrims travelling to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury agree to take part in a storytelling competition, and describes the pilgrims themselves.

Author: Geoffrey Chaucer

Original language: Middle English

Genre: Poetry

### Structure

Form and Structure of The Canterbury Tales: General Prologue

Chaucer wrote his poem in rhyming couplets with every two lines rhyming with each other. Though they are divided into stanzas, it is structured with the lines of iambic pentameter, with five pairs of unstressed and stressed syllables.

### Year

During 1380-1392, he wrote the "General Prologue" and some of Canterbury Tales. By the year 1400, he had completed the Canterbury Tales, perhaps the most famous poem in medieval English!

### Point of view

The Canterbury Tales uses the first-person point of view in the General Prologue and the frame narrative; Chaucer, the narrator, speaks from his own perspective on the events of the story contest and the pilgrims who tell the tales.

What is the purpose of Chaucer General Prologue?

The General Prologue establishes the frame for the Tales as a whole (or of the intended whole) and introduces the characters/storytellers. These are introduced in the order of their rank in accordance with the three medieval social estates (clergy, nobility, and commoners and peasantry).

What is the summary of the Prologue from The Canterbury Tales?

Through the Canterbury tales summary of the General Prologue, Chaucer gives a description of the pilgrims in a pleasant and grotesque manner. At dinner with the pilgrims, the Host proposes a plan to the group. He says that on the way to Canterbury, each pilgrim must tell two tales and then two on the return journey.

Who is the narrator of the Prologue to Canterbury Tales?

The Canterbury Tales uses the first-person point of view in the General Prologue and the frame narrative; Chaucer, the narrator, speaks from his own perspective on the events of the story contest and the pilgrims who tell the tales.

What is the main theme of Canterbury Tales?

Social satire is the major theme of The Canterbury Tales. The medieval society was set on three foundations: the nobility, the church, and the peasantry. Chaucer's satire targets all segments of the medieval social issues, human immorality, and depraved heart.

How does Chaucer open the Prologue?

The General Prologue opens with a description of April showers and the return of spring. "Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote / The droghte of March hath perced to the roote," he begins, and writes about the burgeoning flowers and singing birds.

Who was the first character described in the Prologue of The Canterbury Tales?

The Knight The first pilgrim Chaucer describes in the General Prologue, and the teller of the first tale. The Knight represents the ideal of a medieval Christian man-at-arms. He has participated in no less

than fifteen of the great crusades of his era. Brave, experienced, and prudent, the narrator greatly admires him.

Which is the longest tale in Canterbury Tales?

The Tale of Melibee is the longest of The Canterbury Tales, and the densest.

How many characters are there in Prologue?

In "The Canterbury Tales," 30 pilgrims accompany Chaucer on the pilgrimage to Canterbury. Before they embark on their journey, the Host, Harry Bailly, decides to join them, making them a party of 32.

How did The Canterbury Tales end?

At the end of the tale, the Pardoner invites the pilgrims to buy relics and pardons from him and suggests that the Host should begin because he is the most sinful. This comment infuriates the Host; the Knight intercedes between the Host and the Pardoner and restores peace.

What is the writing style of Chaucer?

The style of The Canterbury Tales is characterized by rhyming couplets. That means that every two lines rhyme with each other.

What is the setting of Chaucer's The General Prologue?

It is the time of year when people in medieval times go on pilgrimages, and Chaucer is about to set off with the tavern's landlord, Harry Bailly, on the long ride to Canterbury in Kent, to visit the shrine of the martyr Thomas Becket.

Who is the best character in The Canterbury Tales?

Chaucer has presented the Knight as an ideal character. He is a significant and admirable character, and everyone respects him. The Knight is also a nobleman, who struggles, fights for God and truth instead of yearning for stardom and glory. He is a victorious man with an extended travel history.

How many stories are in Canterbury Tales?

Taken together, the tales offer a fascinating insight into English life during the late 14th century. Chaucer's original plan was for over 100 stories, but only 24 were completed, some of which had already been written for earlier works

What is the shortest story in Canterbury Tales?

The shortest story in the collection is Physician's Tale, which only consists of more or less two thousand words. Physician's Tale narrates the story of Virginia who consents to her own death, asking her father Virginius to kill her before the villain Apis can take her virginity.

Is Canterbury Tales a poem?

