

Middle English

Dr Alison Wiggins

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Drop in hour: Thursdays 3-4pm, Zoom joining link on Moodle



Exploring Middle English and the *Miller's Tale*

Lecture topics:

1. **Middle English + Chaucer's life**
2. Spelling and sounds + the portrait of Alisoun
3. Style and lexicon + the portraits of Nicholas and Absolon
4. Syntax and morphology + the fabliau plot and the trick
5. Narrative viewpoints + what next after Level 1 + exam revision

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University of Glasgow | School of
Critical Studies

ENGLISH LANGUAGE

LEVEL 1

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Miller's Prologue and Tale

from *The Canterbury Tales*

2020-21

Edited, with interpretative notes and commentary, by Graham D. Caie

(revised, and with accompanying Middle English grammar, by Jeremy J. Smith)

What is Middle English?

The name given to the varieties of the English language used between 1150 – 1500

A non-standard language

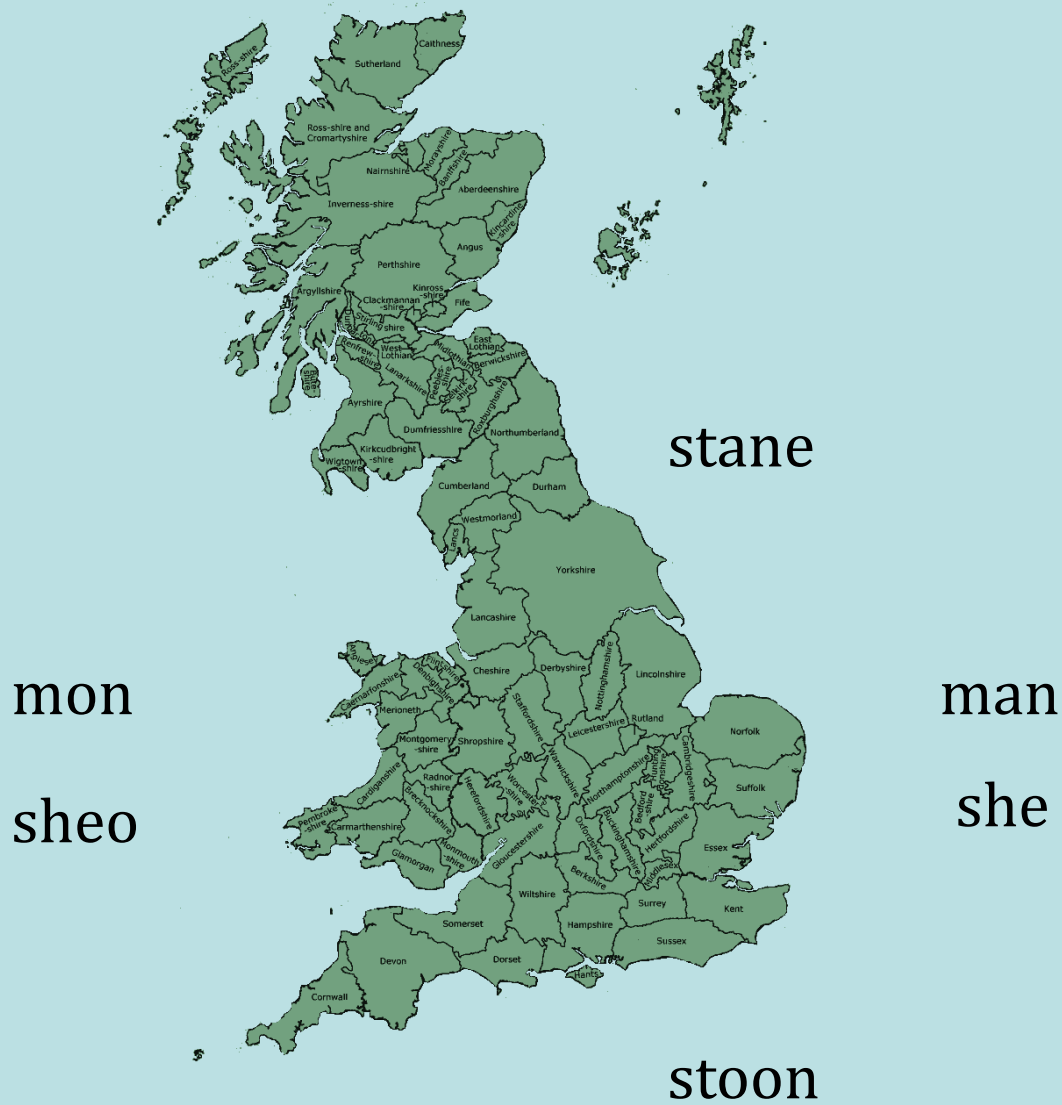
[f] [v]



