

# The merchant's tale from canterbury tales



Geoffrey Chaucer The Canterbury Tales A merchant's Tale The merchant's tale is one that tells of treachery. The story of an old man who takes a young wife unthinking of anything but his own pleasure in her young body. The story is based on the age old saying " There is no fool like an old fool". The old man who was a knight, despite the well meaning advice of his friends takes a wife in his old age certain that it will prove to be a happy one. He is convinced that a wife is God's gift and will last longer than any other gift of fortune. Even the gods laugh at the naivete of the old man who expects that his young wife will be satisfied and happy with him. His wife May, young and tender perhaps remained unsatisfied with the old man's love making and his bristly beard is shown in contrast to her tender skin. The knight's squire was madly in love with May and when the knight foolishly sends his wife to enquire after the health of his squire Damian, the two shake hands on a treacherous plot to trick the knight. Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales is a delightful collection of stories, that vividly paint the lives of people in 14th. century England. Considered one of his finest works, it is written in poem as well as prose form. The Merchant's Tale is a story told by one of a group of pilgrims who are on their way to visit a shrine at Canterbury. It is an age old tale of infidelity, that is as true today as it was in Chaucer's time. The story of an old man who seeks the pleasures of a young bride, and the young girl who in her time probably had no say in the matter of marrying a man old enough to be her father; or did it for the wealth that she would enjoy on his death. This is true in many societies even today where fathers, lured by the glitter of gold, sell their daughters to the highest bidder without a thought for the girl's happiness. Young empowered women in today's open societies too are not above marrying old men for the monetary benefits that such an

alliance could bring their way. What I find most interesting are the insights into human nature. Chaucer has highlighted human failings and though every human being is a mixture of good and bad, there are times when the evil triumphs over the good. As Prosperine tells her husband Pluto about the words he has attributed to Solomon, when they argue about the duplicity of women, " I pray you take the meaning of the man; He meant that sovereign goodness cannot be. Except in God, Who is the Trinity." (Chaucer Lines 1076 - 1078) The Merchant's Tale I think depicts the failings of being human. Human beings in every age fall prey to flattery and will conveniently disregard advice that they do not like. In the scene when January turns to his brothers Placebo and Justinin for advice about his decision to marry, Placebo praises his courage in being able to marry at his age. " it argues high courage In any man that is advanced in age To take a young wife" (Chaucer Lines 301 to 303) and again " I say it is a wicked man that hinders matrimony" (Chaucer lines 360- 361) while Justinin advises against marriage saying " Perhaps she may your purgatory be!" (Chaucer Line 458) Yet it is Placebo that January heeds. The story also tells how sometimes people one considers close friends can be treacherous and false in their pursuit of their own selfish interests. " O January, drunk of pleasure's brew In marriage, see how now your Damian, Your own trained personal squire, born your man, Wishes and means to do you villainy." (Chaucer Lines 576 - 579) The way society too looks upon a marriage where a man in his dotage takes a young bride, seems to be the same in every age. " When tender youth has wedded stooping age, There is such mirth that no one may it show;" (Chaucer Lines 526 - 527) is a revealing comment on the way human beings in any age view such an alliance. References Chaucer Geoffrey The Canterbury Tales A

Merchant's Tale Retrieved from <http://www.librarius.com/cantales.htm>

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