

# The Miller's Prologue and Tale

By Geoffrey Chaucer

*Transcription, correction, editorial commentary, and markup by Austin Benson*

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THE COMPLETE WORKS

OF

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

,<sup>intro</sup> *EDITED, FROM NUMEROUS MANUSCRIPTS*

BY THE

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THE CANTERBURY TALES: TEXT

'Let every felawe telle his tale aboute,  
And lat see now who shal the soper winne.'

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## THE MILLER'S PROLOGUE.

Here folwen the wordes bitwene the Host and  
the Millere.

3109 Whan that the Knight had thus his tale y-told,  
3110 In al the route, <sup>route</sup> nas ther yong ne old  
3111 That he ne seyde it was a noble storie,  
3112 And worthy for to drawn to memorie;  
3113 And namely the gentils, <sup>gentils</sup> everichoon.  
3114 Our Hoste lough and swoor, 'so moot I goon,  
3115 This gooth aright; unbokeled, <sup>unbokeled</sup> is the male;  
3116 Lat see now who shal telle another tale:  
3117 For trewely, the game is wel bigonne.  
3118 Now telleth ye, sir Monk, if that ye conne,  
3119 Sumwhat, to quyte, <sup>quyte</sup> with the Knightes tale.'  
3120 The Miller, that for-dronken was al pale,  
3121 So that unnethe, <sup>unnethe</sup> up-on his hors he sat,  
3122 He nolde avalen neither hood ne hat,  
3123 Ne abyde no man for his curteisye,  
3124 But in Pilates, <sup>pilate</sup> vois he gan to crye,  
3125 And swoor by armes and by blood and bones, <sup>curse</sup>,  
3126 'I can a noble tale for the nones, <sup>nones</sup>,  
3127 With which I wol now quyte the Knightes tale.'

3128 Our Hoste saugh that he was dronke of ale,  
3129 And seyde: 'abyd, Robin, my leve brother,  
3130 Som bettre man shal telle us first another:  
3131 Abyd, and lat us werken thriftily.'

3132 'By goddes soul,' quod he, 'that wol nat I;  
3133 For I wol speke, or elles go my wey.'  
3134 Our Hoste answerde: 'tel on, a devel wey!  
3135 Thou art a fool, thy wit is overcome.'

3136 'Now herkneth,' quod the Miller, 'alle and some!  
3137 But first I make a protestacioun  
3138 That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun, <sup>soun</sup>;  
3139 And therefore, if that I misspeke or seye,  
3140 Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I yow preye;

3141 For I wol telle a legende and a lyf  
3142 Bothe of a Carpenter, and of his wyf,  
3143 How that a clerk hath set the wrightes cappe, <sup>cappe</sup> .’

3144 The Reve answerde and seyde, ‘stint thy clappe,  
3145 Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye.  
3146 It is a sinne and eek a greet folye  
3147 To apeiren, <sup>apeiren</sup> any man, or him diffame,  
3148 And eek to bringen wyves in swich fame, <sup>swich\_fame</sup> .  
3149 Thou mayst y-nogh of othere thinges seyn.’

3150 This dronken Miller spak ful sone ageyn,  
3151 And seyde, ‘leve, <sup>leve</sup> brother Osewold,  
3152 Who hath no wyf, he is no cokewold, <sup>who\_hath</sup> .  
3153 But I sey nat therfore that thou art oon;  
3154 Ther been ful gode wyves many oon,  
3155 And ever a thousand gode ayeyns oon badde,  
3156 That knowestow wel thy-self, but-if thou madde.  
3157 Why artow angry with my tale now?  
3158 I have a wyf, pardee, as well as thou,  
3159 Yet nolde I, for the oxen in my plough,  
3160 Taken up-on me more than y-nogh,  
3161 As demen of my-self that I were oon;  
3162 I wol beleve wel that I am noon, <sup>noon</sup> .  
3163 An housbond shal nat been inquisitif  
3164 Of goddes privetee, nor of his wyf, <sup>privetee</sup> .  
3165 So he may finde goddes foyson, <sup>foyson</sup> there,  
3166 Of the remenant nedeth nat enquere.’