Northern dialects: *fox, fixen*

Southern dialects: *vox, vixen*

PDE: *fox, vixen*



Present Day English STONE MAN SHE

<ch, sc, sch, sh, ss>

chall, scall, schall, shall, ssall

<ch, sc, sch, sh, ss>

chall, scall, schall, shall, ssall

Present Day English SHALL

<ch, sc, sch, sh, ss>

chall, scall, schall, shall, ssall,
chal, sel, chel, shell, ssul, shull,
schull, schulle, schalle, sselle....

Present Day English SHALL

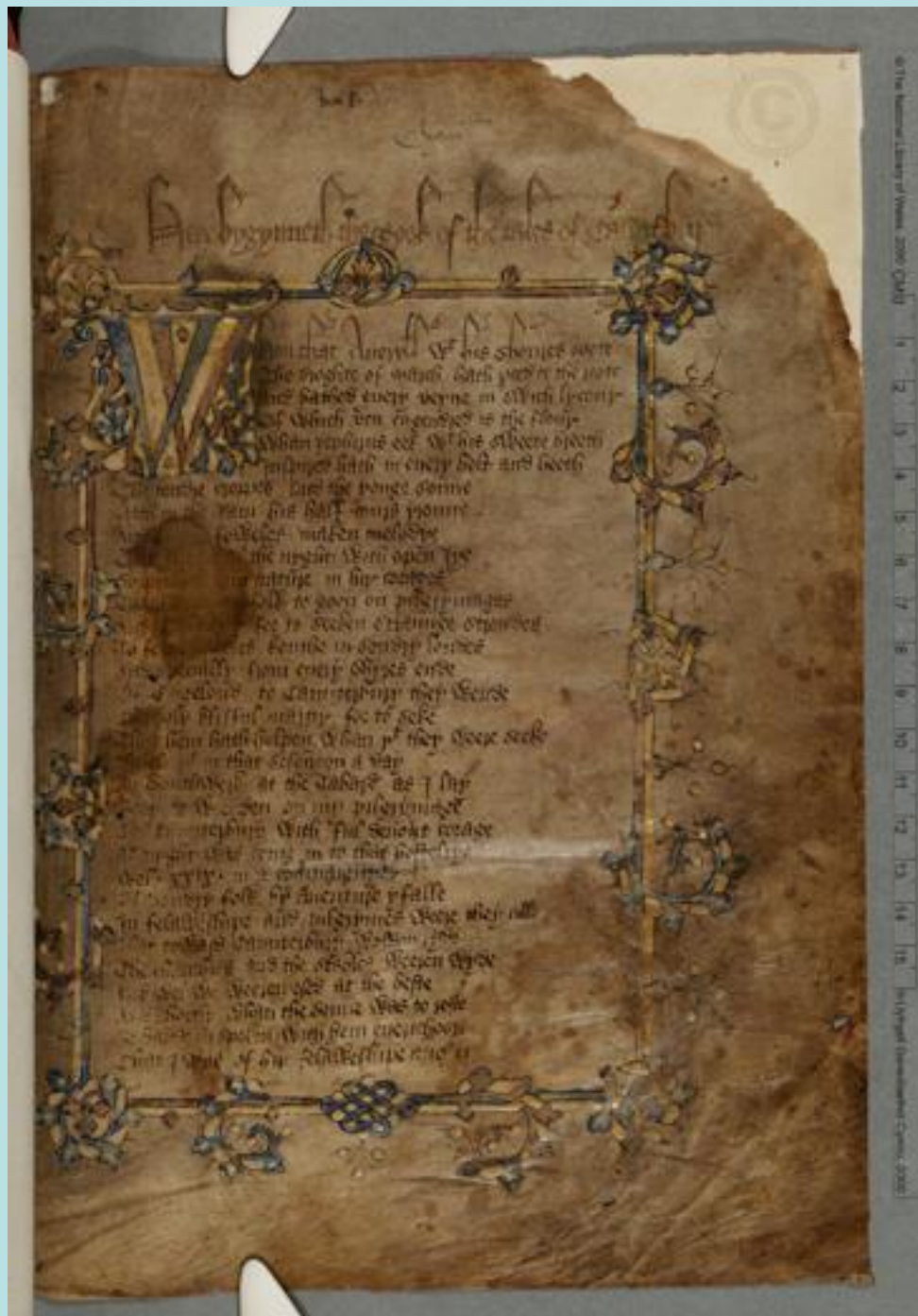
My first quill
My second quill
My third quill
My fourth quill
My fourth quill
My fifth quill



