

## **Characters**

### **58 Characters**

- Apart from Chaucer, parts are small, and actors could play multi parts. The main characters all have lines.

**Act 1**  
**Scene 1**

**(SFX. Medieval music pre-show and to begin. Geoffrey Chaucer enter performing space. Bow to the audience, who are the ‘court’.)**

**Chaucer:** Your Royal Highnesses, my Lords and Ladies; allow me, your humble Poet Laureate, Geoffrey Chaucer, to present to the court, in the year of our Lord 1387, the General Prologue to ‘The Canterbury Tales’, which my band of strolling players will perform.

We will show you the motley crowd of pilgrims, of which I am one, who assemble at The Tabard Inn, Southwark, before setting out for the shrine of St Thomas of Becket, Canterbury. You will hear how the landlord, Harry Bailey, makes the proposal that each pilgrim tell two tales there and two tales back, promising to ride with us, and be the judge of the best tale, with the prize of a good supper upon our return, paid for by all! Anyone disagreeing will pay for the whole pilgrimage!

**(Chaucer move and stand unobtrusively to one side of performing space. SFX. Short piece of medieval music as intro to play. Harry Bailey the landlord enters whistling. Lights lamp or candle. Swipes a rat or two from the table. Sets about giving the tankards on table a rub on his sleeve and apron. Wipes the table with a dirty cloth. Strews a bit of clean straw onto floor. Arranges the place.)**

**Chaucer:** **(Begin narrating as soon as landlord enters.)**  
When in April the sweet showers fall  
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all  
The veins are bathed in liquor of such power  
As brings about the engendering of the flower,  
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath  
Exhales an air in every grove and heath  
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun  
His half-course in the sign of the Ram has run,  
And the small fowl are making melody  
That sleep away the night with open eye  
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)  
Then people long to go on pilgrimages  
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands  
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,  
And specially, from every shire’s end  
Of England, down to Canterbury they wend  
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick  
To give his help to them when they were sick.

**Harry Bailey:** **(In Middle English. Gesture towards pilgrims.)**  
Bifel that, in that seson on a day,  
In Southwerk at the Tabard as he lay  
Ready to wenden on his pilgrimage  
To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,  
At night was come in-to my hostelrye  
Wel nyne and twenty in a companye,  
Of sundry folk, by aventure y-falle  
In felawshipe, and pilgrims were they alle,

That towards Caunterbury wolden ryde;

**(Pilgrims enter in character, singly and in two's and three's. Harry Bailey welcome pilgrims in mime. Pour 'ale' from jug into tankards and hand out a few drinks. Pilgrims mill around, getting served drinks at the table; mime chatting to one another. Harry Bailey continues to mime welcoming the pilgrims. Gesture to chairs.)**

**Chaucer:** The rooms and stables of the inn were wide;  
They made us easy, all was of the best.  
And briefly, when the sun had gone to rest,  
I'd spoken to them all upon the trip  
And was soon one with them in fellowship,  
Pledged to rise early and to take the way  
To Canterbury, as you heard me say.  
But none the less, while I have time and space,  
Before my story takes a further pace,

**(Pilgrims begin to sit around performing space on benches or chairs. Knight remain standing. Knight remain standing. Harry Bailey sits)**

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**Chaucer:** It seems a reasonable thing to say  
What their condition was, the full array  
Of each of them, as it appears to me,  
According to profession and degree,  
And what apparel they were riding in;  
And at a *Knight* I therefore will begin.

**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce knight. Knight move to performing space. Bow nobly to court.)**

**Chaucer:** **(Indicate)** There was a Knight, a most distinguished man, Who

**Knight:** from the day on which I first began  
To ride abroad have followed chivalry,  
Truth, honour, generousness and courtesy.

**Chaucer:** He had done nobly in his sovereign's war  
And ridden into battle, no man more,  
As well in Christian as in heathen places,  
And ever honoured for his noble graces.

**(Tribal Elder approach Knight; bow to him; listen, nod occasionally)**

**Knight:** When we took Alexandria, I was there.  
I often sat at table in the chair  
Of honour, above all nations, when in Prussia.  
In Lithuania I have ridden, and Russia,  
No Christian man so often, of my rank.  
When, in Granada, Algeciras sank  
Under assault, I have been there, and in

North Africa, raiding Benamarin;  
In Anatolia I have been as well  
And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell,

**(Tribal Elder return to seat)**

**Monk:** **(Stand from seat to seamlessly deliver lines)**  
For all along the Mediterranean coast  
He has embarked with many a noble host. **(Sit.)**

**(Tribesman rush at Knight and mime fighting.)**

**Knigh**t: **(Mime fending off Tribesman whilst speaking.)**  
In fifteen mortal battles I have been  
And jousted for our faith at Traminssene  
Thrice in the lists, and always killed my man.

**(Tribesman stagger away as if mortally wounded. Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** This same distinguished Knight had led the van  
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work  
For him against another heathen Turk;  
He was of sovereign value in all eyes  
And though so much distinguished, he was wise  
And in his bearing modest as a maid.  
He never yet a boorish thing had said  
In all his life to any, come what might;  
He was a true, a perfect gentle-knight.  
Speaking of his equipment, he possessed  
Fine horses, but he was not gaily dressed.  
He wore a fustian tunic stained and dark  
With smudges where his armour had left mark;

**Wife of Bath:** **(Stand from seat to deliver lines)**  
Just home from service, he has joined our ranks  
To do his pilgrimage and render thanks. **(Sit)**

**(Knight bow to audience. Remain in performing space, but move to allow Squire to enter.)**

**Chaucer:** He had his son with him, a fine young *Squire*.

**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce Squire. Squire enter, bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** A lover and cadet, a lad of fire  
With locks as curly as if they had been pressed.  
He was some twenty years of age, I guessed.  
In stature he was of a moderate length,  
With wonderful agility and strength.

**Squire:** I've seen some service with the cavalry  
In Flanders and Artois and Picardy

**Knigh**t: And done valiantly in little space  
Of time,

**(Damsel 1 move to performing space to be romanced by Squire.)**

**Squire:** in hope to win my lady's grace. **(Bow to damsel; present her with a flower. Romance damsel.)**

**Damsel 1:** He is embroidered like a meadow bright  
And full of freshest flowers, red and white.

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**Knight:** Singing he is, or fluting all the day;  
He is as fresh as is the month of May. **(Bow briefly to court. Return to seat.)**

**Damsel 1:** **(Admiringly)** Short is his gown, the sleeves are long and wide;  
He knows the way to sit a horse and ride.  
He can make songs

**Squire:** **(Sing following medieval song to damsel. Damsel join in. They dance a few simple steps of the period. Music is at back of script.)** Summer has come in!  
Loud sing cuckoo!  
Grows seed and blooms mead,  
And springs the woods anew.  
Sing, cuckoo!  
Ewe bleats after lamb,  
  
Lows after calf the cow.  
Bull starts, buck farts,  
Merrily sing, cuckoo!  
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!  
Will sing you, cuckoo.  
Nor stop you ever now.  
  
Sing cuckoo now! Sing cuckoo!  
Sing cuckoo now! Sing cuckoo!

**Chaucer:** and poems and recite,  
Knew how to joust and dance, to draw and write.  
He loved so hotly that till dawn grew pale  
He slept as little as a nightingale.

**Harry Bailey:** **(Stand from seat to deliver lines)**  
Courteous he is, lowly and serviceable,  
And carved to serve his father at the table.

