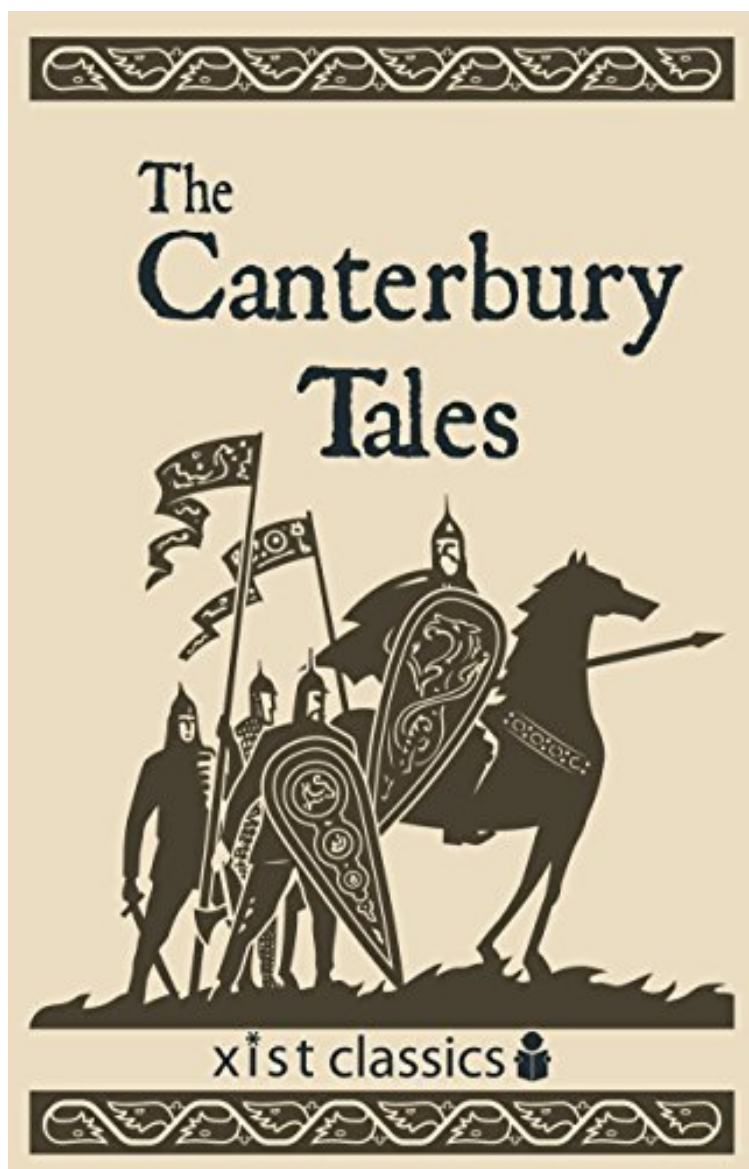


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The Canterbury Tales



Par Geoffery Chaucer
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Description :

Prsentation de l'diteurWhen a group of pilgrims bound for Canterbury Cathedral meet on the road, they agree to tell stories to pass the time. Each story reflects a different segment of society, from the pious to the bawdy, and has given countless readers a look into fourteenth-century English life. The stories can be read on their own or as part of the entire work and have been translated from their original middle English by D. Lain Purves.Xist Publishing is a digital-first publisher. Xist Publishing creates books for the touchscreen generation and is dedicated to helping everyone develop a lifetime love of reading, no matter what form it takes Get your next Xist Classic title for Kindle here: <http://amzn.to/1A7cKKI> Find all our our books for Kindle here: <http://amzn.to/1PooxLl> Sign up for the Xist Publishing Newsletterhere. Find more great titles

on our website. .com On a spring day in April--sometime in the waning years of the 14th century--29 travelers set out for Canterbury on a pilgrimage to the shrine of Saint Thomas Beckett. Among them is a knight, a monk, a prioress, a plowman, a miller, a merchant, a clerk, and an oft-widowed wife from Bath. Travel is arduous and wearing; to maintain their spirits, this band of pilgrims entertains each other with a series of tall tales that span the spectrum of literary genres. Five hundred years later, people are still reading Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*. If you haven't yet made the acquaintance of the Franklin, the Pardoner, or the Squire because you never learned Middle English, take heart: this edition of the *Tales* has been translated into modern idiom. From the heroic romance of "The Knight's Tale" to the low farce embodied in the stories of the Miller, the Reeve, and the Merchant, Chaucer treated such universal subjects as love, sex, and death in poetry that is simultaneously witty, insightful, and poignant. The *Canterbury Tales* is a grand tour of 14th-century English mores and morals--one that modern-day readers will enjoy.

