

Chaucer's Pilgrims

The General Prologue Lecture Notes

In the Medieval church there were several alternative ways to secure a place in heaven. Such as,

- Charity
- Building chapels
- Go on pilgrimages

Pilgrimages were possible obligation of Christian

Humans, by sinning, fell into debt to god. Christ took debt on. Now humans have to pay debt to Christ not god.

Fear, not love, of God.

They were sometimes taken on to complete a vow

“St. Joseph, if you help me I’ll make pilgrimage”

or

merit – brownie points

Going on a pilgrimage was like a vacation today.

- Receive a souvenir patch

Examples:

- Jerusalem – palm patch
 - St. James of Compostela –shell
 - You’d sew this on your pilgrim jacket and show off where you’d been.
- Itinerary – souvenir shops
 - Canterbury was a tourist trap– Thomas a Beckett assassinated
- Going on pilgrimages was like a competition; there were semi-professional pilgrims. Who could go to the weirdest places
 - Could do as living – bed along way
 - Sure beats plowing
 - Piers plowman – complained against

Canterbury Tales Genre: Estates satire

- Chaucer’s General Prologue is one of the first to show people as individuals instead of types.
 - Medieval art formulaic – Italian Giotto 1st to paint individual face perspective, mural St. Frances of Assisi
- Nosce te ipsum = “know yourself” most characters don’t – individuals reforming selves
- Chaucer conservative = does not attack institution
- Failure of individuals to live up to standards
- Reformation misread – why we read Chaucer. It was not banned during the reformation.

Title: Knight*

Station: Lower Aristocracy

Lines: 43-78

Traits:

- Keeps order in group
- Truth and honour, freedom (generosity) and courtesy.
- Mercenary
 1. Western Mediterranean – crusades nearly 600 years including Northern Africa
 2. Eastern Mediterranean – recapture holy land fought for Muslim lord – 65-66
 3. Eastern Baltic – Teutonic Knight against Eastern Orthodox goal go to Russia stopped in Lithuania
- Never home
- Clothes humble, horses were good
- He can ride all day

Tale: Roman de Thebe. Palamon and Arcite fall in love with the same woman and must fight each other to gain the right to marry her.

Title: Squire

Station: Lower Aristocracy (Father is the Knight)

Lines: 79-100

Traits:

- Uses curling iron
- Gown was short (pants tight) (Parson's sermon says lustful to make obvious sexual organs) (l. 93)
- Could ride well (possibly sexual pun) (l. 98)
- Stays out all night (l. 98)
- Knows how to act (courtly) (l. 99-100)

Tale:

On the anniversary of King Cambuscan's reign, he is given several magical gifts, including a ring that makes bird speech intelligible. His daughter, Canace, takes the ring and listens to a falcon's tale of love. Story interrupted.

Title: Yeman(*)

Station: Lower Aristocracy/Middle Class

Lines: 101-116

Traits:

- Dresses in green
- Well kempt
- Sort of idealized
- Knows woodcraft
- Wears an image of St. Christopher (Taliesin against death and weariness) in silver (Sumptuary laws of 1363 forbade but they were widely ignored and repealed the next year.)

Tale: None

Title: Prioress (Madame Eglantine)

Station: Clergy (once aristocracy)

Lines: 118-162

Traits:

- Prioress head of order not supposed to travel abroad.
- Swears by Saint Eligius -- worldly pride not supposed to swear (l. 120)
- Clergy only way to have social advancement.
- Daughter expensive for aristocracy she within church continues to live secular life. Described as secular woman not as a holy woman.
- Mispronounces French – Northern French not Central, now standard, French. [Much like they thought that the Scottish speak funny.]
- Good manners
- More concerned w/animals than poor humans
- Nuns not supposed to have animals,
- She feeds animals better than humans
- Two little yippy lap dogs

Tale:

Play on Hugh of Lincoln. Anti-Semitic in tone but uses pathos very well.