The Hengwrt
Manuscript of *The
Canterbury Tales*

Online at the
National Library of
Wales:

<https://www.library.wales/discover/digital-gallery/manuscripts/the-middle-ages/the-hengwrt-chaucer/>



Cursor Mundi, ‘our langage o northrin lede’

John Trevisa, ‘so scharp, slyttyng [piercing], and frotyng
[harsh], and unschape [formless], that we Southeron
men may that longage unnethe [hardly] undurstonde’

Chaucer's spelling

The MILLERE was a stout carl for the nones;
Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones.

Middle English: the alphabet

Ash, Eth, Wyn:

Æ æ

Ð ð

ƿ ƿ

Thorn, Yogh:

þ þ

ȝ ȝ

Chaucer's spelling

The MILLERE was a stout **carl** for the nones;
Ful byg he was of brawn, and **EEK** of bones.

Chaucer's spelling

The MILLERE was a stout carl for the nones;
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Chaucer's spelling

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Chaucer's spelling

The **MILLERE** was a stout carl for the nones;
Ful byg he was of brawn, and eek of bones.

PDE: FULL

ME forms: ful, fol, vul, vol.

PDE: BIG

ME forms: big, byg, bigge, bygge, beg, begge

PDE: MILLER

ME forms: millere, milner, mulner, melnere, muller, mellere

Chaucer's spelling

HAND *hand, hond*

hand : garland, hond : bond

MERRY *merye, mury, myrie*

merye : berye, mury : Canterbury, pyrie : myrie

APRIL: *Aprill, Aperil*

This is the finest surviving copy of Chaucer's epic Trojan romance, *Troilus and Criseyde*, illuminated in London c.1415-20, perhaps for the royal prisoner in the Tower of London, Charles d'Orléans (1394-1465). The frontispiece shows Geoffrey Chaucer himself declaiming his poem to an aristocratic party, gathered in a landscape...

Image and caption quotation from:
<https://theparkerlibrary.wordpress.com/2016/10/01/history-by-the-month-october-and-geoffrey-chaucer/>



Rule 1: Pronounce all consonants!

- knight
- which
- half
- girl
- ring

Rule 2: Emphasise the final syllable of French words

- courage
- pilgrimage

Rule 3: words like *wife* should be pronounced with the vowel in *bee*

- wife
- life

- knight
- which
- half
- girl
- ring
- courage
- pilgrimage
- wife
- life



Recordings of Chaucer's Middle English:

Essentials of Early English
STELLA App (link on Moodle)