**(Squire and Damsel 1 bow/Curtsey to court. Return to seats; she her arm in his.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a *Yeoman* with him at his side,  
  
**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce Yeoman. Yeoman enter performing space; bow to audience.)**

- Chaucer:** No other servant; so he chose to ride.  
This Yeoman wore a coat and hood of green,  
And peacock-feathered arrows, bright and keen  
And neatly sheathed, hung at his belt the while  
- For he could dress his gear in yeoman style,
- Wife of Bath:** **(Stand from bench to deliver lines rather saucily)**  
His arrows never droop their feathers low –  
And in his hand he bears a mighty bow.
- Chaucer:** His head was like a nut, his face was brown.
- Yeoman:** **(Pose with bow or arrow)** I know the whole of woodcraft up and down.
- Chaucer:** A saucy brace was on his arm to ward  
It from the bow-string, and a shield and a sword  
Hung at one side, and at the other slipped  
A jaunty dirk, spear-sharp and well-equipped.
- Yeoman:** A medal of St Christopher I wear  
Of shining silver on my breast, and bear  
A hunting-horn, well slung and burnished clean,  
That dangles from a baldrick of bright green.
- Parishioner:** **(Stand for line)** He is a proper forester, I guess.  
**(Yeoman bow to court, return to seat.)**
- Chaucer:** There was also a **Nun**, a Prioress,  
**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce Nun. Nun move to performing space holding small 'dog'. Curtsey modestly to court. Place dog on floor.)**
- Knight:** **(Stand from seat to say lines)**  
Her way of smiling very simple and coy.  
Her greatest oath is only
- Nun:** **(Say as if annoyed.)** 'by seynt Loy!';
- Chaucer:** And she was known as Madam Eglantyne.  
And well she sang a service, with fine  
Intoning through her nose, **(pause for Agnus Dei)**
- Nun:** **(Sing/chant nasally)** Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.  
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, miserere nobis.  
Agnus Dei, qui tollis peccata mundi, dona nobis pacem.
- Chaucer:** as most seemly,  
And she spoke daintily in French, extremely,
- Nun:** After the school of Stratford-atte-Bowe; **(mime actions as they occur in following stanzas.)**
- Wife 4:** **(Stand for lines.)**  
French in the Paris style she does not know.  
At meal her manners are well taught withal;  
No morsel from her lips does she let fall,

Nor dips her fingers in the sauce too deep;  
But she can carry a morsel up and keep  
The smallest drop from falling on her breast.

**Wife 5:** (Stand for lines.)  
For courtliness she has a special zest,  
And she will wipe her upper lip so clean  
That not a trace of grease is to be seen  
Upon the cup when she has drunk; to eat,  
She reaches a hand sedately for the meat.

**Wife 1:** (Stand to deliver line) She certainly is very entertaining,

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**Ploughman:** (Stand for lines.)  
Pleasant and friendly in her ways, and straining  
To counterfeit a courtly kind of grace,  
A stately bearing fitting to her place,  
And to seem dignified in all her dealings  
As for her sympathies and tender feelings,  
She is so charitably solicitous.

**(Harry Bailey walk past nun carrying dead 'rat' by tail. Drop it in a bin. Return to seat.)**

**Nun:** (In response)  
I can't help weeping if I see a mouse  
Caught in a trap, if it is dead or bleeding

**Chaucer:** And she had little dogs she would be feeding  
With roasted flesh, or milk, or fine white bread.  
And bitterly she wept if one were dead  
Or someone took a stick and made it smart;

**(Yeoman enter performing space. When in line with dog, shake ankle as if dog is biting it, make expression of pain, kick dog. Return to seat. Nun run to retrieve 'dog'; pet it tenderly; return it to floor.)**

**Chaucer:** She was all sentiment and tender heart.  
Her veil was gathered in a seemly way,  
Her nose was elegant, her eyes glass-grey;  
Her mouth was very small, but soft and red  
Her forehead, certainly, was fair of spread,  
Almost a span across the brows, I own;  
She was by no means undergrown.  
Her cloak, I noticed, had a graceful charm.  
She wore a coral trinket on her arm,  
A set of beads, the gaudies tricked in green,  
Whence hung a golden brooch of brightest sheen  
On which there first was graven a crowned A,  
And lower.

**Nun:** Amor vincit omnia. (Curtsey to audience; return to seat)

**Chaucer:** Another Nun, the secretary at her cell,  
Was riding with her,

**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce Another Nun. Another Nun rise from seat and curtsey. Sit.)**

**Chaucer:** And three Priests as well.

**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce three Priests. Priests 1, 2 & 3 rise from seats in synchronisation and bow to court. Sit.)**

**Chaucer:** A Monk there was,

**(SFX. brief piece of medieval music to introduce Monk. Monk enter performing space. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** One of the finest sort  
Who rode the country; hunting is his sport.  
A manly man, to be an Abbot able;  
Many a dainty horse he had in stable.

**Chaucer:** His bridle, when he rode, a man might hear  
Jingling in a whistling wind as clear,  
Aye, and as loud as does the chapel bell  
Where my lord Monk was Prior of the cell.

**Parson:** **(Stand for line.)**  
The Rule of good St Benet or St Maur  
As old and strict he tends to ignore;  
He lets go by the things of yesterday  
And takes the modern world's more spacious way.

**Monk:** I do not rate that text at a plucked hen  
Which says that hunters are not holy men  
And that a monk uncloistered is a mere  
Fish out of water, flapping on the pier.

**Chaucer:** That is to say a monk out of his cloister.  
That was a text he held not worth an oyster;  
And I agreed and said his views were sound;

**(Nun enter performing space and offer Monk a book.)**

**Monk:** **(Shun book robustly.)**  
Am I to study till my head goes round  
Pouring over books in cloisters? Must I toil  
As Austin bade and till the very soil?  
Am I to leave the world upon the shelf?  
Let Austin have his labour to himself.

**(Nun shrugs. Stay standing)**

**Chaucer:** This monk was therefore a good man to horse;  
Greyhounds he had as swift as birds, to course. **(Short pause until dog race has ended.)**



**(Pilgrims all move to performing space. Money changes hands quickly between pilgrims and monk, as if placing bets. All stand and animatedly act out as if watching a short dog race. SFX. drum sound to announce start of dog race, then pounding of drum during race; then hurdy gurdy or suchlike to celebrate win. A little money is repaid to several pilgrims only by monk. Pilgrims all return to seats, apart from Yeoman, Wife 2, Wife 3, and Watchman.)**

**Yeoman:** Hunting a hare or riding at a fence  
Is all his fun, he spares for no expense.

**Wife 2:** **(Gossiping to Wife 3.)**  
I see his sleeves are garnished at the hand  
With fine grey fur, the finest in the land,  
And on his hood, to fasten it at his chin  
He has a wrought-gold cunningly fashioned pin;

**Wife 3:** **(To Wife 2.)** Into a lover's knot it seems to pass.  
  
**(Wife 2 & Wife 3 return to seats.)**

**Chaucer:** His head was bald and shone like looking-glass;  
So did his face, as if it had been greased.  
He was a fat and personable priest;  
His prominent eyeballs never seemed to settle.  
They glittered like flames beneath a kettle;  
Supple his boots, his horse in fine condition.