Extrait

The Knights Tale 1 Introduction 1 The Knights Tale, which mostly takes place in ancient Athens, is the conflicted love story of two royal Theban cousins who love the same woman. Because *The Knights Tale* is by far the longest and most complex of the *Canterbury Tales* presented in this volume, a quick summary of the action of the four parts of the tale may help readers encountering it for the first time:

Part I. On his way back to Athens with his bride, Hypolita, and his sister-in-law, Emily, Duke Theseus responds to the pleas of some grieving widows by defeating Creon, the tyrant of Thebes. Among the bodies of the defeated army, he finds near death the royal cousins Palamon and Arcite. Rather than kill them, Theseus takes them back to Athens and places them in prison. From their barred prison window, the two young men see the lovely Emily and both fall in love with her. Arcite after a time is released but banished from Athens on pain of death, while Palamon remains in prison. The two are envious of each others condition.

Part II. Arcite disguises himself as a common laborer and comes back to Athens, where he gets a job working in Emilys household. Meanwhile, Palamon escapes from prison, and the rival cousins chance to meet in a grove near Athens. While Palamon and Arcite are fighting a bloody duel, Theseus, Hypolita, and Emily, out hunting, by chance come upon them in a grove. At first angry, Theseus soon relents, sets both of his enemies free, and invites them to return in a year, each with a hundred knights, to take part in a glorious tournament, with Emilys hand going to the winner.

Part III. Theseus builds a splendid amphitheater in preparation for the tournament and places on its west, east, and north borders elaborately decorated temples to Mars, Venus, and Diana. When the two troops of warriors come back for the tournament, the three principals each pray to one of the planetary deities. Palamon prays to Venus, not for victory but for the hand of Emily. Emily prays to Diana to be spared marriage to either Palamon or Arcite, praying instead to remain a maiden always. Arcite prays to Mars for victory in the tournament.

Part IV. Just before the tournament begins Theseus declares that he wants no lives to be lost and restricts the kinds of weapons that may be used. He sets out the rules of the game, the primary one being that the winning side will be the one that takes the loser to a stake at the end of the field. After vigorous fighting, Arcites men drag the wounded Palamon to the stake. No sooner is Arcite declared the winner than Saturn commands Pluto, god of the underworld, to send a diabolical fury to frighten Arcites horse. Arcite is thrown and crushed by his own saddle bow. After an elaborate funeral and the passage of some years, Theseus tells Palamon and Emily to marry, and they happily do so. Arching over the story of the warriors and lovers down on the earth below is a heavenly conflict among the gods or, more precisely, among the planetary or astrological influences that were thought to control the affairs of men. Indeed, a key feature of *The Knights Tale* is the prayers of the three principal characters to these influences. Closely tied up with the question of whether Palamon or Arcite will get the young woman they both love is the question of how the powerful Saturn will settle the conflicting demands on him of Mars, Venus, and Diana. Chaucers main source for *The Knights Tale* is Giovanni Boccaccios several-hundred-page-long *Teseida*. Readers who are upset at having to read Chaucers long and leisurely story of Palamon, Arcite, and Emily should thank Chaucer for streamlining a story that is less than a quarter the length of Boccaccios Italian story of Palemone, Arcita, and Emilia. Chaucer reduced the story in lots of ways, particularly by staying focused on the love story. He cut out, for example, Boccaccios long opening description of Theseuss journey to the land of the s, his defeat of them, and his acquiring as his bride the ian queen Hypolita. But Chaucer did more than reduce the *Teseida*, which focuses on Arcite as the main character, who in Boccaccio is almost a tragic figure who makes the mistake of praying to the wrong deity. For Chaucer, Palamon is raised to equal importance, if not more importance, than his rival. And Chaucer transforms the vain and coquettish Emilia of his source into a more innocent object of the love of rival cousins. One of Chaucers most important changes was to give the story a philosophical overlay by

introducing into it the ideas of the ancient philosopher Boethius. One of Boethius's key ideas was that there is a great God who designs a far better plan for human beings than they could possibly design for themselves. That design sometimes involves what looks like adversity, but the adversity is always (for Boethius) part of a design that leads to happiness. We should then, according to Boethius, not resist or fight against the troubles that come our way, but cheerfully accept them, trusting that in the end things will work out for the best. The ending of *The Knights Tale*, then, reflects this reassuring philosophy by showing that although the three principal characters all seem at first not to get what they want most, in the end all of them do get what they want, or perhaps something even better. For this and the other tales in this volume, readers should reread the portrait of the teller given by Chaucer in the General Prologue. The portrait of the Knight (lines 4378) shows him to be the idealized Christian soldier who fought with valor and honor at most of the important late-fourteenth-century battles against heathens. We know less of his marital than of his martial life, but he does have a son who is with him on this pilgrimage. The Knight seems, all in all, an ideal teller for the long tale of war, romance, honor, and philosophy that Chaucer assigns to him.