<https://www.arts.gla.ac.uk/STELLA/apps/web/readings/middle-english/>

Also: iTunes, Harvard Chaucer Page

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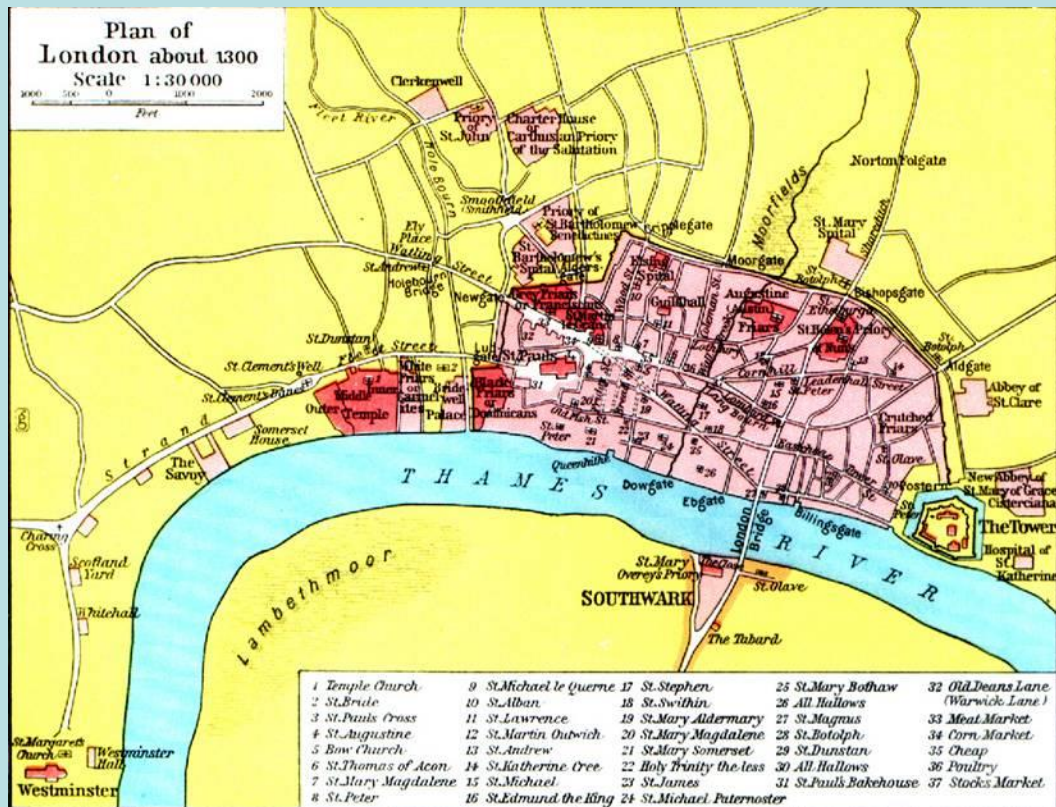
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Refugee Tales

Edited by David Herd & Anna Pincus

Featuring Patience Agbabi, Jade Amoli-Jackson, Chris Cleave, Stephen Collis, Inua Ellams, Abdulrazak Gurnah, David Herd, Marina Lewycka, Avaes Mohammad, Hubert Moore, Ali Smith, Dragan Todorovic, Carol Watts & Michael Zand

Two unaccompanied children travel across the Mediterranean in an overcrowded boat that has been designed to only make it halfway across...

A 63-year-old man is woken one morning by border officers 'acting on a tip-off' and, despite having paid taxes for 28 years, is suddenly 'cast into the detention system with no obvious means of escape...

An orphan whose entire life has been spent in slavery – first on a Ghanaian farm, then as a victim of trafficking – writes to the Home Office for help, only to be rewarded with a jail sentence and indefinite detention...

These are not fictions. Nor are they testimonies from some distant, brutal past, but the frighteningly common experiences of Europe's new underclass – its refugees. While those with 'citizenship' enjoy basic human rights (like the right not to be detained without charge for more than 14 days), people seeking asylum can be suspended for years in Kafka-esque uncertainty. Here, poets and novelists retell the stories of individuals who have direct experience of Britain's policy of indefinite immigration detention. Presenting their accounts anonymously, as modern day counterparts to the pilgrims' stories in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, this book offers rare, intimate glimpses into otherwise untold suffering.

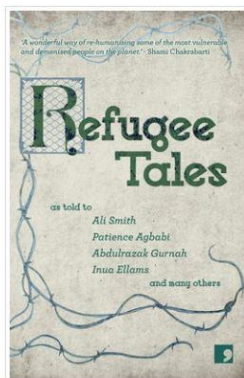
All profits go to the Gatwick Detainees Welfare Group and Kent Refugee Help.

Press

Praise for Refugee Tales:

'Refugee Tales is a wonderful way of re-humanising some of the most vulnerable and demonised people on the planet. This collection is both challenging and poignant. Readers will surely be moved to move their leaders to action.'

– Shami Chakrabarti



Comma Press Refugee Tales, and 28 Tales for 28 Days YouTube

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THE RAP CAMBERBURY TALES

Written and Performed by Baba Brinkman

★★★★★

"Truly awe-inspiring... Five stars!" Scotsman

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The Miller tells us....

- John (the old husband)
- Nicholas (the poor student)
- Alisoun (the pretty young wife)

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
A barmclooth as whit as morne milk
Upon her lendes, ful of many a goore.
Whit was hir smok and broyden al bifoore
And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
The tapes of hir white voluper
Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye.
Ful smale ypulled were hire browes two,
And tho were bent and blake as any sloo.
She was ful moore blisful on to see
Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
And softer than the wolle is of a wether.
And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,
Tasseled with silk and perled with latoun.