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3167 What sholde I more seyn, but this Millere  
3168 He nolde his wordes for no man forbere,  
3169 But tolde his cherles tale in his manere;  
3170 Me thinketh that I shal reherce it here.  
3171 And ther-fore every gentil wight I preye, <sup>apology</sup> ,  
3172 For goddes love, demeth nat that I seye  
3173 Of evel entente, but that I moot reherce  
3174 Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,  
3175 Or elles falsen som of my matere.  
3176 And therefore, who-so list it nat y-here,  
3177 Turne over the leef, and chese another tale, <sup>leef</sup> ;  
3178 For he shal finde y-nowe, grete and smale,  
3179 Of storial, <sup>storial</sup> thing that toucheth gentillesse, <sup>gentillesse</sup> ,  
3180 And eek moralitee and holinesse;  
3181 Blameth nat me if that ye chese amis.

3182 The Miller is a cherl, ye knowe wel this;  
3183 So was the Reve, and othere many mo,  
3184 And harlotrye they tolden bothe two.  
3185 Avyseth yow and putte me out of blame;  
3186 And eek men shal nat make earnest of game.

Here endeth the prologe.

## THE MILLERES TALE.

Here biginneth the Millere his tale.

3187 Whylom ther was dwellinge at Oxford, <sup>oxenford</sup>  
3188 A riche gnof, <sup>gnof</sup>, that gestes heeld to bord, <sup>gestes</sup>,  
3189 And of his craft he was a Carpenter.  
3190 With him ther was dwellinge a povre scoler, <sup>scoler</sup>,  
3191 Had lerned art, <sup>art</sup>, but al his fantasye, <sup>fantasye</sup>  
3192 Was turned for to lerne astrologye, <sup>astrologye</sup>,  
3193 And coude a certeyn, <sup>certeyn</sup> of conclusiouns  
3194 To demen by interrogaciouns,  
3195 If that men axed him in certein houres,  
3196 Whan that men sholde have droghte or elles shoures, <sup>droghte</sup>,  
3197 Or if men axed him what sholde bifalle  
3198 Of every thing, I may nat rekene hem alle.

3199 This clerk was cleped, <sup>cleped</sup> hende Nicholas;  
3200 Of derne, <sup>derne</sup> love he coude, <sup>coude</sup> and of solas, <sup>solas</sup>;  
3201 And ther-to he was sleigh and ful privee, <sup>sleigh</sup>,  
3202 And lyk a mayden meke for to see.  
3203 A chambre hadde he in that hostelrye  
3204 Allone, with-outen any companye,  
3205 Ful fetisly y-dight with herbes swote, <sup>ydight</sup>;  
3206 And he him-self as swete as is the rote, <sup>rote</sup>  
3207 Of licorys, or any cetewale, <sup>licorys</sup>.  
3208 His Almageste, <sup>almageste</sup> and bokes grete and smale,  
3209 His astrelabie, <sup>astrelabie</sup>, longinge for his art,  
3210 His augrim-stones, <sup>augrim</sup> layen faire a-part  
3211 On shelves couched at his beddes heed:  
3212 His presse y-covered with a falding reed, <sup>falding</sup>.  
3213 And al above ther lay a gay sautrye, <sup>sautrye</sup>,  
3214 On which he made a nightes melodye

3215 So swetely, that al the chambre rong;  
3216 And Angelus ad virginem, <sup>angelus</sup> he song;  
3217 And after that he song the kinges note, <sup>kinges</sup>;  
3218 Ful often blessed was his mery throte.

3219 And thus this swete clerk his tyme spente  
 3220 After his freendes finding and his rente, <sup>after</sup> .  
  
 3221 This Carpenter had wedded newe a wyf  
 3222 Which that he lovede more than his lyf;  
 3223 Of eightetene yeer she was of age.  
 3224 Ialous, <sup>ialous</sup> he was, and heeld hir narwe in cage, <sup>narwe</sup> ,  
 3225 For she was wilde and yong, and he was old  
 3226 And demed him-self ben lyk a cokewold.  
 3227 He knew nat Catoun, <sup>catoun</sup> , for his wit was rude,  
 3228 That bad man sholde wedde his similitude.  
 3229 Men sholde wedden after hir estaat, <sup>estaat</sup> ,  
 3230 For youthe and elde is often at debaat.  
 3231 But sith that he was fallen in the snare,  
 3232 He moste endure, as other folk, his care.  
  
