

The Canterbury Tales' themes

<https://www.homework-online.com/the-canterbury-theses/the-knights-tale-summary.html>

<https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/the-canterbury-theses/section1/>

| Title | Summary | Themes | Characters |
|-----------------|--|---|---|
| The knight tale | <p>The Knight's Tale is the story of Palamon and Arcite. They are captured by Theseus, the king of Thebes, and imprisoned in a tower together. The tower has one window, which the knights spend their days looking out of.</p> <p>One day, they see Emilye, the queen's young sister, walking in her garden. Both Palamon and Arcite fall in love with her instantly; while they fight over her at first, they soon realize there is no point in fighting, since they're both trapped in a tower and therefore equally unlikely ever to meet her, let alone marry her.</p> <p>Several years later, however, Arcite manages to escape the tower with the help of a friend. He becomes a page in Emilye's household, but does not confess his love to her. Meanwhile, Palamon spends several more years in prison before escaping.</p> <p>The two knights meet and fight over Emilye, but the fight is broken up by Theseus, who insists that they hold a proper tournament. Palamon and Arcite are each given one year to build an army and return to Thebes. The tournament will be a fight to the death,</p> | <p>In the General Prologue, the Knight is described as the very flower of chivalry, and his Tale espouses many of the ideals of chivalry and courtly love. Both Arcite and Palamon are knights who place their love for their "lady," Emilye, over all other concerns, including their own deaths. They lose sleep and utter eloquent, long-winded poetic complaints detailing their all-consuming love for their idealized lady; in the courtly love tradition, lovers were expected to behave in precisely this manner.</p> <p>Meanwhile, the ending of the tale is foreshadowed in the visits to the various shrines. Arcite seeks the help of the god of war and manages to win the tournament, but lose his life and</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Theseus, King of Thebes /• Palamon wins love - VENUS• Archite /arkit/ wins war - MARS• Emily (is she happy?) – DIANA |

| | | | |
|--------------------------------------|---|---|--|
| | <p>and the winner of the tournament will receive Emilye's hand in marriage.</p> <p>The evening before the tournament, Palamon, Arcite, and Emilye each visit one of the three shrines built into the walls of the tournament arena. Arcite visits the shrine of the Roman god of war, Mars, where he prays to win the tournament. Palamon visits the shrine of the Roman goddess of love, Venus, where he prays to win Emilye's hand. Emilye, meanwhile, visits the shrine of the Roman goddess of chastity, Diana. There, she prays that Diana will allow her to remain unmarried, but she states she is willing to accept whatever Diana's will is for her.</p> <p>The next day, the tournament begins. After much fighting, Arcite emerges as the winner of the tournament, but he is thrown from his horse and suffers a fatal injury. On his deathbed, he announces his wish for Palamon to marry Emilye</p> | <p>Emilye. Palamon seeks the help of the goddess of love and, while he loses the tournament, he wins Emilye's hand in marriage. Only Emilye, who prays to remain single, does not get her wish; however, if she is troubled by this result, the Tale doesn't tell us. The tale's main theme is that life itself is unstable: joy and sorrow are never far apart, and fortune can change at a moment's notice.</p> <p>3 Gods decide the destiny of 3 people</p> <p>Archite's funeral on a pyre similar to that of Beowulf</p> <p>Die with good reputation</p> <p>Accept what we cannot change</p> | |
| <p>The Franklin's tale ()</p> | <p>The Franklin tells the story of two Bretons (residents of Brittany, located in what today is northern France), Arveragus and Dorigen, and their marriage. Arveragus was a knight and Dorigen was his faithful bride; the two are described as having an equal</p> | <p>Honour</p> <p>The Franklin's Tale deals with romance and love and contains some supernatural element, like magic.</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Arveragus - Dorigen (squire/scudiero) - Aurelius (lover) |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | <p>marriage in which neither one has “mastery” over the other.</p> <p>Being a knight, Arveragus frequently leaves Dorigen to go on quests, crusades, and the like. While Arveragus is away on one of these journeys, Dorigen sits at the window of her chamber, which overlooks the coast of Brittany – an area full of treacherous rocks that were known for destroying ships that attempted to land on the coast. She begins to cry, fearing that the rocks will destroy Arveragus’s ship and kill him when he tries to return and lamenting that there is no way to get rid of the rocks.</p> <p>One day, Dorigen’s friends throw a party in their garden. During the party, Dorigen sees a squire named Aurelius dancing. Aurelius notices Dorigen as well, and he confesses that he has been in love with her for many years. He begs her to tell him what he can do to win her love.</p> <p>At first, Dorigen shames him for putting the moves on a married woman. Then, seeing that he’s in earnest, she decides to have a little fun with him. She tells Aurelius that she will sleep with him only if Aurelius figures out how to get rid of the rocks on Brittany’s coast. Aurelius, assuming this is impossible, leaves the party in sadness.</p> <p>Eventually, Aurelius’s brother finds out what’s wrong and tells Aurelius to visit a magician in Orleans, who may know how to remove the rocks from Brittany’s coast. The magician does indeed pretend to know the secret, but in fact he simply relies on a calculation of</p> | <p>“mastery” in marriage raised by the Wife of Bath’s Tale and the Merchant’s Tale; it opens with comments that “mastery” has no place in love (Teorema – Marco Ferradini). However, the tale itself doesn’t focus on this problem, but rather on the problem of what happens when one makes a rash promises and the importance of keeping one’s word.</p> <p>The woman must follow her husband’s wish</p> | <p>- Magician (lies over the secret to make rocks disappear)</p> |
|--|--|---|--|