Though the majority of the writing in The Canterbury Tales is in verse and is usually categorized as poetry, there are two tales that are written in prose, or non-poetic writing with no rhythm, rhyme, or other poetic structures. These two stories are "The Parson's Tale" and "The Tale of Melibee".

What happens in the prologue?

A prologue is used to give readers extra information that advances the plot. It is included in the front matter and for a good reason! Authors use them for various purposes, including: Giving background information about the story.

What is the significance of Chaucer's prologue?

The prologue to The Canterbury Tales is most important because it established the class structure of society in Medieval England. Chaucer uses the genre of estates satire, a genre in which the author describes, examines, and explains the workings of the social order and offers their criticism or humor of that system.

Summary

One spring day, the Narrator of The Canterbury Tales rents a room at the Tabard Inn before he recommences his journey to Canterbury. That evening, a group of people arrive at the inn, all of

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whom are also going to Canterbury to receive the blessings of "the holy blissful martyr," St. Thomas à Becket. Calling themselves "pilgrims" because of their destination, they accept the Narrator into their company. The Narrator describes his newfound traveling companions.

The Host at the inn, Harry Bailey, suggests that, to make the trip to Canterbury pass more pleasantly, each member of the party tell two tales on the journey to Canterbury and two more tales on the journey back. The person who tells the best story will be rewarded with a sumptuous dinner paid for by the other members of the party. The Host decides to accompany the pilgrims to Canterbury and serve as the judge of the tales.

#### Analysis

The primary function of these opening lines is to provide a physical setting and the motivation for the Canterbury pilgrimage. Chaucer's original plan, to have each pilgrim tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two more on the way back, was never completed; we have tales only on the way to Canterbury. In The Prologue are portraits of all levels of English life. The order of the portraits is important because it provides a clue as to the social standing of the different occupations. The pilgrims presented first are representative of the highest social rank, with social rank descending with every new pilgrim introduced.

Highest in the social rank are representatives of the aristocracy or those with pretensions toward nobility. First in this group are the Knight and his household, including the Squire. The second group within those of the highest social standing includes the Prioress, the Monk, and the Friar, who ought to be of the lower class, but who, as a pious beggar, has begged so well that his prosperity ironically slips him into the company of the nobles. Of these pilgrims, probably only the Knight and his son, the Squire, qualify as true aristocrats, both outwardly and inwardly. The "gentillesse" — refinement resulting from good breeding — of the Prioress and the Monk is largely external and affected.

Following this class are pilgrims whose high social rank is mainly derived from commercial wealth. Included in this group are the Merchant, who illegally made much of his money from selling French coins (a practice that was forbidden in England at the time); the Sergeant of Law, who made his fortune by using his knowledge as a lawyer to buy up foreclosed property for practically nothing; the Clerk, who belongs with this group of pilgrims because of his gentle manners and extensive knowledge of books; and the Franklin, who made enough money to become a country gentleman and is in a position to push for a noble station. (It is evident both from the relationship of the Franklin's portrait to that of the guildsmen, presented next, and from Harry Bailey's scornful remarks to him, however, that he is not yet of the noble class).

The next class of pilgrims is the guildsmen, consisting of men who belong to something similar to specialized unions of craftsmen guilds. Among this group of specialized laborers are the Haberdasher, the Dyer, the Carpenter, the Weaver, and the Tapestry-Maker. None of them tell a tale.

A middle-class group of pilgrims comprises the next lower position of social rank. First presented in this group is the Cook, whom we might consider out of place — ranked too high — but who, as a master of his trade, is greatly respected by his fellow travelers. Also included in this social class are the Shipman, because of his immense knowledge of and travels throughout the world, and the Physician, a doctor of medicine (a career that was less revered in the Middle Ages than it is now). The Wife of Bath, who is the last of this group to be presented, is included in this group because of her knowledge and deportment and her many other pilgrimages.

The Parson and the Plowman comprise the next group of pilgrims, the virtuous poor or lower class. Each, although very poor, represents all of the Christian virtues.

The last group of pilgrims include those of the immoral lower class. Among this group of pilgrims are the Manciple, who profits from buying food for the lawyers in the Inns of Court, and the vulgar Miller, who steals from his customers. The Reeve tells dirty stories and cheats his trusting young master, and the corrupt Summoner takes bribes. Last, and most corrupt in this litany of undesirables is the Pardoner, who sells false pardons and fake relics.