**Watchman:** **(To Yeoman)** He is a prelate fit for exhibition,  
He is not pale like a tormented soul. **(Return to seat.)**  
  
**(Yeoman return to seat.)**

**Monk:** **(Smacks lips)**  
I like a fat swan best, and roasted whole.

**Chaucer:** His palfrey was as brown as is a berry.  
  
**(Monk bow to court, exit.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a Friar,  
  
**(SFX. very short piece of medieval music to introduce Friar. Friar to performing space. Bow to court.)**

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**Chaucer:** A wanton one and merry,  
A Limiter, a very festive fellow.  
In all four Orders there was none so mellow,  
So glib with gallant phrase and well-turned speech.

**Another Nun:** **(Stand for lines. Disapproving.)**  
He's fixed up many a marriage, giving each  
Of his young women what he can afford her.

**(Reeve enter performing space with Damsel 2. Damsel 2 enter performing space with Reeve. Friar hand Reeve a small purse of money. Join Reeve and Damsel 2's hands together and confer a blessing, as if marrying them. Shake Reeve's hand in congratulatory manner. Reeve return to seat. Friar pushes Damsel 2 to follow Reeve. Damsel 2 is pushed by Friar to reluctantly follow Reeve. Return to seat. Friar smile to self and move hands as if washing his hands of her.)**

**Summoner:** (Stand for lines)  
He is a noble pillar to his Order.  
Highly beloved and intimate is he  
With County folk within his boundary,

**Chaucer:** (Ironically)  
And city dames of honour and possessions;  
For he was qualified to hear confessions,  
Or so he said, with more than priestly scope;

**Friar:** (Show rolled up scroll) I have a special license from the Pope.

**Chaucer:** Sweetly he heard his penitents at shrift

**(Damsel 2 enter performing space with Yeoman. Join in song with Yeoman.)**

**Yeoman:** (Enter performing space with Damsel 2. Sing.)  
All night by the rose, rose,  
All night by the rose I lay;  
Dared I not the rose steal,  
And yet I bare the flower away.

**Pardoner:** (Stand for line. Approvingly) With pleasant absolution, for a gift.

**(Yeoman give coins from his purse to Friar. Damsel 2 give coins from her purse to Friar.)**

**Friar:** (Chant sanctimoniously to Yeoman and Damsel 2, making the sign of the Cross)  
Ego te absolvo a peccatis tuis in nomine Patris, et Filii, et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.

**Parishioner:** (Stand for line. Ironically)  
He was an easy man in penance-giving  
Where he could hope to make a decent living;

**Friar:** It's a sure sign whenever gifts are given  
To a poor Order that a man's well shriven,  
And should he give enough I know in verity  
The penitent repented in sincerity. (Tap Yeoman on shoulder. Hold out purse as a demand for more money.)

**(Yeoman drop a few more coins into Friar's purse. Damsel 2 drop a few more coins into Friar's purse. Yeoman return to seat. Reeve stand up and irately beckon to Damsel 2. Damsel 2 return to seat.)**

**Friar:** For many a fellow is so hard of heart  
He cannot weep, for all his inward smart.  
Therefore instead of weeping and of prayer  
He should give silver for a poor Friar's care.

**Husband 1:** (Stands for lines. Knowingly.)  
He keeps his tippet stuffed with pins for curls,  
And pocket knives, to give to pretty girls.

**(Damsel 3 enter performing space. Friar beckons her to him. Chucks her under the chin lecherously, and hands her a few ribbons.)**

**Chaucer:** And certainly his voice was gay and sturdy,  
For he sang well and played the hurdy-gurdy.  
At sing-songs he was champion of the hour.

**Friar:** (Sing lustily to Damsel 3.)

I have a gentle cock  
Who crows the day;  
He gets me up early  
My prayers to say.

I have a gentle cock,  
He's descended from the great;  
His comb is of red coral,  
His tail is of black

His legs are azure,  
So gentle & so small;  
His spurs are of silver  
Down to the wall.

His eyes are of crystal,  
Set all in amber;  
& every night he perches  
In my lady's chamber.

**(Damsel 3 throw ribbons back at Friar in disgust. Run back to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** His neck was whiter than a lily-flower  
But strong enough to butt a bruiser down.

**(Miller enter performing space. Roll up sleeves as if for a set to. Approach Friar. Wrangle with him. Be thrown aside. Friar wrangle with the Miller and throw him aside. Miller return to seat rubbing shoulder as if painful.)**

**Harry Bailey:** (Enter performing space; hand Friar a tankard.)  
He knows the taverns well in every town  
And every innkeeper and barmaid too  
Better than lepers, beggars and that crew  
For in so eminent a man as he

**(Beggar enter performing space; approach Friar pitifully begging for alms. Leper enter performing space; ring bell; approach Friar pitifully begging for alms.)**

**Friar:** (In disgust, wave the beggar and leper begone.)  
It is not fitting with the dignity  
Of my position, dealing with a scum  
Of wretched lepers; nothing good can come

Of commerce with such slum-and-gutter dwellers.

**Leper:** **(Mutter to beggar ironically)**  
But only with the rich and victual-sellers.  
But anywhere a profit might accrue

**Friar:** **(Hypocritically)**  
Courteous I am and lowly of service too.  
Natural gifts like mine are hard to match.

**Beggar:** **(Bitterly mutter to leper)**  
He is the finest beggar of his batch,

**(Beggar & Leper return to seats.)**

**Chaucer:** And, for his begging-district, paid a rent;  
His brethren did no poaching where he went.

**Poor widow:** **(Go to performing space.)**  
For though a widow mightn't have a shoe,  
So pleasant is his holy how-d'ye-do

**(Friar hold out purse to widow, indicating that she should contribute. Poor Widow hunt in her purse and give Friar a coin.)**

**Poor Widow:** He got his farthing from me just the same  
Before he left, and so his income came  
To more than he laid out.

**(Friar twirl Poor Widow round in jest, and force her to dance a few dance steps.)**

**Chaucer:** And how he romped,  
Just like a puppy!

**(Poor widow return to seat looking ruffled.)**

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**Friar:** **(As if advertising his services to the court. Smile greasily.)**  
I am ever prompt  
To arbitrate disputes on settling days  
(For a small fee)

**Chaucer:** For there he was nat lyk a cloisterer,  
With a thredbar cope, as is a povre scoler,  
But he was lyk a maister or a pope.  
Of double worsted was his semi-cope,  
That rounded as a belle out of the presse.  
Somewhat he lipped, for his wantownesse,  
To make his English swete up-on his tongue;  
And in his harping, whan that he had songe,

**Friar:** **(Bow to court. Sings to himself as he returns to seat)**

I have a gentle cock  
Who crows the day;  
He gets me up early  
My prayers to say.

**Chaucer:** He eyen twinkled in his heed aright,  
As doon the sterres in the frosty night.  
This worthy limitour was cleped Huberd. **(Returns to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a *Merchant*

**(SFX very short piece of medieval music to introduce Merchant. Merchant enter performing space. Bow to court)**

**Chaucer:** With a forking beard  
And motley dress: high on his horse he sat,

**Nun:** **(Stands for lines. Observing)**  
Upon his head a Flemish beaver hat  
And on his feet daintily buckled boots.

**Skipper:** **(Enter and listen to Merchant's spiel; nod now and then.)**  
He told of his opinions and pursuits  
In solemn tones, he harped on his increase  
Of capital;

**Merchant:** **(Complain to Skipper)**  
'there should be sea-police  
I think, upon the Harwich-Holland ranges;'

**Chaucer:** He was expert at dabbling in exchanges.  
This estimable Merchant so had set  
His wits to work, none knew he was in debt,

**Merchant:** **(To Skipper, as if promoting his services)**  
I am so stately in administration,  
In loans and bargains, and negotiation.  
**(Shake hands with Skipper. Bow to court. Return to seat.)**

**Skipper:** He was an excellent fellow all the same;  
To tell the truth I do not know his name. **(Return to seat)**

**Chaucer:** An Oxford *Cleric*,

**(SFX. very short piece of medieval music to introduce Cleric. Cleric enter performing space with study books. Bow to court. Look at books.)**

**Chaucer:** Still a student though,  
One who had taken logic long ago,  
Was there;

**Cook:** **(Stand for lines.)**  
his horse is thinner than a rake,  
And he is not too fat, I undertake,  
But has a hollow look, a sober stare;

The thread upon his overcoat is bare.