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | <p>the high tides to find the day of the year on which the tide is highest; the highest tide completely covers the rocks, making it look like they've vanished. The "magician" tells Aurelius to go to Dorigen on this day, tell her he has succeeded, and have her look out the window at the coastline.</p> <p>Aurelius does this, explaining in courtly language how he has fulfilled their bargain and Dorigen now owes him. Dorigen, distraught, goes home, realizing she has made a bad deal and now must give up either her body or her reputation. She thinks about several stories in which faithful wives or maidens killed themselves rather than sleep with a man who was not their husband.</p> <p>Meanwhile, Arveragus comes home, and Dorigen tells him what happened. He tells her that, while it's sad, she must uphold her end of the bargain – that is, she must sleep with Aurelius – and Arveragus will deal with the blow to his honor. Arveragus then sends Dorigen to Aurelius. When Aurelius hears that Arveragus has placed keeping the promise over his honor, however, Aurelius agrees to release Dorigen from her obligation, stating that a squire (like Aurelius) can be as honorable as a knight (like Arveragus). Aurelius then goes to pay the "magician," upholding his own bargain, and the "magician" forgives Aurelius's debt, thus showing himself to be honorable as well. The Franklin ends by asking the company who they think was the most honorable.</p> | | |
|--|---|--|--|

