

# The Prologue to the Canterbury Tales

## Lines 1–200

Geoffrey Chaucer (1340(?)–1400)

WHAN that Aprille with his shoures soote  
The droghte of Marche hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour,  
Of which vertu engendred is the flour;  
Whan Zephirus eek with his swete breeth 5  
Inspired hath in every holt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halfe cours y-ronne,  
And smale fowles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the night with open ye, 10  
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages:  
Than longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmers for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, couthe in sondry londes;  
And specially, from every shires ende 15  
Of Engelond, to Caunterbury they wende,  
The holy blisful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen, whan that they were seke.  
Bifel that, in that sesoun on a day, 20  
In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay  
Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage  
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,  
At night was come in-to that hostelrye  
Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye,  
Of sondry folk, by aventure y-falle 25  
In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,  
That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde;  
The chambres and the stables weren wyde,  
And wel we weren esed atte beste.  
And shortly, whan the sonne was to reste, 30  
So hadde I spoken with hem everichon,  
That I was of hir felawshipe anon,  
And made forward erly for to ryse,  
To take our wey, ther as I yow devyse.  
But natheles, whyl I have tyme and space, 35  
Er that I ferther in this tale pace,  
Me thinketh it acordaunt to resoun,  
To telle yew al the condicioun

Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,  
 And whiche they weren, and of what degree; 40  
 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 tyme that he first bigan  
 To ryden out, he loved chivalrye, 45  
 Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye.  
 Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,  
 And thereto hadde he riden (no man ferre )  
 As wel in cristendom as hethenesse,  
 And evere honoured for his worthinesse. 50  
 At Alisaundre he was, whan it was wonne;  
 Ful ofte tyme he hadde the bord bigonne  
 Aboven alle naciouns in Pruce.  
 In Lettow hadde he reysed and in Ruce,  
 No cristen man so ofte of his degree. 55  
 In Gernade at the sege eek hadde he be  
 Of Algezir, and riden in Belmarye.  
 At Lyeys was he, and at Satalye,  
 Whan they were wonne; and in the Grete See  
 At many a noble aryve hadde he be, 60  
 At mortal batailles hadde he been fiftene,  
 And foughten for our feith at Tramissene  
 In listes thryes, and ay slayn his foo.  
 This ilke worthy knight hadde been also  
 Somtyme with the lord of Palatye, 65  
 Ageyn another hethen in Turkye:  
 And everemore he hadde a sovereyn prys.  
 And though that he were worthy, he was wys,  
 And of his port as meek as is a mayde.  
 He nevere yet no vileinye ne sayde 70  
 In al his lyf, un-to no maner wight.  
 He was a verray parfit gentil knight.  
 But for to tellen yow of his array,  
 His hors were goode, but he was nat gay.  
 Of fustian he wered a gipoun 75  
 Al bismotered with his habergeoun.  
 For he was late y-come from his viage,  
 And wente for to doon his pilgrimage.  
 With him ther was his sone, a yong SQUYER, 80  
 A lovyer, and a lusty bachelor,  
 With lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse.  
 Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.  
 Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,  
 And wonderly delivere, and greet of strengthe.