**Chaucer:** He had found no preferment in the church  
And he was too unworldly to make search  
For secular employment.

**Cleric:** By my bed  
I prefer having twenty books in red  
And black, of Aristotle's philosophy,  
Than costly clothes, fiddle or psaltery.

**Chaucer:** Though a philosopher, as I have told,  
He had not found the stone for making gold.  
Whatever money from his friends he took  
He spent on learning or another book

**(Carpenter enter performing space. Kindly greet Cleric and place coins into his hand, closing it over.)**

**Cleric:** **(To Carpenter)**  
I pray for you most earnestly, returning  
Thanks to you thus for paying for my learning.

**(Carpenter nod kindly as Cleric thanks him. Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** His only care was study, and indeed  
He never spoke a word more than was need,  
Formal at that, respectful in the extreme,  
Short, to the point, and lofty in his theme.  
A tone of moral virtue filled his speech  
And gladly would he learn, and gladly teach.

**(Cleric bow to court; return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** A Serjeant at the Law

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Serjeant. Serjeant enter performing space with book of law; bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** Who paid his calls,  
Wary and wise, for clients at St Paul's  
There also was, of noted excellence.  
Discreet he was, a man to reverence,  
Or so he seemed, his sayings were so wise.

**Serjeant:** I often have been Justice of Assize  
By letters patent, and in full commission.

**Franklin:** **(Stand)** His fame and learning and his high position  
Have won him many a robe and many a fee.  
There is no such conveyancer as he; **(Remain standing)**

**Chaucer:** All was fee-simple to his strong digestion,  
Not one conveyance would be called in question.  
Though there was nowhere one so busy as he,  
He was less busy than he seemed to be.

**Serjeant:** **(Tap book of law and continue to read.)**  
I know of every judgement, case and crime  
Ever recorded since King William's time.

**Chaucer:** Thereto he coude endyte, and make a thing,  
Ther coude no wight pinche at his writing;  
And every statut coude he pleyn by rote.  
He rood but hoomly in a medlee cote  
Girt with a ceint of silk, with barres smale;  
Of his array telle I no lenger tale.

**(Sergeant bow to court; return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a *Franklin* with him, it appeared;

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Franklin. Franklin move into performing space; bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** White as a daisy-petal was his beard.  
A sanguine man, high-coloured and benign,

**Franklin:** **(Kisses his fingers in appreciation.)**  
I love a morning sop of cake in wine.

**Chaucer:** He lived for pleasure and had always done,  
For he was Epicurus' very son,  
In whose opinion sensual delight  
Was the one true felicity in sight.  
As noted as St Julian was for bounty

**Franklin:** **(Throw arms open with pride and bon homie)**  
I make my household free to all the County.  
My bread, my ale, are finest of the fine  
And no one has a better stock of wine.  
My house is never short of bake-meat pies,  
Of fish and flesh, and these in such supplies  
It positively snows with meat and drink  
And all the dainties that a man can think.  
According to the seasons of the year  
Changes of dish are ordered to appear.  
I keep fat partridges in coops, beyond,  
Many a bream and pike are in my pond.

**(Cook enter performing space with wooden spoon. Proffers spoon to Franklin to taste.)**

**Franklin:** **(Tastes content of spoon. Disapproves and with a sharp look, gestures Cook return to kitchen.)**  
Woe to the cook unless the sauce is hot  
And sharp, or if he isn't on the spot!  
And in my hall a table stands arrayed  
And ready all day long, with places laid.

**(Cook return to seat with spoon.)**

**Chaucer:** As Justice at the Sessions none stood higher;  
He often had been Member for the Shire.

A dagger and a little purse of silk  
Hung at his girdle, white as morning milk.  
As Sheriff he checked audit, every entry.  
He was a model among landed gentry.

**(Franklin bow; return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** A Haberdasher, a Dyer, a Carpenter, a Weaver, and a Carpet-maker.

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce them. Haberdasher, Dyer, Carpenter, Weaver, Carpet-maker all move to performing space; bow to court in synchronization.)**

**Chaucer:** Were among our ranks, all in the livery  
Of one impressive guild fraternity.  
They were so trim and fresh their gear would pass  
For new. Their knives were not tricked out with brass  
But wrought with purest silver, which avouches  
A like display on girdles and on pouches.  
Each seemed a worthy burgess, fit to grace  
A guild-hall with a seat upon the dais.  
Their wisdom would have justified a plan  
To make each one of them an alderman;

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**Tradesmen:** **(Together say line proudly.)** We have the capital and revenue,

**Chaucer:** Besides their **wives** declared

**(Wives 1, 2, 3, 4 enter performing space together and stand with husbands. Say haughtily)**

**Wife 1:** it is our due.

**Wife 2:** And if you do not think so, then we ought;

**Wife 3:** To be called 'Madam'

**Wife 4:** Is a glorious thought,

**Wife 1:** And so is going to church and being seen

**Wife 2:** Having your mantle carried, like a queen.

**(Wives link arms with husbands. All bow/curtsey and parade to seats proudly. Alternatively, all perform a dignified dance of the period.)**

**Chaucer:** They had a Cook with them

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Cook. Cook enter performing space with a bag of spice and wooden spoon. Bow.)**

**Chaucer:** who stood alone



For boiling chicken with a marrow-bone,

**Cook:** **(Takes a pinch of spice and show.)**  
Sharp flavouring-powder and a spice for savour.  
I can distinguish London ale by flavour.  
And I can roast and seethe and broil and fry,  
Make good thick soup and bake a tasty pie.

**Doctor:** **(Stand for lines. Observing)**  
But what a pity – so it seems to me,  
That he should have an ulcer on his knee.

**(Skipper enter performing space, to be offered wooden spoonful to taste from Cook. Remain standing.)**

**Cook:** **(Offer Skipper a wooden spoonful to taste. Boasts)**  
As for blancmange, I make it with the best. **(Remain in performing space.)**

**(Skipper nods approvingly of blancmange.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a Skipper hailing from far west;

**(SFX. very short piece of medieval music with maritime flavour to introduce Skipper. Skipper bow to court.)**

**Cook:** **(To Skipper enquiringly)** You come from?

**Skipper:** **(To Cook)** Dartmouth,

**Cook:** **(Nod as if knowing the place.)**  
So I understood.  
He rode a farmer's horse as best he could,  
In a woolen gown that reached his knee.  
A dagger on a lanyard falling free  
Hung from his neck under his arm and down.  
The summer heat has tanned his colour brown,  
And certainly he is an excellent fellow.

**Skipper:** **(Mime drinking from a bottle)**  
Many a draught of vintage, red and yellow,  
I've drawn at Bordeaux, while the trader snored.