 3233 Fair was this yonge wyf, and ther-with-al  
 3234 As any wesele, <sup>wesele</sup> hir body gent and smal.  
 3235 A ceynt, <sup>ceynt</sup> she werede barred al of silk,  
 3236 A barmclooth, <sup>barmclooth</sup> eek as whyt as morne milk  
 3237 Up-on hir lendes, <sup>lendes</sup> , ful of many a gore., <sup>gore</sup>  
 3238 Whyt was hir smok, and brouded al bifore, <sup>brouded</sup>  
 3239 And eek bihinde, on hir coler aboute,  
 3240 Of col-blak silk, with-inne and eek with-oute.  
 3241 The tapes of hir whyte voluper, <sup>tapes</sup>  
 3242 Were of the same suyte of hir coler;  
 3243 Hir filet, <sup>filet</sup> brood of silk, and set ful hye:  
 3244 And sikerly she hadde a likerous yë, <sup>likerous</sup> .  
 3245 Ful smale y-pulled were hir browes two, <sup>smale</sup> ,  
 3246 And tho were bent, and blake as any sloo, <sup>sloo</sup> .  
 3247 She was ful more blisful on to see  
 3248 Than is the newe pere-ionette tree, <sup>pere</sup> ;  
 3249 And softer than the wolle is of a wether, <sup>wether</sup> .  
 3250 And by hir girdel heeng a purs of lether

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3251 Tasseld with silk, and perled with latoun, <sup>latoun</sup> .  
 3252 In al this world, to seken up and down,  
 3253 There nis no man so wys, that coude thenche  
 3254 So gay a popelote, or swich a wenche., <sup>popelote</sup>  
 3255 Ful brighter was the shying of hir hewe, <sup>hewe</sup>  
 3256 Than in the tour the noble y-forged newe, <sup>noble</sup> .  
 3257 But of hir song, it was as loude and yerne, <sup>yerne</sup>



3258 As any swalwe sittinge on a berne, <sup>swalwe</sup> .  
 3259 Ther-to she coude skippe and make game,  
 3260 As any kide or calf folwinge his dame.  
 3261 Hir mouth was swete as bragot or the meeth, <sup>bragot</sup> ,  
 3262 Or hord of apples leyd in hey or heeth.  
 3263 Winsinge she was, <sup>winsinge</sup> , as is a Ioly colt,  
 3264 Long as a mast, and upright as a bolt.  
 3265 A brooch she baar up-on hir lowe coler,  
 3266 As brood as is the bos of a bocler, <sup>bocler</sup> .  
 3267 Hir shoes were laced on hir legges hye;  
 3268 She was a prymerole, a pigges-nye, <sup>prymerole</sup>  
 3269 For any lord to leggen in his bedde,  
 3270 Or yet for any good yeman to wedde.  
  
 3271 Now sire, and eft sire, so bifel the cas,  
 3272 That on a day this hende, <sup>hende</sup> Nicholas  
 3273 Fil with this yonge wyf to rage and pleye, <sup>rage</sup> ,  
 3274 Whyl that hir housbond was at Oseneye, <sup>oseneye</sup> ,  
 3275 As clerkes ben ful subtile and ful queynte, <sup>queynte</sup> ;  
 3276 And prively he caughte hir by the queynte, <sup>caughte</sup> ,  
 3277 And seyde, ‘y-wis, but if ich have my wille,  
 3278 For derne love of thee, lemman, I spille, <sup>spille</sup> ;’  
 3279 And heeld hir harde by the haunche-bones,  
 3280 And seyde, ‘lemman, love me al at-ones,  
 3281 Or I wol dyen, also god me save!’  
 3282 And she sprong as a colt doth in the trave, <sup>trave</sup> ,  
 3283 And with hir heed she wryed faste away,  
 3284 And seyde, ‘I wol nat kisse thee, by my fey,  
 3285 Why, lat be,’ quod she, ‘lat be, Nicholas,

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3286 Or I wol crye out “harrow” and “allas.”  
 3287 Do wey your handes for your curteisye!’  
  
 3288 This Nicholas gan mercy for to crye,  
 3289 And spak so faire, and profred hir so faste, <sup>profred</sup> ,  
 3290 That she hir love him graunted atte laste,  
 3291 And swoor hir ooth, by seint Thomas of Kent, <sup>thomas</sup> ,  
 3292 That she wol been at his comandement,  
 3293 Whan that she may hir leyser wel espye, <sup>leyser</sup> .  
 3294 ‘Myn housbond is so ful of Ialousye,  
 3295 That but ye wayte wel and been privee,  
 3296 I woot right wel I nam but deed, <sup>deed</sup> ;’ quod she.  
 3297 ‘Ye moste been ful derne, as in this cas.’

3298 'Nay ther-of care thee noght,' quod Nicholas,  
 3299 'A clerk had litherly biset his whyle, <sup>litherly</sup>,  
 3300 But-if he coude a Carpenter bigyle.'  
 3301 And thus they been acorded and y-sworn  
 3302 To wayte a tyme, as I have told biforn.  
 3303 Whan Nicholas had doon thus everydeel,  
 3304 And thakked hir aboute the lendes weel, <sup>thakked</sup>,  
 3305 He kist hir swete, and taketh his sautrye,  
 3306 And pleyeth faste, and maketh melodye.  
  