Title: Nun

Station: Clergy

Lines: 163

Traits: Travels with Prioress

Tale: Cecilia wants to remain a virgin. When she is married, she coverts both her husband and his bother, and they are baptized by Pope Urban. A pagan named Almachius puts Cecilia on trial and she is martyred.

Title: Chapeleyne

Station: Clergy

Lines: 164

Traits: Travels with Prioress

Tale: None

Title: Three Priests

Station: Clergy

Lines: 164

Traits: Travel with Prioress

Tale: One priest tells a beast fable. The vain roaster Chaunticleer is caught by a fox.

Title: Monk

Station: Clergy (maybe once aristocracy)

Lines: 165-207

Traits:

- Loves hunting
- Compromised vows of poverty and obedience
- Hunting and eating his passions
- Lines 191-92 maybe sexual but no other mention of such improprieties

Tale: A series of tragedies foregrounding the fickleness of fortune.

Title: Friar (Hubert)

Station: Clergy

Lines: 208-69

Traits:

- 4 orders of friars
 - Dominicans (or Black Friars)
 - Augustinians (or Austin Friars)
 - Franciscans (or Grey Friars)
 - Carmelites (or White Friars)
- Orders of Friars supposed to be absolute poverty; however, within 2 generations of Frances death Friars one of richest brotherhoods
- Tension between Friars and Clergy
- Lisp
- Seduces women (l. 212-13). Then marries them off.
- Later argues with Summoner

Tale:

A summoner, who blackmails the poor and innocent, meets up with a demon. When a widow curses the summoner, the fiend takes him to hell.

Title: Merchant

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 270-284

Traits:

- Finely dressed
- Shrewd businessman
- No one knew he was in serious financial trouble

Tale: An elderly man, January, marries a young intelligent wife, May. She has an affair with his squire in a pear tree.

Title: Clerk*

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 285-308

Traits:

- University student
 - Requires
 1. Male
 2. Member of clergy
- Eternal student not worldly enough for a job

Tale: King Walter repeatedly tests his lowborn wife, Griselda. She responds with patience.

Title: Sergeant of the Law

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 309-330

Traits:

- *Seems* wise
- No one could prove his purchases incorrect
- *Seems* industrious (Note ll. 321-2)

Tale: Dame Constance is married to a newly converted sultan, but his mother intervenes and Constance is set off in a rudderless ship. She converts more individuals until she finally finds her father and new husband in Rome.

Title: Franklin (Land Owner)

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 331-360

Traits:

- Countryside noble
- Public servant (Knight of the Shire)
- Always has table up
- Sanguine (Four humors --lade back)

Tale: Arveragus and Dorigen are a happily married couple. When Arveragus leaves to find honor, Dorigen, out of fear for her husband, makes a rash promise to a would be lover.

Title: Five Guildsmen (Haberdasshere, carpenter, weaver, dyer, Tapestry weaver)

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 361-378

Traits:

- Rich, their wives were in front of all on feast days
- They bring their own cook

Tale: None

Title: Cook (Roger)

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 379-387

Traits:

- Cook to the guildsman
- Excellent cook
- Sore on leg

Tale: Fabliau. A gambler moves in with another man whose wife is a whore. Interrupted

Title: Shipman

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 388-410

Traits:

- Good fellow – means dicey
- Wine trade – fortified wine white grapes sherry (sherries) from ME Spain
- Tough guy -- knife around neck
- If people act up send home another way (throw overboard) (ll. 396-7)

Tale: A man borrows money from a husband and gives it to the wife in payment for sex. Wife says she'll pay her husband back the money with sexual favors.

Title: Doctor

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 411-444

Traits:

- Knows authorities – Muslim writers who transferred Greek doctors like Galen
- Astrology to diagnose
- Racket with pharmacist – gets a cut
- Fancy clothes
- Didn't study Bible
- Flakes of gold in cordial – joke at end

Tale: Father decapitates his daughter to save her virginity.