**Cook:** The nicer rules of conscience he ignored.

**Skipper:** If, when I fought, the enemy vessel sank,  
I sent my prisoners home; they walked the plank.

**(Cook mime walking the plank. Mime listening to Skipper.)**

**Chaucer:** As for his skill in reckoning his tides,  
Currents and many another risk besides,  
Moons, harbours, pilots, he had such dispatch  
That none from Hull to Carthage was his match.  
Hardy he was, prudent in undertaking;  
His beard in many a tempest had its shaking,  
And he knew all the havens as they were

**Skipper:**

**(Conversing with Cook)**

From Gottland to the Cape of Finisterre,  
And every creek in Brittany and Spain;  
And barge I own is called The Maudelayne.  
**(Nod to Cook. Bow to Court. Return to seat.)**

**(Cook return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:**

A Doctor too emerged as we proceeded;

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Doctor. Doctor enter with a chart of moons and stars. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:**

No one alive could talk as well as he did  
On points of medicine and of surgery  
For, being grounded in astronomy,

**Doctor:**

**(Authoritatively, pointing to chart)**

I watch the patient closely for hours  
When, by his horoscope, I know the powers

**(Patient 1 enter performing space coughing. Accept a packet of herbs. Pay doctor. Return to seat. Patient 2 enter performing space holding stomach. Accept a packet of herbs. Pay doctor. Return to seat. Patient 3 enter performing space. Show doctor leg. Pay doctor. Accept a bell. Ring it, as if leprosy has been diagnosed. Return to seat. Pilgrims all shuffle seats to avoid leper with bell. Doctor whilst narrating, hand first two patients a packet of herbs. Hand the third patient a bell as if diagnosing leprosy. Collect payment from each.)**

**Doctor:**

Of favourable planets, then ascendant,  
Work on the images for my dependent.  
The cause of every malady you've got  
I know, and whether dry, cold, moist or hot;  
I know their seat, their humour and condition.

**Chaucer:**

He was a perfect practicing physician.  
These causes being known for what they were,  
He gave the man his medicine then and there.  
All his apothecaries in a tribe  
Were ready with the drugs he would prescribe  
And each made money from the other's guile;  
They had been friendly for a goodish while.  
He was well-versed in Aesculapius too  
And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew

**Doctor:**

And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,

**Chaucer:**

Galen and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,  
Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,

**Doctor:**

**(Determined to have last word.)**

Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine.

**Franklin:**

**(Stand from seat for lines. Rather disparagingly)**

In his own diet he observes some measure;  
There are no superfluities for pleasure,  
Only digestives, nutritive and such.

**Parson:** (Stand from seat for line.)  
He does not read the Bible very much.

**Chaucer:** In sangwin and in pers he clad was al,  
Lyned with taffeta and with sandal;  
And yet he was but esy of dispence;  
He kepte that he wan in pestilence.  
For gold in phisik is a cordial,  
(Rubs fingers together to indicate money.)  
Therefore he lovede gold in special.

**(Doctor toss purse in air and catch as if well pleased with fees. Bow to court. Return to seat.)**

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**Chaucer:** A worthy woman from beside Bath city  
Was with us,

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Wife of Bath. Wife of Bath enter with large basket. Curtsey to court.)**

**Chaucer:** Somewhat deaf, which was a pity.  
In making cloth she showed so great a bent  
She bettered those of Ypres and of Ghent.  
In all the parish not a dame dared stir  
Towards the altar steps in front of her,

**(Wives of Tradesmen move to performing space; they attempt to move in front of Wife of Bath. She jostles her way past them with her large basket like a battle ship. Wife of Bath jostles past tradesmen's wives to ensure she's first.)**

**Chaucer:** And if indeed they did, so wrath was she  
As to be quite put out of charity.  
Her kerchiefs were of finely woven ground;  
I dared have sworn they weighed a good ten pound,  
The ones she wore on Sunday, on her head.  
Her hose was of the finest scarlet red  
And gartered tight; her shoes were soft and new.  
Old was her face, handsome, and red in hue.  
A worthy woman all her life, what's more

**Wife of Bath:** (To Wives)  
I've had five husbands, all at the church door,

**(Wives of Tradesmen sniff haughtily and return to seats.)**

**(SFX. A jolly old Morris Dance Music e.g. 'Speed the Plough'. Wife of Bath dance a jolly old Morris Dance, such as 'Speed the Plough' with each of five dead husbands in turn. Wave a pair of lace handkerchiefs whilst dancing. Husband 1 enter performing space waving a pair of large white handkerchief. Dance a brief Morris Dance with Wife of Bath, waving the handkerchiefs; then cough as if stricken, put handkerchief to mouth, and stagger to seat.**

Husband 2 enter gaily waving a pair of large white handkerchiefs. Dance a brief Morris Dance with Wife of Bath. Suddenly clutch chest and stagger; stagger to seat. Husband 3 enter gaily waving a pair of large white handkerchiefs. Dance with Wife of Bath. Husband 4 will come, tap him on shoulder, bump him on head and push him out. Return to seat as if ghost. Husband 4 enter gaily waving a pair of large white handkerchiefs. Tap Husband 3 on shoulder, mime beating him on head and pushing him away. Dance briefly with Wife of Bath. He will shortly be arrested and taken away. Serjeant at Law arrest Husband 4, aided by Watchman. Husband 4 struggling against arrest. Watchman help Serjeant at Law, to arrest Husband 4. \*Alternatively the Serjeant at Law and the Watchman could join in the Morris Dance, and mime arresting Husband 4; dancing him away between them.\* Husband 5 enter gaily waving handkerchiefs. Dance briefly with Wife of Bath. Hears bugle call or battle drum. Salutes and marches away as if to war. Return to seat. SFX. Bugle call or battle drum. SFX. Morris Dance ends. Wife of Bath looks sadly after her husbands.)

**Franklin:** (Stand for lines. Somewhat embarrassed, almost to self)  
Apart from other company in youth;  
No need just now to speak of that, forsooth.

**Wife of Bath:** And I have thrice been to Jerusalem,  
Seen many strange rivers and passed over them;  
I have been to Rome and also to Boulogne,  
St James of Compostella and Cologne,  
(Look around saucily at the men.)  
And I am skilled in wandering by the way.

**Chaucer:** She had gap-teeth, set widely, truth to say.  
Easily on an ambling horse she sat  
Well wimpled up, and on her head, a hat  
As broad as is a buckler or a shield;  
She had a flowing mantle that concealed  
Large hips, her heels spurred sharply under that.  
In company she liked to laugh and chat  
Of remedies of love she knew per-chaunce,  
For she coude of that art the olde daunce)

**Wife of Bath:** (Sing)  
Merry it was while summer did last  
With the songs of birds.  
Now nears the wind's blast  
And strong weather.  
Ai! but this night is long  
And I, much wronged,  
Sorrow, mourn, and fast.  
Sorry it is while winter lasts,  
With all kinds of weather,  
For now the bright birds swoon,  
And children cry Alas,  
Ai! But this night is long  
And I, much wronged,  
Sorrow and mourn and fast. (Freeze in position.)

(Chaucer appropriate announcement of interval. Cast parade off in character, with one or two of the pilgrims holding their banner aloft.)