| | | | |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|
| <p>The Pardoner's tale</p> | <p>After the violence of the Physician's Tale, the pilgrims demand that the Pardoner tell them a "moral" tale, not a violent one. The Pardoner obliges by, essentially, preaching on the phrase "radix malorum est Cupiditas" (cupidity is the root of all evil).</p> <p>In Flanders, there were three rioters who did nothing but commit various sins all day, including drunkenness, which the Pardoner preaches against at length. One night while getting drunk and playing dice in a tavern, the three men glance outside to see a group of men carrying a corpse to its burial. They learn that the corpse was an old man whose heart was broken in two by a secret thief called Death. The three rioters make a vow amongst themselves to find Death and kill him.</p> <p>Not far into their quest, the three men meet an old man at a turnstile and ask him why he is still alive. The old man says he is still alive because he has not found any young men who will trade places with him, and that although he has knocked on the earth to let him in, it won't. One of the rioters asks, even more rudely, where Death is, and the old man tells them they can find Death up the crooked way and underneath an oak tree.</p> <p>The three men go to the tree and find eight bushels of gold coins under it. The worst of the three argues that the money is theirs because Fortune gave it to them, but that they can't carry it back to town without being branded as thieves. Therefore, he suggests they draw lots to see who runs back to town for bread and wine</p> | <p>The Pardoner's Tale has been the subject of much recent critical analysis because, in some ways, it sums up the entire</p> <p>Canterbury Tales. It features a tale-teller whose voice is completely at odds with the story he tells, and it provides an opportunity for the writer (Chaucer) to lecture at length on a particular topic without ever revealing what his opinion of it actually is.</p> <p>The Pardoner freely admits that, while his business is preaching and absolving other people of their sins, he is a sinful person himself, and the sin he commits most often is avarice, or greed. Yet his Tale roundly preaches against greed, arguing that it is the root of all evil. Many critics have asked whether, if the Pardoner is so greedy himself, he can actually tell a tale with a sound moral against greed. By telling this tale through a character at a distance, Chaucer can comment both on the conventional morality against greed and the practice of</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - 3 men/rioters /raioters/ - Death / Old man - |
|-----------------------------------|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|------------------|--|--|--|
| | <p>while the other two guard the treasure. They draw lots, and the youngest of them is sent to town.</p> <p>No sooner does he leave than the other two plot to kill the youngest on his return and split his share of the gold between them. Meanwhile, the youngest reaches town, realizes he needs to protect himself against the other two rioters, and buys some poison. He also buys three wine bottles. He poisons two of the wine bottles and keeps the third for himself to drink from.</p> <p>When the youngest returns, however, the other two drunkards set on him and kill him. They then sit down to drink the wine, drink from the poisoned bottles, and die. The tale ends with a short sermon asking God to forgive the sins of good men.</p> <p>Just then, the Pardoner “remembers” that he can issue pardons to the other pilgrims if they pay him, and he asks them to kiss a “relic” he is carrying. The Host tells him it’s not a relic, but a dried turd painted to look like one, which angers the Pardoner. The Knight steps in to make peace between the two men.</p> | <p>greed without ever indicating what he himself actually thinks of either.</p> <p>Greed, gluttony, gambling, drinking brings daeth;</p> <p>Against indulgences: corruption of the Curch (the pardoners himself sells relics;</p> <p>Whoollen clothes</p> <p>Pestilence</p> | |
| The Friar’s Tale | <p>When called on, the Friar says that he will tell a tale about a summoner, that in general are known for their immoral behavior.</p> <p>The Friar’s Tale begins by describing an archdeacon who was zealous about punishing lechers (<i>zozzoni</i>) and other wrongdoers. The archdeacon has a summoner who is very good at ferreting out misbehavior, probably because he does all the same bad things – things the Friar lists in detail as a way of picking on the Summoner in the group of pilgrims.</p> | <p>Both friars and summoners were stock literary characters in the Middle Ages, known for being greedy, illmannered, and sexually promiscuous. However, the Friar’s Tale simply refers to the summoner as a summoner, indicating that the Friar doesn’t see a difference between this summoner or any</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Summoner - Yeoman |

| | | | |
|--|--|---|--|
| | <p>The summoner in the tale, however, only chases after people who have enough money to pay the substantial fine for their misbehavior, and the summoner then pockets half of what he collects instead of giving it to the archdeacon.</p> <p>One day, the summoner is traveling to deliver a summons to an old widow when he meets a yeoman (a gentleman farmer). The two travel together, sharing stories of how they make their living by committing extortion and theft, until the yeoman announces that he's actually the Devil, and that the summoner will meet him again some day.</p> <p>While they're traveling together, the Devil and the summoner meet a carter, whose wagon is stuck in the mud. Frustrated, the carter yells, "the devil have all, both horse and cart and hay!" The summoner encourages the Devil to take the horse, cart, and hay, since this is the literal meaning of the carter's words, but the Devil refuses, saying that while this is what the carter said, it is not what he meant. Instead, the Devil tells the carter to pray to God, and when he does, the horses pull the cart out of the mud.</p> <p>The summoner and the Devil travel onward to the house of the old woman the summoner was traveling to visit when the tale began. The summoner gives the old woman notice to appear before the archdeacon, but she protests, saying that she cannot afford the fine and that she is innocent anyway. The summoner demands that she give him her new pan, to which the old woman replies that she gives the summoner's</p> | <p>other: in his eyes, they are all equally bad.</p> <p>Of course, the summoner in the tale does little to change the tale-teller's, or the listeners', view of summoners. When the summoner meets the Devil, he is neither scared nor shocked; instead, he treats the Devil almost as a colleague. At times the summoner even seems to be impressed.</p> <p>Twice in the tale, a character makes a statement that grants the Devil control over something if the Devil interprets the statement literally. The first time, the carter states in a moment of frustration that the Devil should take his cart, horse, and hay. The second time, the old woman says that she gives the summoner to the Devil. In both cases, it is clear that the Devil has the power to act on the words; whether or not he does so is his choice. This is consistent with the legal understanding of contract in medieval England. Unlike today, when the intent behind a person's words can matter a</p> | |
|--|--|---|--|

