

Abbreviations of the *Canterbury Tales*

- Cl The Clerk's Prologue and Tale
Co The Cook's Prologue and Tale
CY The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale
Fri The Friar's Prologue and Tale
Fkl The Squire-Franklin Link, The Franklin's Prologue and
Tale
GP The General Prologue
Kn The Knight's Tale
Mch The Merchant's Prologue, Tale, and Epilogue
Mcp The Manciple's Prologue and Tale
Mel The Thopas-Melibee Link and The Tale of Melibee
Mil The Miller's Prologue and Tale
Mk The Monk's Prologue and Tale
ML The Man of Law's Prologue, Tale [and Epilogue]
NP The Nun's Priest's Prologue, Tale [and Epilogue]
Pard The Physician-Pardoner Link, The Pardoner's Prologue
and Tale
Pars The Parson's Prologue and Tale
Phys The Physician's Tale
Pri The Shipman-Prioress Link, The Prioress's Prologue and
Tale
Retr Chaucer's Retractions
Rv The Reeve's Prologue and Tale
Sh The Shipman's Tale
SN The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale
Sq The Squire's Prologue and Tale
Sum The Summoner's Prologue and Tale

THE GENERAL PROLOGUE

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
 The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
 And bathed every veine in swich licour
 Of which vertu engendred is the flour,
 Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth 5
 Inspired hath in every holt and heeth
 The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne
 Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,
 And smale foweles maken melodye,
 That slepen al the night with open eye – 10
 So priketh hem nature in hir corages –
 Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,
 And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,
 To ferne halwes, kouthe in sondry londes;
 And specially from every shires ende 15
 Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,
 The holy blisful martyr for to seke
 That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke.
 Bifel that in that sesoun on a day,
 In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay, 20
 Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
 To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
 At night was come into that hostelrye
 Wel nine and twenty in a compaignye

- 1 his shoures soote its sweet showers 3 veine sap-vessel licour liquid, sap
 4 Of which vertu by whose power 5 Zephirus the West Wind eek also
 6 Inspired blown on, breathed life into holt and heeth wood and field
 7 croppes buds, shoots yonge sonne new sun (n.) 8 Has completed its half
 course in Aries (n.) 9 foweles birds 11 corages hearts, spirits
 13 palmeres pilgrims (n.) strondes shores, countries
 14 ferne halwes distant shrines kouthe renowned, famous
 17 blisful martyr blessed martyr (St Thomas Becket) (n.) 18 holpen helped
 seeke ill 21 wenden go 22 corage spirit

25 Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
 In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
 That toward Caunterbury wolden ride.
 The chambres and the stables weren wide,
 And wel we weren esed atte beste;
 30 And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste,
 So hadde I spoken with hem everychon
 That I was of hir felaweshipe anon,
 And made forward erly for to rise,
 To take oure wey theras I yow devise.

35 But nathelees, whil I have time and space,
 Er that I ferther in this tale pace,
 Me thinketh it acordant to resoun
 To telle yow al the condicioun
 Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
 40 And whiche they weren and of what degree,
 And eek in what array that they were inne;
 And at a knight than wol I first biginne.

A KNIGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
 That fro the time that he first bigan
 45 To riden out, he loved chivalrye,
 Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye.
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,
 And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,
 As wel in Cristendom as hethenesse,
 50 And evere honoured for his worthinesse.
 At Alisaundre he was whan it was wonne;
 Ful ofte time he hadde the bord bigonne

25 by aventure by chance yfalle fallen 27 wolden intended to
 29 esed atte beste accommodated to our heart's content
 31 everychon every one 32 anon immediately 33 made forward made an
 agreement 34 theras where devise tell 35 nathelees nevertheless
 36 pace proceed 37 It seems reasonable to me 40 degree rank
 41 array clothing 44 fro from 46 Trouthe loyalty, fidelity
 fredom magnanimity, generosity curteisye courtly behaviour
 47 werre war 48 ferre further 49 hethenesse heathen countries
 51 Alisaundre Alexandria (n.) 52 the bord bigonne sat in the place of
 honour at the head of the table (n.)

Notes

These Notes provide some guidance towards critical interpretation of the *Canterbury Tales*, but are not intended as a full literary-critical commentary, or as a summary of current critical opinion. Their primary aims are to explain places in the text that a modern reader will find hard to understand, to indicate the most important literary sources and traditions on which Chaucer drew, and to indicate some of the more interesting textual questions. As far as possible within the inevitable space restrictions, they aim to contain relevant information within themselves, rather than simply referring the reader to sources where it may be found.