Notes Part I Femenye (line 8). A race of warlike women, led by Hypolita, who decided that they could live and protect themselves without the help of men. They are sometimes called Amazons, their land Scythia. Saturne, Juno (47071). Two forces that Palamon blames for the setbacks that Thebes has suffered. Saturn is the powerful planet. Juno is the jealous wife of Jupiter, who had made love to two Theban women. Part II Hereos (516). Eros, a sickness associated with the intense emotion of falling in love. manye (516). A kind of melancholy madness or mania brought on by the frustration of his love for an inaccessible woman. Argus (532). In classical mythology, the jealous Juno had set the hundred-eyed Argus as guard to Io, who was a lover of her husband, Jupiter. Argus was killed by Mercury (see line 527), who first sang all of Argus's hundred eyes to sleep. Cadme and Amphion (688). Cadmus and Amphion are the legendary founders of the city of Thebes, home to Palamon and Arcite. regne of Trace (780). The reference in this and the next lines is to the Thracian kingdom in which a hunter prepares himself at a mountain pass to meet a charging lion or bear. Part III Citheroun (1078). Venus's supposed mountainous island of Cytherea, though Chaucer may have confused the name with the name of a different location. Ydelnesse, Salamon, Hercules, Medea, Circes, Turnus, Cresus (108288). Various literary, historical, and classical allusions, most of them demonstrating the follies and miseries associated with the snares of love. qualm (1156). Probably a reference to the pestilence or bubonic plague that killed millions in Europe during Chaucer's lifetime. See also line 1611 below, where Saturn claims to have the power to send the plague. The reference to the bubonic plague here is anachronistic, since *The Knights Tale* is set in the classical pre-Christian era. Julius, Nero, Antonius (117374). Three famous rulers slaughtered in time of war, exemplary of the mayhem and death caused by mighty Mars. The last is Marcus Aurelius Antoninus Caracalla, a Roman emperor murdered in AD 217. Puella, Rubeus (1187). Two astrological references to Mars as cast by a complicated process called geomancy, a pseudoscience involving dots and lines. Calistopee, Dane, Attheon, Atthalante, Meleagre (1198 1213). Various classical and legendary allusions to hunters or the hunted whose unfortunate tales are depicted on the walls of the temple of Diana, goddess of the hunt. griffon (1275). A griffin was in Greek mythology a fearsome beast with the head and wings of an eagle on the body of a lion. in hir heure (1359). Palamon picks his hour of prayer carefully. The various planets were supposed to have special powers on certain hours of the day, hours in which it was particularly propitious to make prayers for their astrological influence. Venus would have had special strength on the twenty-third hour of Sunday night (see line 1351), when it was not yet two hours before dawn on Monday morning (line 1352). the thridde heure inequal (1413). The medieval astrological day was divided into twenty-four inequal or planetary hours. In this system the time between dawn and dusk was divided equally into twelve hours, the time between dusk and the following dawn into twelve more.

Except at the two equinoxes, when the daylight hours would have been exactly equal in length to the nighttime hours (that is, sixty minutes), the daylight hours would have been longer or shorter than the hours of darkness, depending on the time of the year, thus the inequality. Emily prays to Diana on the third inequal hour after Palamon prayed to Venus. That would have been the first hour of Monday (moon day), or the dawn hour, the hour at which Diana's power would have been the greatest. Like Palamon, Emily picks her prayer time very carefully. Stace of Thebes (1436). The Thebaid of Statius, though Chaucer's more direct source was actually Boccaccio's *Teseida*, which he does not mention by name here or elsewhere. Chaucer was often eager to claim an ancient source, not a contemporary one. Attheon (1445). While hunting, Acteon accidentally saw Diana while she was bathing. In her anger she changed him into a stag, which Acteon's hunting dogs then killed, not realizing that they were killing their master. See lines 120710 above, where

Acteons unhappy story is artistically summarized on the walls of Dianas temple. thre formes (1455). As suggested in lines 143942 above, the goddess was imagined to have appeared in various forms. The three referred to here are probably Luna, the moon (in the heavens), the chaste Diana, the huntress (on earth), and Proserpina, the reluctant wife of Pluto (in the underworld). the nexte heure of Mars (1509). Marss next hour, the hour that Arcite would have selected for his prayer to Mars, would have been the fourth hour of that Monday. Part IV al that Monday (1628). Monday is given over to partying and celebrations so that the tournament itself takes place the next day, on a Tuesday, or Marss day (Mardi in French). Since Tuesday is the day when the influence of Mars is strongest, it would not have surprised a medieval audience that Arcite, who had prayed to Mars, wins the tournament. Galgopheye (1768). Probably a valley in another part of Greece, perhaps Gargaphia. Belmarye (1772). Probably Benmarin in Morocco but, like the previous name, perhaps just meant to be an exotic place where wild animals were rampant and dangerous. furie infernal (1826). A fury was an avenging spirit usually confined to the underworld but released from time to time to influence the affairs of men, sometimes to see that justice was done. vertu expulsif (1891). This virtue involved the ability to expel certain harmful poisons from the body. This complex account of the mechanics of Arcites dying, the technical details of which are not important here, shows Chaucers awareness of the medical terminology of his day. Firste Moevere (2129). This First Mover who creates the links in the great chain of love, though later in the passage identified as Jupiter, may perhaps be read as an anachronistic stand-in for the Judeo-Christian godhead, the all- loving deity who stands above and beyond the planetary gods and goddesses that seem to control the fates of men. This prime mover determines the number of years individual men and women get to live on earth and arranges things better for them than they could arrange them for themselves.