And he hadde been somtyme in chivachye, 85  
 In Flaundres, in Artoys, and Picardye,  
 And born him wel, as of so litel space,  
 In hope to stonden in his lady grace.  
 Embrouded was he, as it were a mede  
 Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and rede. 90  
 Singinge he was, or floytinge, al the day;  
 He was as fresh as is the month of May.  
 Short was his goune, with sleeves longe and wyde.  
 Wel coude he sitte on hors, and faire ryde.  
 He coude songes make and wel endyte, 95  
 Iuste and eek daunce, and wel purtreye and wryte.  
 So hote he lovede, that by nightertale  
 He sleep namore than doth a nightingale.  
 Curteys he was, lowly, and servisable,  
 And carf biforn his fader at the table. 100  
 A YEMAN hadde he, and servaunts namo  
 At that tyme, for him liste ryde so;  
 And he was clad in cote and hood of grene;  
 A sheef of pecok arwes brighte and kene  
 Under his belt he bar ful thriftily, 105  
 (Wel coude he dresse his takel yemanly:  
 His arwes drouped noght with fetheres lowe),  
 And in his hand he bar a mighty bowe.  
 A not-heed hadde he, with a broun visage.  
 Of wode-craft wel coude he al the usage. 110  
 Upon his arm he bar a gay bracer,  
 And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler,  
 And on that other syde a gay daggere,  
 Harneised wel, and sharp as point of spere;  
 A Cristofre on his brest of silver shene 115  
 An horn he bar, the bawdrik was of grene;  
 A forster was he, soothly, as I gesse.  
 Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,  
 That of hir smyling was ful simple and coy; 120  
 Hir gretteste ooth was but by seynt Loy;  
 And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.  
 Ful wel she song the service divyne,  
 Entuned in hir nose ful semely;  
 And Frensh she spak ful faire and fetisly,  
 After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, 125  
 For Frensh of Paris was to hir unknowe.  
 At mete wel y-taught was she with-alle;  
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,  
 Ne wette hir fingres in hir sauce depe.  
 Wel coude she carie a morsel, and wel kepe, 130

That no drope ne fille up-on hir brest.  
 In curteisye was set ful moche hir lest.  
 Hir over lippe wyped she so clene,  
 That in hir coppe was no ferthing sene  
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte. 135  
 Ful semely after hir mete she raughte,  
 And sikerly she was of greet disport,  
 And ful plesaunt, and amiable of port,  
 And peyned hir to countrefete chere  
 Of court, and been estatlich of manere, 140  
 And to ben holden digne of reverence.  
 But, for to speken of hir conscience,  
 She was so charitable and so pitous,  
 She wolde wepe, if that she sawe a mous  
 Caught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde. 145  
 Of smale houndes had she, that she fedde  
 With rosted flesh, or milk and wastel breed.  
 But sore weep she if oon of hem were deed,  
 Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte:  
 And al was conscience and tendre herte. 150  
 Ful semely hir wimpel pinched was;  
 Hir nose tretys; hir eyen greye as glas;  
 Hir mouth ful smal, and ther-to softe and reed;  
 But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed.  
 It was almost a spanne brood, I trowe; 155  
 For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.  
 Ful fetis was hir cloke, as I was war.  
 Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar  
 A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene;  
 And ther-on heng a broche of gold ful shene, 160  
 On which ther was first write a crowned A,  
 And after, *Amor vincit omnia*.  
 Another NONNE with hir hadde she,  
 That was hir chapeleyne, and PREESTES thre.  
 A MONK ther was, a fair for the maistrye, 165  
 An out-rydere, that lovede venerye;  
 A manly man, to been an abbot able.  
 Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable:  
 And, whan he rood, men mighte his brydel here  
 Ginglen in a whistling wynd as clere, 170  
 And eek as loude as dooth the chapel-belle,  
 Ther-as this lord was keper of the celle.  
 The reule of seint Maure or of seint Beneit,  
 By-cause that it was old and som-del streit,  
 This ilke monk leet olde thinges pace, 175  
 And held after the newe world the space.

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,  
That seith, that hunters been nat holy men;  
Ne that a monk, whan he is cloisterlees  
Is likned til a fish that is waterlees; 180  
This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloistre.  
But thilke text held he nat worth an oistre.  
And I seyde his opinioun was good.  
What sholde he studie, and make him-selven wood,  
Upon a book in cloistre alwey to poure, 185  
Or swinken with his handes, and laboure,  
As Austin bit? How shal the world be served?  
Lat Austin have his swink to him reserved.  
Therfor he was a pricasour aright;  
Grehoundes he hadde, as swifte as fowel in flight; 190  
Of priking and of hunting for the hare  
Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare.  
I seigh his sleeves purfiled at the hond  
With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond;  
And, for to festne his hood under his chin, 195  
He hadde of gold y-wroght a curious pin:  
A love-knot in the gretter ende ther was.  
His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,  
And eek his face, as he hadde been anoint.  
He was a lord ful fat and in good point; 200