INTERVAL

Act 2  
Scene 1

**(SFX. Medieval Music to bring audience back after interval. Chaucer and Pilgrims parade in, with one or two holding their banner aloft. Pilgrims return to seats.)**

**Chaucer:** A good man was ther of religioun,  
And was a povre Persoun of a toun;

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Parson. Parson enter performing space with bible and stave. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** But riche he was of holy thought and werk.  
He was also a lerned man, a clerk,

**(Parishioner enter performing space and listen to Parson preach. Poor Parishioner enter performing space and listen to Parson preach. Ploughman enter performing space and listen to Parson preach. Parson mime preaching to parishioners.)**

**Chaucer:** That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche;  
His parissshens devoutly wolde he teche.  
Benigne he was, and wonder diligent,  
And in adversitee ful pacient;  
And swich he was y-preved oft sythes.  
Ful looth were him to cursen for his tythes,

**(Poor Parishioner offer coins. Parson close Poor Parishioner hand and kindly refuse coins.)**

**Cleric:** **(Stand for lines)**  
But rather wolde he yeven, out of doute,  
Un-to his povre parissshens aboute  
Of his offring, and eek of his substaunce.  
He coude in litel thing han suffisaunce.  
Wyd was his parisshe, and houses for a-sonder,  
But he ne lafte nat, for reyn ne thunder,

**Chaucer:** In sickness or in grief, to pay a call  
On the remotest, whether great or small,  
Upon his feet, and in his hand a stave.  
This noble example to his sheep he gave  
That first he wrought, and afterwards he taught;  
And it was from the Gospel he had caught  
Thos words, and he would add this figure too,

**Parson:** That if gold rust, what then will iron do?  
For if a priest be foul in whom we trust  
No wonder that a common man should rust;  
And shame it is to see – let priests take stock –  
A shitten shepherd and a snowy flock.  
The true example that a priest should give  
Is one of cleanness, how the sheep should live.

**Parishioner:** He does not set his benefice to hire  
And leave his sheep encumbered in the mire

**Poor Parishioner:** Or run to London to earn easy bread  
By singing masses for the wealthy dead,

**Parishioner:** Or find some Brotherhood and get enrolled.  
He stays at home and watches over his fold

**Ploughman:** So that no wolf shall make the sheep miscarry.  
He is a shepherd and no mercenary.  
Holy and virtuous he is, but then  
Never contemptuous of sinful men,  
Never disdainful, never too proud or fine,  
But discreet in teaching and benign.

**Parson:** My business is to show a fair behavior  
And draw men thus to Heaven and their Saviour,  
Unless indeed a man is obstinate;  
And such, whether of high or low estate,  
I put to sharp rebuke, to say the least.

**Chaucer:** I think there never was a better priest  
He sought no pomp or glory in his dealings,  
No scrupulosity had spiced his feelings.  
Christ and His Twelve Apostles and their lore  
He taught, but followed it himself before.

**(Ploughman remain in performing space. Parishioners 1 & 2 take their leave of Parson, nod to Ploughman, and return to seats. Parson bow to court, and return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a Ploughman with him there, his brother

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Ploughman. Ploughman bow to court.)**

**Ploughman:** Many a load of dung one time or other  
I must have carted through the morning dew.

**Chaucer:** A trewe swinker and a good was he,  
Livinge in pees and parfit charitee.  
God loved he best with al his hole herte  
At alle tymes, thogh him gamed or smerte,  
And thane his neighebour right as him-selve,  
He wolde thresshe, and ther-to dyke and delve,  
For Cristes sake, for every povre wight,  
Withouten hyre, if it lay in his might.  
His tythes payed he ful faire and wel,  
Bothe of his proper swink and his catel.

**Ploughman:** I pay my tithes in full when they are due  
On what I own, and on my earnings too.

**Chaucer:** He wore a tabard smock and rode a mare.

**(Ploughman bow to court. Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a Reeve, also a Miller, there,

A College Manciple from the Inns of Court,  
A papal Pardoner and, in close consort,  
A Church-Court Summoner,

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce them. Reeve, Miller, Summoner, Pardoner and Manciple stand and bow to court in synchronization. Apart from Miller, all sit.)**

**Chaucer:** riding at a trot,  
And finally myself – that was the lot. **(Give deep bow to the court.)**

**(Miller enter performing space.)**

**Chaucer:** The Miller was a chap of sixteen stone,  
A great stout fellow big in brawn and bone.  
He did well out of them, for he could go

**(Miller mimes spitting on his hands, and easily overcomes the wrestlers who challenge him. Wrestler 1 enter performing space and wrestle with Miller. Be thrown aside. Remain watching. Wrestler 1 enter performing space and wrestle with Miller. Give in. Remain watching.)**

**Chaucer:** And win the ram at any wrestling show.  
Broad, knotty and short-shouldered, he would boast

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**Miller:** **(Boasting)**  
I can heave any door off hinge and post,  
Or take a run and break it with my head.

**Wrestler 1:** His beard, like any sow or fox, is red  
And broad as well, as though it were a spade;  
And at its very tip, his nose displays  
A wart on which there stands a tuft of hair

**Wrestler 2:** Red as the bristles in an old sow's ear.  
His nostrils are as black as they are wide.  
He has a sword and buckler at his side,  
His mighty mouth is like a furnace door.

**Nun:** **(Stand for line.)**  
A wrangler and buffoon, he has a store  
Of tavern stories, filthy in the main.

**Ploughman:** His was a master-hand at stealing grain.  
He felt it with his thumb and thus he knew  
Its quality and took three times his due –

**Miller:** **(Sticks up thumb)**  
A thumb of gold, by God, to gauge an oat!

**Weaver:** He wears a hood of blue and a white coat.

**Dyer:** He likes to play his bagpipes up and down  
And that is how he brought us out of town.

**(Miller bow to court. Mime playing bagpipes. With Chaucer, lead parade around audience or performing space. Chaucer carry pilgrim banner and with Miller, lead procession around audience or performing space. All cast process behind Chaucer and banner and Miller. SFX. Medieval bagpipe music, whilst pilgrims parade around. All cast return to seats apart from Chaucer, Manciple, Carpenter, Sergeant at Arms and Carpet Maker. Harry Bailey give tankards to Carpenter, Serjeant at Arms and Carpet Makes. Chases a rat away, and returns to seat. Carpenter, Sergeant at Arms and Carpet Maker receive tankards, and stand about. Each returning to seat after saying their lines in the following short section.)**

**Chaucer:** The Manciple came from the Inner Temple;

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Manciple. Manciple enter performing space. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** All caterers might follow his example

**Manciple:** **(To assembly)**  
In buying victuals; I am never rash  
Whether I buy on credit or pay cash,  
I watch the market most precisely  
And get in first, and so do quite nicely.

**Carpenter:** **(Admiringly to assembly)**  
Now isn't it a marvel of God's grace  
That an illiterate fellow can outpace  
The wisdom of a heap of learned men? **(Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** His masters – he had more than thirty then –  
All versed in the abstrusest legal knowledge,  
Could have produced a dozen from their College  
Fit to be stewards in land and rents and game  
To any Peer in England you could name.

**Carpet Maker:** **(To assembly)**  
And show him how to live on what he had  
Debt-free (unless of course the Peer is mad)  
**(Return to seat.)**

**Serjeant at Arms:** **(Joining in conversation)**  
Or be as frugal as he might desire,  
And make them fit to help about the Shire  
In any legal case there was to try;  
And yet this Manciple could wipe their eye. **(Return to seat.)**

**(Manciple bow to court. Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** The Reeve was old and choleric and thin

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Reeve. Reeve enter performing space with a book of accounts. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** His beard was shaven closely to the skin,



His shorn hair came abruptly to a stop  
Above his ears, and he was docked on top  
Just like a priest in front; his legs were lean,  
Like sticks they were, no calf was to be seen.  
He kept his bins and garners very trim;  
No auditor could gain a point on him.

**Reeve:** And I can judge by watching drought and rain  
The yield I might expect from seed and grain.  
My master's sheep, his animals and hens,  
Pigs, horses, dairies, stores and cattle-pens  
Are wholly trusted to my government.  
I have been under contract to present  
The accounts, right from his master's earliest years.  
No one has ever caught me in arrears.

