

Canterbury Tales General Prologue Translation

The General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales An Interlinear Translation

- 1 **Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote**
When April with its sweet-smelling showers
- 2 **The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,**
Has pierced the drought of March to the root,
- 3 **And bathed every veyne in swich licour**
And bathed every vein (of the plants) in such liquid
- 4 **Of which vertu engendred is the flour;**
By which power the flower is created;
- 5 **Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth**
When the West Wind also with its sweet breath,
- 6 **Inspired hath in every holt and heeth**
In every wood and field has breathed life into
- 7 **The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne**
The tender new leaves, and the young sun
- 8 **Hath in the Ram his half cours yronne,**
Has run half its course in Aries,
- 9 **And smale foweles maken melodye,**
And small fowls make melody,
- 10 **That slepen al the nyght with open ye**
Those that sleep all the night with open eyes
- 11 **(So priketh hem Nature in hir corages),**
(So Nature incites them in their hearts),
- 12 **Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,**
Then folk long to go on pilgrimages,
- 13 **And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,**
And professional pilgrims to seek foreign shores,
- 14 **To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;**
To distant shrines, known in various lands;
- 15 **And specially from every shires ende**
And specially from every shire's end
- 16 **Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,**
Of England to Canterbury they travel,
- 17 **The hooly blisful martir for to seke,**

Canterbury Tales General Prologue translation is an essential topic for anyone interested in understanding Geoffrey Chaucer's seminal work, "The Canterbury Tales." This literary masterpiece, written in Middle English in the late 14th century, provides a vivid snapshot of English society during that time. The "General Prologue" serves as an introduction to the various tales that follow, presenting a diverse cast of characters who embark on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. In this article, we will explore the significance of the "General Prologue," discuss the challenges of translating it into modern English, and provide insights into its themes and characters.

The Importance of the General Prologue

The "General Prologue" plays a crucial role in "The Canterbury Tales." It sets the stage for the entire collection, introducing readers to the pilgrims and their backgrounds. Chaucer's ability to craft vivid character sketches makes the "General Prologue" an engaging read. It also establishes the framework for the storytelling contest that takes place during the pilgrimage, where each character shares their own tale.

A Brief Overview of the Characters

In the "General Prologue," Chaucer introduces a variety of pilgrims, each representing different aspects of medieval society. Here are some notable characters:

1. The Knight: A noble warrior who has fought in many battles. He embodies the ideals of chivalry and honor.
2. The Prioress: A head of a convent who is more concerned with manners and courtly behavior than her religious duties.
3. The Monk: A religious figure who prefers hunting and luxury over the monastic life.
4. The Wife of Bath: A bold woman with experience in marriage, she provides a unique perspective on gender roles.
5. The Pardoner: A corrupt church official who sells indulgences, highlighting the theme of hypocrisy within the church.

These characters not only serve as storytellers but also as reflections of the societal norms and issues of Chaucer's time.

Challenges of Translation

Translating the "General Prologue" from Middle English to modern English presents several challenges. Middle English, the language of Chaucer, differs significantly from contemporary English in terms of vocabulary, grammar, and pronunciation. Here are some key challenges translators face:

1. Language Evolution: Many words used in Middle English have fallen out of use or changed in meaning over the centuries. Translators must find modern equivalents that convey the original intent.
2. Poetic Structure: Chaucer's work is rich in meter and rhyme. Maintaining the poetic form while translating can be difficult, as it often requires sacrificing either fidelity to the text or the beauty of the verse.
3. Cultural References: The "General Prologue" is filled with references to medieval customs, social hierarchies, and religious practices. Translators must provide context to ensure modern readers understand these references.
4. Character Nuances: Each character in the "General Prologue" is layered with personality traits

that reflect the culture of the time. Capturing these nuances in translation can be challenging.