In al this world, to seken up and doun,
There nys no man so wys that koude thenche
So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe.
Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame.
Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth
Wynsyng she was, as is a joly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,
As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye;
She was a prymerole, a piggesnye --
For any lord to leggen in his beddde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde!

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any **wezele** hir body gent and smal.
A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
A barmclooth as whit as morne milk
Upon her lendes, ful of many a goore.
Whit was hir smok and broyden al bifoore
And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
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Than is the newe pere-jonette tree,
And softer than the **wolle is of a wether**.
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Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
As any **swalwe sittynge on a berne**.
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any **kyde or calf** folwyng his dame.
Hir mouth was sweete as bragot or the meeth,
Or hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth
Wynsyng she was, as is a joly **colt**,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,
As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye;
She was a prymerole, a piggesnye --
For any lord to leggen in his beddde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde!

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
A barmclooth as **whit as morne milk**
Upon her lendes, ful of many a goore.
Whit was hir smok and broyden al bifoore
And eek bihynde, on hir coler aboute,
Of col-blak silk, withinne and eek withoute.
The tapes of hir white voluper
Were of the same suyte of hir coler;
Hir filet brood of silk, and set ful hye.
And sikerly she hadde a likerous ye.
Ful smale ypulled were hire browes two,
And tho were bent and blake as any **sloo**.
She was ful moore blisful on to see
Than is the newe **pere-jonette tree**,
And softer than the wolle is of a wether.
And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether,
Tasseled with silk and perled with latoun.

In al this world, to seken up and doun,
There nys no man so wys that koude thenche
So gay a popelote or swich a wenche.
Ful brighter was the shynyng of hir hewe.
Than in the Tour the noble yforged newe.
But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne
As any swalwe sittynge on a berne.
Therto she koude skippe and make game,
As any kyde or calf folwynge his dame.
Hir mouth was sweete as **bragot** or the **meeth**,
Or **hoord of apples leyd in hey or heeth**
Wynsyng she was, as is a joly colt,
Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.
A brooch she baar upon hir lowe coler,
As brood as is the boos of a bokeler.
Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye;
She was **a prymerole, a piggesnye** --
For any lord to leggen in his beddde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde!

Fair was this yonge wyf, and therwithal
As any wezele hir body gent and smal.
A ceynt she werede, barred al of silk,
A barmclooth as whit as morne milk
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Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye;
She was a prymerole, a piggesnye --
For any lord to leggen in his beddde,
Or yet for any good yeman to wedde!

Emelye, that fairer was to sene
Than is the lilye upon his stalke grene,
And fresher than the May with floures newe –
For with the rose colour stroof hir hewe;
I noot which was the finer of hem two ...
Yclothed was she fresh for to devise;
Hir yellow heer was broided in a tresse
bihinde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse....
And as an aungel hevenisshly she song.

[Description of Emily from *The Knight's Tale*]

Emelye, that fairer was to sene
Than is the **lilye** upon his stalke grene,
And fresher than the May with floures newe –
For with the **rose** colour stroof hir hewe;
I noot which was the finer of hem two ...
Yclothed was she fresh for to devise;
Hir **yellow heer** was broided in a tresse
bihinde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse....
And as an **aungel** hevenisshly she song.

[Description of Emily from *The Knight's Tale*]

Lecture 2 – Revision

- Can you give a brief definition of ‘Middle English’?
- Can you give some typical examples of spelling variations found in Middle English?
- In what ways and for what purposes did Chaucer exploit spelling variations in his poetry? Can you give some examples?
- What advantages and opportunities did the pilgrimage setting offer to Chaucer for his fictional tale telling contest in *The Canterbury Tales*?
- The Miller’s intervention has been described as a kind of ‘literary Peasants’ Revolt’, can you explain what is meant by this description?
- Translate each of the following words from the description of Alisoun, and then comment on how Chaucer’s particular choice of each adds to her portrait: *gent, sloo, pere-jonette, wether, popelote, wenche, bragot, meeth, joly, prymerole, piggesnye*.
- Do you think the Knight’s portrait of Emily, in his tale, is outdone by the Miller’s portrait of Alisoun? Give reasons and examples.