Title: Wife of Bath (Alison)

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 445-476

Traits:

- Deaf *physical *intellectually –only hears part
- Cloth maker, wealthy
- Rank conscience (ll. 449-52) goes to church to be seen
- Head dress 10 pounds
- Wearing tight, red, visible stockings
- Red of hue (humor)
- Many pilgrimages— where the people are
- Pilgrimages and sex pun (l. 467)
- Gap tooth – cannot control sexuality
- Amble – comfortable to ride
- Horse of experience traveler. She rides astride
- Ovid *Remedia amoris*, *Ars amorie* Medieval Church tried to ban but spread anyway
- Love making (l. 476)

Tale: Knight, accused of rape, must go on a quest to discover what women want.

Title: Parson*

Station: Clergy/Lower Class

Lines: 477-528

Traits:

- *Wants* to be preacher
- Gentle patient diligent
- Loath to excommunicate because of tithes
 - Excommunicated worse than outlaw (l. 486)
 - If excommunicated, couldn't marry, buried, if buried outside church wouldn't rise on 2nd coming
- Gives to poor (l. 489)
- Visits people when sick or in trouble
- Imitated Christ
- Practiced what preached
- If clergy bad, what would lay people do? (l. 500)

Tale: Sermon of the seven deadly sins, their cures, confession and penance.

Title: Plowman*

Station: Lower class

Lines: 529-541

Traits:

- Works in the name of God
- Pays tithes properly
- See *Piers Plowman* – attacking church maybe Chaucer avoiding association

Tale: None

Title: Miller

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 545-566

Traits:

- As Shawn Hughes put it “probably played professional football”
- Skims off wheat
- Plays bagpipe (not Scottish) -- pun on sexual organ
- Has a wart on the side of his nose with hairs growing out of it
- Leads the Canterbury procession out of town

Tale: A carpenter is married to a young wife. To have time together alone, she and her lover claim that a 2nd flood is coming.

Title: Manciple

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 567-586

Traits:

- Steward for a law school
- Not as intelligent as students
- Skims money off for himself

Tale: In the court of Phoebus, a white crow can both sing and speak. When Phoebus' wife has an affair, the crow tells his about it. In rage, Phoebus slays his wife. When he later regrets the deed, he pulls out the crow's white feathers and replaces them with black ones. Phoebus then takes away the crow's ability to speak.

Title: Reeve (Oswald)

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 587-622

Traits:

- Slender and choleric
- Once a carpenter

Tale: Two students dupe a miller and sleep with both his wife and his daughter.

Title: Summoner

Station: Clergy

Lines: 623-668

Traits:

- Summon you to ecclesiastical court
- Can bribe out
- Ache, hot, and lecherous

Tale: A friar preaches about excessive wealth to a rich but sick man, Thomas. Thomas' donation is a fart. A meeting is later held to discuss how to divide a fart equally.

Title: Pardoner

Station: Clergy

Lines: 669-714

Traits:

- Small voice like a goat
- Could not get a beard
- A “geldyng or a mare” (l. 691)

Tale: Three young men kill each other after they find a treasure.

Title: Host

Station: Middle Class

Lines: 751-757

Tale: None. He is the judge of the tales.

Title: Canon’s Yeoman

Station: Middle Class

Lines: Not in General Prologue. The Canon and his Yeoman ride up to the Pilgrims later.

Tale: The first part is autobiographical. The Yeoman explains that they are failed alchemists. In the second part, a canon tricks a priest into thinking that he has discovered a method for alchemy.

Title: Chaucer the Pilgrim

Station: Unknown

Lines: Not described

Tale: “Sir Topas” Sir Topas is in search of the Elf Queen. He meets a giant and agrees to fight, then rides home to get ready. (Interrupted). “The Tale of Melibee” Three burglars break into Melibee’s house. When they are found, his wife, Dame Prudence, convinces him to let them off free.