



The Canterbury Tales: A Retelling by Peter Ackroyd (Penguin Classics Deluxe Edition)

By Geoffrey Chaucer

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"A romp for the ages" (*Vanity Fair*)—now with a graphic cover and deluxe packaging

Renowned novelist, historian, and biographer Peter Ackroyd takes on what is arguably the greatest poem in the English language and presents it in a prose vernacular that makes it accessible to readers while preserving the spirit of the original. A mirror for medieval society, *The Canterbury Tales* concerns a motley group of pilgrims who meet in a London inn on their way to Canterbury and agree to take part in a storytelling competition. Ackroyd's contemporary prose emphasizes the humanity of these characters—as well as explicitly rendering their bawdy humor—yet still masterfully evokes the euphonies and harmonies of Chaucer's verse.

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Editorial Review

Review

Ackroyd's 'retelling' is compulsive, bold and rare and will surely become a vital crib for generations of students to come. -- Robert McCrum Observer

About the Author

Peter Ackroyd is an award-winning novelist, critic, and biographer.

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London, the son of a wine-merchant, in about 1342, and as he spent his life in royal government service his career happens to be unusually well documented. By 1357 Chaucer was a page to the wife of Prince Lionel, second son of Edward III, and it was while in the prince's service that Chaucer was ransomed when captured during the English campaign in France in 1359-60. Chaucer's wife Philippa, whom he married c. 1365, was the sister of Katherine Swynford, the mistress (c. 1370) and third wife (1396) of John of Gaunt, Duke of Lancaster, whose first wife Blanche (d. 1368) is commemorated in Chaucer's earliest major poem, *The Book of the Duchess*.

From 1374 Chaucer worked as controller of customs on wool in the port of London, but between 1366 and 1378 he made a number of trips abroad on official business, including two trips to Italy in 1372-3 and 1378. The influence of Chaucer's encounter with Italian literature is felt in the poems he wrote in the late 1370's and early 1380s—*The House of Fame*, *The Parliament of Fowls*, and a version of *The Knight's Tale*—and finds its fullest expression in *Troilus and Criseyde*.

In 1386 Chaucer was member of parliament for Kent, but in the same year he resigned his customs post, although in 1389 he was appointed Clerk of the King's Works (resigning in 1391). After finishing *Troilus* and his translation into English prose of Boethius' *De consolazione philosophiae*, Chaucer started his *Legend of Good Women*. In the 1390s he worked on his most ambitious project, *The Canterbury Tales*, which remained unfinished at his death. In 1399 Chaucer leased a house in the precincts of Westminster Abbey but died in 1400 and was buried in the Abbey.

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