References in the Notes to works of Chaucer other than the *Canterbury Tales* are to *The Riverside Chaucer*, general editor L. D. Benson (Boston, 1987; Oxford, 1988). *Troilus and Criseyde* may also be consulted in the Penguin Classics edition by Barry Windeatt (London, 2003). Abbreviated References are used in the Notes for works that are cited in connection with two or more different tales. Works cited more than once within the notes *on the same tale* (and accompanying prologue/epilogue) are cited in full on their first occurrence, and thereafter in abbreviated form. Classical authors are cited from editions in the Loeb Classical Library; in such cases, details of editors, place and date of publication are not supplied (with the exception of works included in the *Minor Latin Poets* volume, which may be traced through the Abbreviated References list). The same is true for patristic and medieval Latin authors whose works are cited from the series Corpus Christianorum Series Latina (CCSL), Corpus Christianorum Continuatio Medievalis (CCCM) or Corpus Scriptorum Ecclesiasticorum Latinorum (CSEL). Biblical references are to the Latin Vulgate Bible (which includes the apocryphal books omitted from the King James Authorized Version of 1611); however, I follow the Authorized Version in referring to 1-2 Samuel, followed by 1-2 Kings, rather than 1-4 Kings, and use its more familiar spellings for the

books of the Bible. English translations are generally taken from the Douai-Rheims version of the Vulgate, though they have occasionally been adjusted for the sake of greater clarity or to bring out correspondences with the relevant passage in Chaucer. In textual notes, an asterisk against the headword (lemma) before the square bracket means that an emendation of the El/Hg text is supported by readings in other manuscripts. The abbreviations for grammatical forms are those used in the Glossary. Other abbreviations used are:

AN Anglo-Norman

AV The Holy Bible (Authorized King James Version)

BL British Library

ME Middle English

MS, MSS manuscript, manuscripts

OF Old French

GENERAL PROLOGUE

The portraits that make up the General Prologue are so vivid that scholars were long convinced that Chaucer was here drawing not on literary sources but on contemporary life. In this belief, J. M. Manly attempted to identify real-life models for the Host and several of the pilgrims (see nn. to GP 326, 410; Co 4336, 4358), and claimed that Chaucer's audience would probably have recognized more. Only with the Host, however, is the evidence for a real-life model strong, and it is now generally recognized that the General Prologue is structured on the model of the literary genre known as estates satire, in which the various classes of society are reviewed in turn (Mann, *Estates Satire*). The list of social classes included in the General Prologue is longer and more varied than is often the case, but the details of the pilgrims' appearance and behaviour are largely those associated with their estate or profession. Their portraits conjure up the everyday realities of their professional or working lives. Unlike the writers of estates satire, however, Chaucer refrains for the most part from moral criticism, and also withholds the information on which such criticism might be based. His own responses to the pilgrims, as narrator and their fictional companion, are based on a general criterion of sociability. The complex responses to each pilgrim which are constructed and manipulated by the pilgrim-narrator, often by adopting their own point of view on the world, animate the estates stereotypes and create the impression that they are three-dimensional figures (*ibid.*, pp. 190–202).

- 1-14 The description of spring in these lines closely resembles a passage in Book IV of Guido delle Colonne's *History of the Destruction of Troy* (ed. Griffin, pp. 34-5), a work on which Chaucer drew for his *Troilus and Criseyde*:

It was the time when the aging sun in its oblique circle of the zodiac had already entered into the sign of Aries, in which the equal length of nights and days is celebrated in the equinox of spring; when the weather begins to entice eager mortals into the pleasant air; when the ice has melted, and the breezes [*zephiri*] ripple the flowing streams; when the springs gush forth in fragile bubbles; when moistures exhaled from the bosom of the earth are raised up to the tops of the trees and branches, for which reason the seeds sprout, the crops grow, and the meadows bloom, embellished with flowers of various colors; when the trees on every side are decked with renewed leaves; when earth is adorned with grass, and the birds sing and twitter in music of sweet harmony. Then almost the middle of the month of April had passed . . .

(tr. Meek, pp. 33-4)

In Guido, however, spring is the prelude to war rather than pilgrimage.

- 2 *droghte of March*: The often expressed view that Chaucer is here basing himself on literary convention rather than actual weather conditions in England has been convincingly contested by J. A. Hart, *Texas Studies in Literature and Language*, 4 (1963), 525-9, and A. S. Daley, *ChauR*, 4 (1970), 171-9.
- 7 *the yonge sonne*: The sun is 'young' because it has just passed the spring equinox, which is the beginning of the solar year.
- 8 *the Ram*: The zodiacal sign of Aries (Latin for 'ram'). (On the zodiac, see n. to Mch 2222-4.) The sun passes through Aries from 12 March to 11 April; the opening reference to April shows that 'his halve cours' cannot mean 'half his course' (which would place the date around the end of March), but must mean that the sun has completed the half of its course that fell in April (North, *Chaucer's Universe*, p. 132). This supposition is confirmed by ML 5-6, which gives the date as 18 April.

And how would you know when [the Ram was half-way through Aries]? You might have in the church or town hall a zodiac sun-dial, such as can be seen on the wall of the Royal Observatory at