

The canterbury tales research paper

[Life](#), [Death](#)



The Canterbury tales is a collection of stories which were written in the Middle English at the end of the 14th Century by Geoffrey Chaucer. Most of the tales are in verses though some of them are also in prose form. The Canterbury stories were part of the story telling contest by a small group of pilgrims who travelled together on a journey from Southwark to Saint Thomas Becket where their shrine was located. Chaucer used the tales and the descriptions of his characters to paint a very critical and ironic paint of the English Community at the time in particular the church of that time. The collection structurally bears the influence of the Decameron which came across Chaucer's first diplomatic visit to Italy. However, Chaucer preferred to tell people his tales with sundry folk other than the fleeing nobles of the Boccaccio.

A question arising as to whether the Canterbury Tales has been finished or not is not yet answered. Chaucer's combined elements of philosophy, quadric-lingual knowledge in law, issues of transmission of the manuscript, and his method of telling the stories by a multi perspective prism make the Canterbury Tales very difficult to interpret and understand. 83 works of the manuscripts emerge from the Early Renaissance period and the late medieval period which are more than any of the vernacular literary texts not including "The prick of conscience". This is strong evidence to portray the popularity of the tales during the century and immediately after the death of Chaucer. Of these manuscripts, 55 of them are thought to have been completed at one time while the other 28 are known to have been so fragmentary to the extent that it was really difficult to suggest whether they were part of the set or whether they were individually copied. The

Canterbury Tales actually are different in major and minor ways from one manuscript to the other. These differences arose as a result of the copy typists' errors while some other people attribute these variations to Chaucer's revision and addition of his work during copying and distribution. The order in which Chaucer had intended his stories to be published and placed still reveal no official and complete existence of the text and up to now no consensus has been reached on this issue.

Manuscript and Textual clues have been attributed to support 2 of the most prosperous methods in the ordering of these Canterbury Tales. These tales are divided into ten scholarly standard editions. In so doing, the tales which comprised a fragment and are closely related because of containing indications of the presentation order usually have a character speaking to and then another one steps in. The connection is however less obvious between the fragments and therefore there arose several orders of the tales.

The earliest manuscripts that survived are not even the originals of Chaucer since even the oldest called "Hengwrt" was after all compiled after the death of Chaucer. This scribe had his own order even though he seemed not to have the full collections of the tales and therefore some of the parts were terribly missing. The "Ellesmere Manuscript" was the most beautiful and most of the editors followed its order from the centuries to this present day. William Caxton's Print edition of 1478 is the latest and it is the first version to be ever published in print. It is up to now being counted as among the 83 earlier manuscripts since it was created from the lost manuscript.

The Canterbury Tales were actually written in the English of the Middle in a

dialect which was associated with London and the spellings closely related to the emergent Standard of Chancery. As of now, there exists no manuscripts which appear in Chaucer's own handwriting and the two manuscripts which were copied around the time of his death were written by a scribe known as Adam Pinkhurst who seemed to work very closely with Chaucer before his death. Therefore, this is a very clear and sure indication that these tales were actually written by Chaucer himself. The last to pronounce at the end of the words were Chaucer's English speaker's generation. The mistakes made by the copy typists who tended to be very inconsistent in copying of the final -e led to the scholars' impression and belief that it was a mistake made by Chaucer himself. But as for now, it has been clearly established that indeed, the " e" was a very crucial part of the morphology that was used by Chaucer so that to be able to distinguish plural adjectives from the singular adjectives and the subjunctive verbs from the indicative ones. The fact that Chaucer's language didn't undergo the Great Vowel Shift made the prominent English language to be very different from the pronunciation of Chaucer's writings. The pronunciation of the vowels of Chaucer as they are supposed to be pronounced today in European languages like Spanish, German or Italy will actually lead to production of pronunciations which are most likely to be Chaucer' than the current Pronunciation of English. Additionally, the sounds are currently written in English but were not pronounced were still able to be pronounced by Chaucer, for example the word knight could have been pronounced by Chaucer as Knixt.