| | | | |
|-----------------------|--|--|---|
| | body to the Devil. The Devil hears this and takes the summoner to hell with him. | great deal when it comes to their legal effect, medieval courts were less interested in a person's intent than in the content of the words themselves. The Friar's Tale, then, provides a caution against watching what you say, since words have power. | |
| The Nun's priest tale | <p>The Host asks the Nun's Priest to be "merry of heart" in telling his tale. The Nun's Priest tells the following story:</p> <p>A poor widow and her daughters owned a small cottage with a fenced-in yard. In the yard, they kept a number of chickens, including a rooster named Chanticleer, who was described as very beautiful. Chanticleer had seven wives (the hens), his favorite of whom was called Pertelote.</p> <p>One morning, Chanticleer woke from a bad dream and described it to Pertelote. He dreamed that while walking around the yard, he was attacked by an animal "like a hound," with a red body and a black-tipped tail and ears. The hound-like creature grabbed Chanticleer and tried to kill him.</p> <p>Pertelote made fun of Chanticleer for this, telling him that he was a coward and that dreams have no meaning. She tells him she will pick herbs from the yard to restore the balance to his health and stop his bad dreams. Chanticleer, however, insists that dreams are omens of things to come, and describes an example of a man who dreamt his friend was</p> | <p>The Nun's Priest's Tale is perhaps the best-known of all the Canterbury Tales. It is a "beast fable," in the same genre as Aesop's fables – a tale that uses animal characters to teach a human moral lesson.</p> <p>The tale returns to the same question raised in The Tale of Melibee about whether men should take the counsel of women. Here, the question is whether Chanticleer should take Pertelote's advice about how to interpret his dreams. Should he take his dreams seriously and change the way he lives his life based on what he thinks they are telling him, or should he ignore them and go on with his life?</p> <p>The fact that Chanticleer is going about his daily business</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Chanticleer - Pertelote - Fox |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | <p>being murdered for his gold, and woke to find that it had happened. He also tells the story of two men going on a sea voyage; one dreamt that if he went to sea the next day he would drown, but his friend laughed at him, so he went anyway, only to drown.</p> <p>Chanticleer then tells Pertelote to stop talking about prophecies, because while he is with her, she is so beautiful he has no fear. He cites the proverb “Mulier est hominis confusio,” translating it as “Woman is man’s joy and all his bliss,” when it actually means “Woman is man’s ruin.”</p> <p>Near the end of March, Chanticleer is strutting about in the yard with the hens when a fox (with a red coat and black-tipped ears, feet, and tail) breaks through the fence into the yard. The fox watches Chanticleer for a while, then addresses the rooster, claiming to be his friend. He asks Chanticleer if he can sing like his father did. When Chanticleer starts to demonstrate his singing, the fox grabs him by the throat and runs off into the woods.</p> <p>The poor widow, her daughters, and the townspeople chase the fox. Chanticleer convinces the fox to turn and curse at the people chasing him, but when the fox opens his mouth, Chanticleer jumps free and flies up into a tree. The fox tries to convince Chanticleer to come down, but to no avail.</p> | <p>when the fox catches him implies that Pertelote was wrong and that Chanticleer should have taken his dream seriously. However, it doesn’t take a prophetic dream to tell us that foxes like to hunt and eat chickens; this is a fact that Chanticleer probably should have known well. The tale seems to imply that one should not expect un-chickenlike behavior from a chicken, but the contradiction lies behind the entire genre of beast-fables.</p> <p>Interpreting dreams is also a favorite activity in Middle English literature, even spawning a whole genre of poetry known as “dream poems.” Chaucer’s own dream poems include the <i>Book of the Duchess</i>, <i>The House of Fame</i>, <i>The Parliament of Fowles</i>, and <i>The Legend of Good Women</i>. Often, the dream forms the basis of the text itself, asking whether dreams are any more or less real than tales. If we can find a moral in a story, can we find one in a dream as well?</p> | |
|--|---|--|--|

