

1380

CANTERBURY TALES

THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE

Geoffrey Chaucer

Chaucer, Geoffrey (1343-1400) - English poet, known as the most important writer of Middle English. His Canterbury Tales (~1380) are told by traveling pilgrims who meet at a tavern and have a storytelling contest to pass the time.

Each tale is preceded by an introductory prologue. The Miller's Prologue - Introduces the bawdy, drunken Miller, who leads the company on his bagpipes. The Host asked the Monk to follow the Knight's Tale, but the drunken Miller insists on telling his.

THE MILLERS PROLOGUE

The Words between the Host and the Miller
 Now when the knight had thus his story told,
 In all the rout there was nor young nor old
 But said it was a noble story, well

Worthy to be kept in mind to tell;
 And specially the gentle folk, each one.
 Our host, he laughed and swore, "So may I run,
 But this goes well; unbuckled is the mail;

Let's see now who can tell another tale:
 For certainly the game is well begun.
 Now shall you tell, sir monk, if't can be done,
 Something with which to pay for the knight's tale."

The miller, who with drinking was all pale,
 So that unsteadily on his horse he sat,
 He would not take off either hood or hat,
 Nor wait for any man, in courtesy,

But all in Pilate's voice began to cry,
 And by the Arms and Blood and Bones he swore,
 "I have a noble story in my store,
 With which I will requite the good knight's tale."

Our host saw, then, that he was drunk with ale,
 And said to him: "Wait, Robin, my dear brother,
 Some better man shall tell us first another:
 Submit and let us work on profitably."

"Now by God's soul," cried he, "that will not I!
 For I will speak, or else I'll go my way."
 Our host replied: "Tell on, then, till doomsday!
 You are a fool, your wit is overcome."

"Now hear me," said the miller, "all and some!
 But first I make a protestation round
 That I'm quite drunk, I know it by my sound:
 And therefore, if I slander or mis-say,

Blame it on ale of Southwark, so I pray;

For I will tell a legend and a life
 Both of a carpenter and of his wife,
 And how a scholar set the good wright's cap."

The reeve replied and said: "Oh, shut your trap,
 Let be your ignorant drunken ribaldry!
 It is a sin, and further, great folly
 To asperse any man, or him defame,

And, too, to bring upon a man's wife shame.
 There are enough of other things to say."
 This drunken miller spoke on in his way,
 And said: "Oh, but my dear brother Oswald,

The man who has no wife is no cuckold.
 But I say not, thereby, that you are one:
 Many good wives there are, as women run,
 And ever a thousand good to one that's bad,

As well you know yourself, unless you're mad.
 Why are you angry with my story's cue?
 I have a wife, begad, as well as you,
 Yet I'd not, for the oxen of my plow,

Take on my shoulders more than is enow,
 By judging of myself that I am one;
 I will believe full well that I am none.
 A husband must not be inquisitive

Of God, nor of his wife, while she's alive.
 So long as he may find God's plenty there,
 For all the rest he need not greatly care."
 What should I say, except this miller rare

He would forgo his talk for no man there,
 But told his churlish tale in his own way:
 I think I'll here re-tell it, if I may.
 And therefore, every gentle soul,

I pray That for God's love you'll hold not what
 I say Evilly meant, but that I must rehearse,
 All of their tales, the better and the worse,
 Or else prove false to some of my design.

Therefore, who likes not this, let him, in fine,
Turn over page and choose another tale:
For he shall find enough, both great and small,
Of stories touching on gentility,

And holiness, and on morality;
And blame not me if you do choose amiss.
The miller was a churl, you well know this;
So was the reeve, and many another more,

And ribaldry they told from plenteous store.
Be then advised, and hold me free from blame;
Men should not be too serious at a game.

HERE ENDS THE PROLOGUE