**Chaucer:** No bailiff, serf or herdsman dared to kick,  
He knew their dodges, knew their every trick;

**(Poor Widow enter performing space with toy hen. Reeve will examine it, and take it in lieu of payment. Return to seat. Reeve examine widow's hen rather disparagingly. Accept it and tuck it under arm.)**

**Parson:** **(Stand for line.)**  
Feared like the plague he was, by those beneath.

**Reeve:** **(Proudly.)**  
I have a lovely dwelling on a heath,  
Shadowed in green by trees above the sward.  
A better hand at bargains than my lord,

**Chaucer:** He had grown rich and had a store of treasure  
Well tucked away, yet out it came to pleasure  
His lord with subtle loans or gifts of goods,  
To earn his thanks and even coats and hoods.

**(Franklin enter performing space. He will receive hen from Reeve. Return to seat. Reeve present hen to Franklin.)**

**Carpenter:** **(Admiringly of skill)**  
When young he learnt a useful trade and still  
He is a carpenter of first-rate skill.

**Haberdasher:** **(Stand for line.)**  
The stallion-cob he rides at a slow trot  
Is dapple-grey and bears the name of Scot.

**Chaucer:** He wore an overcoat of bluish shade  
And rather long; he had a rusty blade  
Slung at his side. He came, as I heard tell,

**Reeve:** **(To Chaucer)**  
From Norfolk, near a place called Baldeswell.

**Dyer:** **(Stand for line)**  
His coat was rucked under his belt and splayed.  
He rode the hindmost of our cavalcade.

**(Reeve bow to court, exit.)**

**Chaucer:** There was a Summoner with us at that Inn,

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**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Summoner. Summoner enter performing space. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** His face on fire, like a cherubin,  
For he had carbuncles. His eyes were narrow,

**Wife of Bath:** **(Stand for line.)**  
He is as hot and lecherous as a sparrow.

**Chaucer:** Black scabby brows he had, and a thin beard.  
Children were afraid when he appeared.

**Doctor:** **(Stand for lines. Shakes head puzzled.)**  
No quicksilver, lead ointment, tartar creams,  
No brimstone, no boracic, so it seems  
Can make a salve that has the power to bite,  
Clean up or cure his welks of knobby white  
Or purge the pimples sitting on his cheeks.

**Summoner:** Garlic I love, and onions too, and leeks,

**Harry Bailey:** **(Stand for lines.)**  
And drinking strong red wine till all was hazy.  
Then he would shout and jabber as if crazy,

**Chaucer:** And wouldn't speak a word except in Latin  
When he was drunk, such tags as he was pat in;  
He only had a few, say two or three,  
That he had mugged up out of some decree;  
No wonder, for he heard them every day.  
And as you know, a man can teach a jay  
To call out

**Summoner:** **(Call)** 'Walter,'

**Cleric:** **(Stand for lines.)**  
better than the Pope.  
But had you tried to test his wits and grope  
For more, you'd have found nothing in the bag.  
Then

**Summoner:** 'Questio quid juris'

**Chaucer:** was his tag.

**Parson:** **(Stand for lines. Ironically)**  
He is a noble varlet and a kind one,

You'd meet none better if you went to find one.  
Why, he'll allow – just for a quart of wine –  
Any good lad to keep a concubine  
A twelvemonth and dispense him altogether?

**Chaucer:** And he had finches of his own to feather:  
And if he found some rascal with a maid  
He would instruct him not to be afraid  
In such a case of the Archdeacon's curse  
(Unless the rascal's soul were in his purse)  
For in his purse the punishment should be  
Purse is the good Archdeacon's Hell,  
said he.

**Nun:** But well I know he lied in what he said;  
A curse should put a guilty man in dread,  
For curses kill, as shriving brings, salvation.  
We should beware of excommunication.  
Thus, as he pleased, the man could bring duress  
On any young fellow in the diocese.  
He knew their secrets, they did what he said.

**(Youth enter performing space. Notice Summoner and try to evade. Blocked by Summoner. Cornered. Payment demanded. Summoner corner youth and mime demanding payment. Youth pay coins unhappily. Returns to seat.)**

**Summoner:** (Jollily)  
I wear a garland set upon my head  
Large as the holly-bush upon a stake  
Outside an ale-house, and I have a cake,  
A round one, which it is my joke to wield  
As if it is intended for a shield. **(Summoner, bow to court. Remain, but move aside for Pardoner to enter.)**

**Chaucer:** He and a gentle Pardoner rode together,

**(SFX. Very short piece of medieval music to introduce Pardoner. Pardoner enter performing space. Bow to court.)**

**Chaucer:** A bird from Charing Cross of the same feather,  
Just back from visiting the Court of Rome,  
He loudly sang 'Come hither, love, come home!'  
The Summoner sang deep seconds to this song,

**Pardoner:** **(Sing stanzas together below (Greensleeves tune fits))**  
**Summoner:** **(Sing stanzas together below (Greensleeves tune fits))**

My immaculate Lamb, that can bless all,  
Said she, my beloved fix'd by lot,  
Chose me to his mate, though my worth was small;  
Long ago was that bridal, I wot;

What time I from your world did fall,  
Then did he to me his bliss allot,  
'Come hither, my love, my sweet!' was his call,  
For thou hast neither blemish nor spot.

Beauty and might he withheld from me not,  
Wash'd my weeds in his blood on his throne of state,  
In maidenhood crown'd me withouten blot,  
And dight me in pearls immaculate.

**(Summoner nod pleasantly to Pardoner. Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** No trumpet ever sounded half so strong.  
The Pardoner had hair as yellow as wax,  
Hanging down smoothly like a hank of flax.  
In driblets fell his locks behind his head  
Down to his shoulders which they overspread;  
Thinly they fell, like rat-tails, one by one.  
He wore no hood upon his head, for fun;  
The hood inside his wallet had been stowed,

**Pardoner:** I aim at riding in the latest mode;

**Weaver:** But for a little cap his head was bare  
And he had bulging eye-balls, like a hare.  
He'd sewn a holy relic on his cap;  
His wallet lay before him on his lap,

**Pardoner:** **(As if advertising)**  
Brimful of pardons come from Rome, all hot.

**Wife of Bath:** **(Stand for lines.)**  
He has the same small voice a goat has got.  
His chin no beard has harboured, nor would harbor,  
Smoother than ever chin as left by barber.

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**Knight:** **(Stand for line)**  
I judge he is a gelding, or a mare.

**Chaucer:** As to his trade, from Berwick down to Ware  
There was no pardoner of equal grace,  
For in his trunk he had a pillow-case  
Which he asserted was our Lady's veil.  
He said

**Pardoner:** **(Reverently show off pillow case, fragment of cloth, and other relics)**  
I have a gobbet of the sail  
Saint Peter had the time when he made bold  
To walk the waves, till Jesu Christ took hold.