| | | | |
|-------------------------|--|---|--|
| | | | |
| The wife of Bath's tale | <p>The Wife of Bath's Prologue is even longer than her tale. She begins by announcing that experience trumps knowledge and summing up her own experience in marriage: she has had a total of five husbands, and she is looking for her sixth. Her first three husbands were old men, to whom she was married young and whom she outlived; they all died in old age, leaving her with considerable property.</p> <p>Her fourth husband was a man she chose to marry while she was "sowing her wild oats" after the death of her first three husbands. Although they both liked to party, it hurt her that her fourth husband kept a mistress and refused to give her up after they married. Her fourth husband was also frequently away from home on business, and while he was gone, she cultivated a relationship with a potential fifth husband, a clerk named Jankyn. During one such visit, she tells Jankyn that she dreamed he had killed her in her bed and left her covered in blood, but that "blood bitokeneth gold" and that the dream therefore meant that if they married, Jankyn would be rich.</p> <p>In time, the Wife of Bath's fourth husband died and she married Jankyn. However, despite the fact that she claims to have married Jankyn for love, their relationship did not go smoothly at first. Jankyn was fond of scolding his wife by reading to her from a book about "wicked wives" and comparing her to them. One night, the Wife of Bath gets so fed up with Jankyn's scolding that she tears a page from his book. He responds by hitting her so hard that she</p> | <p>The Wife of Bath is perhaps Chaucer's most enduring character, and certainly one of the most distinctive. She is assertive and insistent on the power of her experience, even over the authorities that appear in books – including both the Bible and Jankyn's own "book of wicked wives."</p> <p>The desire of women to have "mastery" in marriage over all things. Others, however, find the Tale ambiguous: what good is a wife's having "mastery" if she only uses it to do whatever her husband tells her?</p> <p>One way to resolve the dilemma might be to ask who or what the "loathly lady" in the Tale is meant to represent. If she stands for the Wife of Bath herself, the Tale may be arguing that despite old age, the Wife of Bath and women like her still have the vigor and inner beauty to make themselves desirable in marriage – if they</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Knight - Raped girls - Queen - Old woman - |

