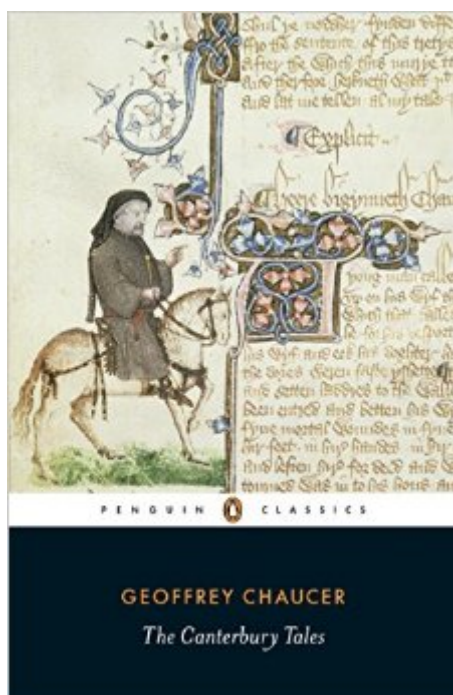


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# The Canterbury Tales (original-spelling Middle English Edition) (Penguin Classics)



## Synopsis

One of the greatest and most ambitious works in English literature, in the original Middle English *The Canterbury Tales* depicts a storytelling competition between pilgrims drawn from all ranks of society. The tales are as various as the pilgrims themselves, encompassing comedy, pathos, tragedy, and cynicism. The Miller and the Reeve express their mutual antagonism in a pair of comic stories combining sex and trickery; in *“The Shipman’s Tale,”* a wife sells her favors to a monk. Others draw on courtly romance and fantasy: the Knight tells of rivals competing for the love of the same woman, and the Squire describes a princess who can speak to birds. In these twenty-four tales, Chaucer displays a dazzling range of literary styles and conjures up a wonderfully vivid picture of medieval life. This is a freshly established Middle English text with standardized spelling and punctuation and on-page glossing. It features an introduction by Jill Mann, a chronology of Chaucer’s life and works, detailed explanatory notes, suggestions for further reading, a full glossary, and a bibliography. For more than sixty-five years, Penguin has been the leading publisher of classic literature in the English-speaking world. With more than 1,500 titles, Penguin Classics represents a global bookshelf of the best works throughout history and across genres and disciplines. Readers trust the series to provide authoritative texts enhanced by introductions and notes by distinguished scholars and contemporary authors, as well as up-to-date translations by award-winning translators.

## Book Information

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## Customer Reviews

Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* (Original-Spelling Edition). Edited by Jill Mann. Penguin Classics,

2005. ISBN 014042234X. The Canterbury Tales itself needs no review, as Chaucer is universally acknowledged to be the greatest English poet after Shakespeare and Milton. As Chaucer's Prologue explains, the Tales are stories told by pilgrims en route to Canterbury. They range from tales of courtly love to bawdy farce to fable. Chaucer is a storyteller, and it might surprise some modern people just how entertaining a seven-hundred-year-old collection of stories might be. Unfortunately, the English language has changed since Chaucer's time, making it difficult for modern English readers to enjoy the Canterbury Tales without a bit of work. Chaucer wrote in a dialect of Middle English (ME) which is a direct ancestor of Present Day English (PDE). This relationship makes Chaucer much easier to read than other dialects of ME further removed from PDE, such as that in which the Gawain poet wrote. Chaucer's vocabulary, consisting mainly of words derived from French and Old English, is also easier than the Gawain poet's. With a little concentration, the modern reader will probably find many ME words that looked unintelligible are actually similar to PDE words. (This edition includes a note on "Chaucer's Language" which explains Middle English grammar well, but due to its use of grammatical terminology, it will be helpful only to those who already know what such things as pluperfect and genitive singular mean.) Getting used to Middle English will take time, but it's worth it. Now for this particular edition. I found it well edited, with glosses at the bottom of each page and detailed endnotes, which occupy about a third of the volume.

There is no getting around the fact that I am one of those individuals who struggled with this work and struggled with Middle English. I was first introduced, to some degree, to this early ancestor of our language in high school. I am sorry to report that most of it went well over my head, for the most part due to laziness on my part. Later in college I received strong doses of Middle English, and strong doses of this particular work. Being older helped; there was greater understanding on my part, but still, I felt I was missing much. Yes, I did the work and produced the grades as all must do if they want to graduate, but still, I just did not get it. I am also one of those people who has been blessed or cursed, depending on how you look at it, with an acute literary curiosity and can be at times, rather tenacious when I go after something. I dearly wanted to have some understanding (at least more than I had) of this particular work. Enter this book!! I have never been and never will be, nor do I have a desire to be an expert in Middle English. That being said though, and in lieu of my statement above, I have always been drawn to this particular work and have searched through many different translations and editions of Chaucer's writing to find just the right one, the one I could connect with. I found it in this chunky edition. As has been stated, it does take some work; but that is

okay as this edition is well footnoted, has a wonderful glossary of explanatory notes and gives the full tale, which makes the reading much less intimidating for someone like me. When I feel the need, this is the volume I turn to. Now I have found that if I hear something and then read it, I get far more out of the work. I have approached this work with a three pronged attack.

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