**Squire:** **(Stand for lines)**  
He has a cross of metal set with stones  
And, in a glass, a rubble of pigs' bones  
And with these relics, any time he found  
Some poor up-country parson to astound,  
In one short day, in money down, he drew  
More than the parson in a month or two,

**Parson enter performing space to stand and reverently gaze on 'relics'.  
Parishioner enter performing space to stand and reverently gaze on 'relics'.  
Poor Parishioner enter performing space to stand and reverently look on  
'relics'. Pardoners show 'relics' carefully to Parson, Parishioner and Poor  
Parishioner.)**

**Manciple:** (Stand for lines)  
And by his flatteries and prevarication  
Made monkeys of the priest and congregation.

**Chaucer:** But trewely to tellen, at laste,  
He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste.  
Wel coude he rede a lessoun or a storie,  
But alderbest he song an offertorie;

**Pardoner:** (Sing Offertory to Parson, Parishioner and Poor Parishioner. Music at back of script.)  
A - ve Ma-ri - - a,  
gra - ti - a - ple - na: Do - mi - nus te - cum:  
be - ne - di - - cta tu in mu - li - e - ri - ,  
- Bus, et be - ne - di - ctus fru - - ctus  
ven - tris tu - i.

**(Parson give money to Pardoner. Return to seat looking awed. Parishioner give money to Pardoner. Return to seat looking overcome. Poor Parishioner give money to Pardoner. Return to seat looking awed.)**

**Chaucer:** For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,  
He moste preche, and wel affyle his tonge,  
To winne silver, as he ful wel coude;  
Therefore he song so merily and loude.

**(Pardoner bow to court. Return to seat.)**

**Chaucer:** Now have I told you shortly; in a clause,  
Thestat, tharray, the nombre, and eek the cause  
Why that assembled was this companye  
In Southwerk, at his gentil hostelrye,  
That highte the Tabard, faste by the Belle.  
But now is tyme to yow for to telle  
How that we baren us that ilke night,  
Whan we were in that hostelrye alight.  
And after wol I telle of our viage,  
And al the remnaunt of our pilgrimage.  
But first I pray yow, of your curteisye,  
That ye narrate it nat my vileinye,  
Thogh that I pleyedly speke in this matere,  
To tell yow hir words and hir chere;  
Ne thogh I speke hir words proprely.

**Chaucer:** For certainly as you all know so well,  
He who repeats a tale after a man  
Is bound to say, as nearly as he can,  
Each single word, if he remembers it,  
However rudely spoken or unfit,

Or else the tale he tells will be untrue,  
The things pretended and the phrases new.  
He may not flinch although it were his brother,  
He may as well say one word as another.  
And Christ Himself spoke broad in his Holy Writ,  
Yet there is no scurrility in it,  
And Plato says, for those with power to read,  
'The word should be as cousin to the deed.'  
Further I beg you to forgive it me  
If I neglect the order and degree  
And what is due to rank in what I've planned.  
I'm short of wit as you will understand.

**(Pilgrims All enter performing space. If actors are playing multi-roles, speak this last piece in the guise of who they consider their 'main character' to be. Gather round landlord, Harry Bailey. Any additional characters gather round. Harry Bailey enter performing space.)**

**Knight:** **(Gesture to host)**  
Our Host gave us great welcome; everyone  
Was given a place and supper was begun.  
He served the finest victuals you could think,  
The wine was strong and we were glad to drink.

**Wife of Bath:** **(Admiringly. Goes to stand near Host.)**  
A very striking man our Host withal,  
And fit to be a marshal in a hall.  
His eyes are bright, his girth a little wide;  
There is no finer burgess in Cheapside.

**Doctor:**  
Bold in his speech, yet wise and full of tact,  
There is no manly attribute he lacks,  
What's more he is a merry-hearted man.  
After our meal he jokingly began

**Squire:**  
To talk of sport, and, among other things  
After we'd settled up our reckonings,  
He said as follows:

**Harry Bailey:** **(In a lively way)**  
Truly, gentlemen,  
You're very welcome and I can't think when  
- Upon my word I'm telling you no lie -  
I've seen a gathering here that looked so spry,  
No, not this year, as in this tavern now.  
I'd think you up some fun if I knew how.

**Harry Bailey:**  
And, as it happens, a thought has just occurred  
To please you, costing nothing, on my word.  
You're off to Canterbury - well, God speed!  
Blessed St Thomas answer to your need!

**Harry Bailey:**  
And I don't doubt before the journey's done  
You mean to while the time in tales and fun.  
Indeed, there's little pleasure for your bones  
Riding along and all as dumb as stones.

**Harry Bailey:** So let me then propose for your enjoyment,  
Just as I said, a suitable employment.  
And if my notion suits and you agree  
And promise to submit yourselves to me

**Harry Bailey:** Playing your parts exactly as I say  
Tomorrow as you ride along the way,  
Then by my father's soul – and he is dead,  
If you don't like it you can have my head!  
Hold up your hands and not another word.'

**Manciple:** Well, our opinion was not long deferred,  
It seemed not worth a serious debate;  
We all agreed to it at any rate  
And bade him issue what commands he would.

**Pardoner:** My lords, he said, now listen for your good,  
And please don't treat my notion with disdain.  
This is the point. I'll make it short and plain.  
Each one of you shall help to make things slip

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**Nun:** By telling two stories on the outward trip  
To Canterbury, that's what I intend,  
And, on the homeward way to journey's end  
Another two, tales from the days of old;

**Yeoman:** And then the man whose story is best told,  
That is to say who gives the fullest measure  
Of good morality and general pleasure,  
He shall be given a supper, paid by all,

**Cleric:** Here in this tavern, in this very hall,  
When we come back again from Canterbury.

**Harry Bailey:** And in the hope to keep you bright and merry  
I'll go along with you myself and ride

**Reeve:** All at my own expense and serve as guide.

**Harry Bailey:** I'll be the judge, and those who won't obey  
Shall pay for what we spend upon the way.  
Now if you all agree to what you've heard  
Tell me at once without another word,

**Harry Bailey:** And I will make arrangements early for it.

**Serjeant at Arms:** Of course we all agreed, in fact we swore it  
Delightedly, and made entreaty too  
That he should act as he proposed to do,

**Friar:** Become our Governor in short, and be  
Judge of our tales and general referee,

**Cook:** And set the supper at a certain price.

**Skipper:** We promised to be ruled by his advice.

**Merchant:** Come high, come low; unanimously thus  
We set him up in judgement over us.

**Franklin:** More wine was fetched, the business being done;  
We drank it off and up went everyone

**Ploughman:** To bed without a moment of delay.

**Parson:** Early next morning at the spring of day  
Up rose our Host and roused us like a cock,  
Gathering us together in a flock,

**Monk:** And off we rode at slightly faster pace  
Than walking to St Thomas' watering place;  
And there our Host drew up, began to ease  
His horse, and said,

**Harry Bailey:** Now, listen if you please,  
My lords! Remember what you promised me.  
If evensong and mattins will agree  
Let's see who shall be first to tell a tale.  
And as I hope to drink good wine and ale  
I'll be your judge. The rebel who disobeys,  
However much the journey costs, he pays.  
Now draw for cut and then we can depart;  
The man who draws the shortest cut shall start.

**(All cast lean forwards and move as if grasp one cut straw each from the tankard. Freeze in this position for a few seconds. The play ends with all characters about to take a straw. Then all sing. Whole cast sing vigorously.)**

Summer has come in!  
Loud sing cuckoo!  
Grows seed and blooms mead,  
And springs the woods anew.  
Sing, cuckoo!  
Ewe bleats after lamb,  
Lows after calf the cow.  
Bull starts, buck farts,  
Merrily sing, cuckoo!  
Cuckoo! Cuckoo!  
Will sing you, cuckoo.  
Nor stop you ever now.

Sing cuckoo now! Sing cuckoo!  
Sing cuckoo now! Sing cuckoo!

**(SFX. Medieval music for cast to lead off to. All bow twice – then Pilgrim banner aloft, all march behind it.)**

**END**