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>becomes deaf in one ear. When she comes to, Jankyn apologizes for hitting her and promises to obey her will in their marriage from then on. She makes him burn his book, and they live together happily from that moment on.</p> <p>With this Prologue over, the Wife of Bath begins her tale, which is about a knight in King Arthur's court. While out riding one day, the knight finds a young peasant girl and rapes her. Although the penalty for his crime is death, when the knight is brought before King Arthur's court, the Queen and her ladies beg to have the case turned over to them. They tell the knight that they will spare his life if, within the next year, he discovers the answer to the question "What thing do women most desire in marriage?"</p> <p>The knight wanders about the kingdom for a year, trying desperately to find the answer. As the year ends, he discovers a "loathly lady" in the forest. She promises to tell him the answer, as long as he gives her whatever she asks. The knight agrees and takes her back to the court, where the loathly lady tells him the answer to the question "what thing do women most desire in marriage?" is "mastery over all things."</p> <p>The Queen and the ladies of the court agree that this is the answer to the question and spare the knight's life, but the loathly lady points out that the knight must now give her whatever she wants – and she wants him to marry her. Although he tries to beg his way</p> | <p>have a partner who respects their "experience."</p> <p>Raping is not punished</p> <p>Bad image of women who want to have mastery over everything</p> <p>Toy boy (he was 20, she was 40)</p> <p>At the end souls is more important than physical appearance</p> | |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|------------------|---|--|--|
| | <p>out of the deal, the Queen holds him to it, and the marriage is celebrated.</p> <p>On the wedding night, the knight and the loathly lady are alone in their bedchamber, but the knight can't bring himself to get into bed with her. The loathly lady gives him a lecture on the true nature of "gentilesse," or a noble nature, and then offers him a deal: either he can have a wife who is beautiful on the outside but has the "mastery" to do whatever she wants, or a wife who is ugly but leaves the "mastery" to him. The knight agrees to give her the "mastery," at which point the loathly lady takes on the form of a beautiful young woman. She agrees to obey him in public for the sake of appearances, and they live happily ever after.</p> | | |
| The Clerk's tale | <p>The Host next calls on the Clerk to tell a story, reminding him that he's also agreed to the deal and that therefore he should tell a story in "plain" language. The Clerk agrees, stating he's going to share a story he learned from someone named Petrarch, now dead.</p> <p>The Clerk's Tale is told in multiple parts. It begins by describing Walter, the marquis /<i>merchiil</i>/ of Saluzzo, a town at the base of Mount Viso in Italy. Walter was a good ruler, but he was always giving up more long-lasting, worthwhile pastimes in favor of immediate pleasures. When the people in Saluzzo confront him about his failure to marry, Walter makes a deal: he will marry, but he gets to choose whom, and the villagers must treat her as if she were an</p> | <p>The Clerk claims to get the tale from Petrarch, but Petrarch almost certainly found it in Boccaccio's Decameron – a fact that Chaucer likely knew. However, the tale may not actually have the meaning it seems to have at first glance. Although it sounds like a tale meant to instruct wives in how to be patient, the Clerk not only warns that real people can't expect to live up to Griselde's example, but he also explicitly praises the Wife of Bath for her comments about women</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Wlter, marquis of Saluzzo - Janicula - Griselde. Janicula's daughter - 2 kids |

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | <p>emperor's daughter no matter where she is actually from.</p> <p>Part Two begins some distance from Walter's palace in a house belonging to a man named Janicula. Janicula has a daughter named Griselde, who is known for her virtue. While hunting one day, Walter sees Griselde in the forest and decides to marry her. First, however, he goes home and has a wedding dress and jewelry made in Griselde's size; only then does he approach Janicula and ask to marry his daughter. Janicula is shocked at first and cannot speak, but eventually manages to agree.</p> <p>Walter then makes Griselde a deal: if she will do whatever he says, whenever he asks, and never resents it, then he will marry her. She agrees, and the wedding is celebrated. Griselde becomes famous throughout Saluzzo for her beauty and virtue, and she gives birth to a baby girl.</p> <p>In Part Three, Walter decides, not long after the baby is born, to test his wife. Here, the Clerk notes that he doesn't understand why the marquis would want to test his wife and states that he (the Clerk) thinks it is "evil" to test one's wife when there is no need. Nevertheless, Walter tests Griselde by telling her that while he still loves her, the rest of the nobility hates her and wants her daughter put to death. Griselde says she and her child will do anything that pleases Walter.</p> <p>Instead of killing their daughter, however, Walter sends the child to be raised by his sister in Bologna.</p> | <p>needing "mastery" in marriage.</p> <p>What, then, is the point of the Clerk's Tale? It may be to demonstrate that people with superhuman patience, like Griselde, are a lost breed – for better or worse. On the one hand, Griselde shows great patience. On the other, standing aside while her children are murdered – at least as far as she knows – is not necessarily a praiseworthy act.</p> <p>Petrarch's own solution is voiced by the Clerk in the tale: that it is not a story about how wives should behave toward their husbands, but how human beings should behave towards God. The changes in Griselde's clothes as her status changes from low to high and back again also serves as a symbol for how a person's life circumstances can be reinterpreted in perspective – in other words, not everything is as bad or good as it initially seems.</p> | |
|--|---|--|--|