Through a detailed philological research, Chaucer's pronunciation of poetry can now be effectively, fairly and confidently reconstructed. In this IPA

reconstruction, words which ended in vowels were followed by words which began in vowels and then the two vowels were elided into a single syllable. Prior to Chaucer's work, no other sources of tales within the framework of pilgrims who went for pilgrimage has been established. It is however established that some portions and sometimes big portions were borrowed by Chaucer from some earlier versions of the stories and that his work was partly influenced by a state of a literary world in which he existed. In England, the main source of entertainment at the time was story telling and as such, a lot of story telling competitions or contests existed around for a hundred years. The English Pui group of England appointed a judge who would assess the songs of the groups. The winner who won in the Canterbury Tales was awarded a free dinner while the winner of the songs was given a crown. The pilgrims who were on pilgrimage usually chose a " Master of Ceremonies" who would guide and organize the journey for them.

The Canterbury Tales always featured a number of narrators who would tell stories over the long journeys that the Pilgrims undertook. Scholars however find it very unlikely that Chaucer kept a copy of the work in his hands, but instead, they assume that he might have merely read the story of Decameron while on a visit to Italy at one point in his life. The Canterbury Tales appear to have come from several liturgical writings and encyclopedia which included among others, *Summa Praedicatorum* written by John Bromyard and *Adversus Jovinianum* which was written by Jerome.

In genre and structure analysis, the Canterbury Tales are grouped into other categories as other works which were organized into Frame Tales or Frame Narratives. The Canterbury Tales by Chaucer were different from the other

stories because of its intense variations. The theme of this tales was religious in that the story tellers were encouraged to strongly stick on the theme which was stipulated for that day and not to beat about the bush. Diverse collections of people from different backgrounds were brought together for the literary purpose through this idea of pilgrimage which was very unprecedented. By introduction and encouragement of competition among the tales, the readers were able to compare variety of tales and therefore made it easy for Chaucer to show his skills in a variety of literary forms and genres.

The Canterbury Tales structure is largely linear since one story follows another and therefore Chaucer describes the people who will tell the stories other than the tales to be told. This makes it clear that the structure will heavily rely on the characters other than the general moral or theme. This clearly comes to light when the Miller brings an interruption to tell his tale after completion of the Knight's tale. Telling the stories by class is well indicated when the knight gives his story first followed by the monk but when the Miller interrupts, it gives us a clear picture that this structure and order will be dumped in favor of a free and open exchange of the tales in all the classes that are present. Point of views and the general themes arise when the stories are told and the characters respond in their own stories long after the theme has never been addressed. Chaucer's writing of this tale seems to be primarily focused on the tales which are being told other than the pilgrimage itself.

Numerous linguistic styles and rhetorical forms emerge from a variety of the tales written by Chaucer and this show the length of his familiarity. Such

dividing literature and diversity were well encouraged by the medial schools of rhetoric which existed at the time and this perpetuated into the high, middle and the low styles which were well measured by the density of vocabulary and the rhetorical forms. To keep in mind the speakers, the writers were encouraged to the writers were often encouraged to write in ways which would motivate the speakers. Chaucer doesn't show any favoritism to any of the styles since he only considers the readers of the works as being an audience.

Chaucer clearly avoids targeting a single social class or audience of readers but instead puts his major focus on the characters of the tales and wrote the stories with skills which were proportional to their learning and social standing in the society. Even though the subject matter of Miller as the lowest character is so lowbrow, Miller shows a surprising rhetorical ability. The Canterbury Tales were written at a period when there were turbulent times in the English history. The Roman Catholic Church was a subject of a very big controversy known as the “ Great Schism”. These tales are therefore among the earliest English works to be mentioned on paper which was by then a new relative invention which gave way to the circulation of the written word which had never been seen in England during that time.

The Canterbury Tales portray diverse and different views of the Church in England. Many of the Europeans had started to question the authority of the church which had been established after the Black Death and some of them chose less extreme paths, others chose Lollardy and new monastic orders were created and there the church was exposed to corruption following the funny behaviors of the Clergy. Some of the religious figures are included as

the character in “ The Canterbury Tales” and it is very funny that indeed, the setting of these pilgrimages to the Canterbury was religious in nature. Religion therefore becomes one of the major significant themes of Chaucer’s works.

On the other side, the two characters Summoner and the Pardoner whose responsibilities apply the secular power of the church are reflected as being greedy, abusive and corrupt. In Chaucer’s words, A Pardoner was an individual whom someone bought the indulgence of the church so that the sins could be forgiven and who were guilty of abusing their offices for their own selfish gains. The Summoner in Chaucer’s understanding was an officer who brought the sinners in the church court so that the penalties or excommunication could be imposed on them

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