| | | | |
|--|--|--|--|
| | <p>Griselde never mentions her daughter's name again, and though Walter feels sorry for her, he doesn't tell her the child isn't actually dead.</p> <p>At the beginning of Part Four, four years have passed. Griselde has had a son in the meantime, and when the boy is two years old, Walter repeats the same test. He tells Griselde that the townspeople don't want Janicula's grandson to be their ruler and that the boy must die. Although Griselde lets him take the boy, she points out that for her motherhood has provided no joy, only pain.</p> <p>The people of Saluzzo start hating Walter, thinking that he has murdered his children. Walter, however, ignores them and comes up with a new way to test Griselde's patience: he creates a fake papal bull, or order from the pope, that says Walter must leave Griselde and take another wife. However, Walter has also written secretly to Bologna, asking his sister and her husband to bring the children back to Saluzzo but without telling anyone whose children they are. Instead, they are to pretend that the daughter is to marry Walter.</p> <p>In Part Five, Walter tells Griselde about the (fake) papal bull, gives her back her dowry, and sends her back to Janicula. Griselde states that she still loves Walter and does not regret loving him. Her only request is that she be given a simple dress so that she does not have to leave the palace naked, which Walter grants. The people follow her back to her old</p> | | |
|--|--|--|--|

| | | | |
|--|---|--|--|
| | <p>house, weeping, and the narrator compares her suffering to that of Job in the Bible.</p> <p>In Part Six, Walter's sister, the Countess of Panago, arrives with Griselde's two children. Walter sends a message to Griselde announcing his upcoming wedding and asking for Griselde to plan the ceremony. Griselde agrees and begins to make the arrangements.</p> <p>As the wedding party sits down to dinner, Walter calls Griselde into the hall and introduces her to his "new wife" (actually their daughter). Griselde asks him not to treat his new wife as unkindly as he did his old one.</p> <p>At this, Walter kisses Griselde and tells her she has always been his wife. He then reveals that the "new wife" and the other child at the dinner are actually their children. Griselde faints. When she awakens, she kisses both children; then her maids dress her in clothing befitting her station and she and Walter live happily ever after.</p> <p>The Clerk goes on to explain that today's wives should not try to emulate Griselde, since they will probably fail, but that everyone should try to be constant in adversity, accepting whatever God brings them.</p> | | |
|--|---|--|--|

The Canterbury Tales Themes, Symbols and Motifs by Geoffrey Chaucer

Women and Society

Several of the Canterbury Tales explore questions of what roles women should play in society, what power or choices were available to them, and what results these situations produced. In The Wife of Bath's Tale, for instance, Chaucer argues that giving women power or "mastery" in marriage may lead to greater happiness than forcing them to submit to their husbands' wills in all things; this and several other tales explore the dynamics of male-female marriages. **Although modern Western feminism was not an element of medieval thought, questions about what roles women should play and how they should behave in them** were central questions in many medieval minds.

Christianity

Christianity was central to English life in the Middle Ages, and it appears in the Tales in a number of ways. The setting for the Tales as a whole is on a religious pilgrimage to Canterbury, and they end with a "Retraction" that begs God's forgiveness, attributes any good in the tales to Jesus Christ, and apologizes for the ways in which the Tales tend toward sin. Several tales, including those told by the Prioress, the Parson, and the Clerk, are expressly religious.

Words and Language

"What nedeth words mo?" ("What more needs to be said?") is a question several of the tale-tellers ask, from the Knight to the Manciple; indeed, the theme of the Manciple's Tale is that it is wise to know when to hold your tongue. The Friar's Tale explores the consequences of thoughtlessly spoken words, as does the Franklin's Tale. The nature of language and words and their value are all themes that arise at various points in the Canterbury Tales.

Revenge and Repaying Debts

Several of the pilgrims "quit," or repay, one another for real or imagined slights through the telling of their tales. The Miller and Reeve do this somewhat jokingly in their tales, but between the Summoner and the Friar, the argument gets more serious; while the Miller and Reeve are meant to be lighthearted, the Summoner and Friar paint downright rude pictures of one another's professions. The habit of "quitting" invites comparison of several of the Tales as it pulls them into complementary relationships with one another.

Serious vs. Silly

Although Chaucer warns us in several Tales not to take them too seriously and begs in his Retraction not to be taken seriously at all, many of the tales play with the relationship between seriousness on the one hand and silliness, games, or jokes on the other. Some of the "funny" tales have serious consequences, while a few of the "serious" ones have comic or ironic moments. These echo the frame

of the Tales as a whole, which are told as part of a “game” but which offer the opportunity to give moral instruction, which many of the tale-tellers try to take.