 3307 Than fil it thus, that to the parish-chirche,  
 3308 Cristes owne werkes for to wirche,  
 3309 This gode wyf wente on an haliday;  
 3310 Hir forheed shoon as bright as any day,  
 3311 So was it wasshen whan she leet hir werk.  
  
 3312 Now was ther of that chirche a parish-clerk,  
 3313 The which that was y-cleped Absolon.  
 3314 Crul was his heer, and as the gold it shoon, <sup>crul</sup>,  
 3315 And strouted as a fanne large and brode, <sup>strouted</sup>;  
 3316 Ful streight and even lay his Ioly shode, <sup>shode</sup>.  
 3317 His rode was reed, his eyen greye as goos, <sup>rode</sup>;  
 3318 With Powles window corven on his shoos, <sup>powles</sup>,  
 3319 In hoses rede he wente fetisly.  
 3320 Y-clad he was ful smal and proprely,  
 3321 Al in a kirtel of a light wachet, <sup>kirtel</sup>;  
 3322 Ful faire and thikke been the poyntes, <sup>poyntes</sup> set.  
  
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 3323 And ther-up-on he hadde a gay surplys, <sup>surplys</sup>  
 3324 As whyt as is the blosme up-on the rys.  
 3325 A mery child he was, so god me save,  
 3326 Wel coude he laten blood and clippe and shave, <sup>laten</sup>,  
 3327 And make a chartre of lond or acquitaunce, <sup>chartre</sup>.  
 3328 In twenty manere coude he trippe and daunce  
 3329 After the scole of Oxenforde tho,  
 3330 And with his legges casten to and fro,  
 3331 And pleyen songes on a small rubible, <sup>rubible</sup>;  
 3332 Ther-to he song som-tyme a loud quinible, <sup>quinible</sup>;  
 3333 And as wel coude he pleye on his giterne, <sup>giterne</sup>.  
 3334 In al the toun nas brewhous ne taverne  
 3335 That he ne visited with his solas,  
 3336 Ther any gaylard tappestere, <sup>gaylard</sup> was.  
 3337 But sooth to seyn, he was somdel squaymous, <sup>squaymous</sup>

3338 Of farting, and of speche daungerous, <sup>daungerous</sup> .

3339 This Absolon, that Iolif was and gay,

3340 Gooth with a sencer, <sup>sencer</sup> on the haliday,

3341 Sensinge the wyves of the parish faste;

3342 And many a lovely look on hem he caste,

3343 And namely on this carpenteres wyf.

3344 To loke on hir him thoughte a mery lyf,

3345 She was so propre and swete and likerous.

3346 I dar wel seyn, if she had been a mous,

3347 And he a cat, he wolde hir hente anon, <sup>hente</sup> .

3348 This parish-clerk, this Ioly Absolon,

3349 Hath in his herte swich a love-longinge,

3350 That of no wyf ne took he noon offringe;

3351 For curteisye, he seyde, he wolde noon.

3352 The mone, whan it was night, ful brighte shoon,

3353 And Absolon his giterne hath y-take,

3354 For paramours, he thoghte for to wake.

3355 And forth he gooth, Iolif and amorous,

3356 Til he cam to the carpenteres hous

3357 A litel after cokkes hadde y-crowe;

3358 And dressed him up by a shot-windowe, <sup>windowe</sup>

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3359 That was up-on the carpenteres wal.

3360 He singeth in his vois gentil and smal,

3361 ‘Now, dere lady, if thy wille be,

3362 I preye yow that ye wol rewe on me, <sup>rewe</sup> ;

3363 Ful wel acordaunt to his giterninge, <sup>giterninge</sup> .

3364 This carpenter awook, and herde him singe,

3365 And spak un-to his wyf, and seyde anon,

3366 ‘What! Alison! herestow nat Absolon

3367 That chaunteth thus under our boures wal, <sup>boure?</sup>

3368 And she answerde hir housbond ther-with-al,

3369 ‘Yis, god wot, Iohn, I here it every-del.’

3370 This passeth forth; what wol ye bet than wel, <sup>bet?</sup>

3371 Fro day to day this Ioly Absolon

3372 So woweth hir, that him is wo bigon.

3373 He waketh al the night and al the day;

3374 He kempte hise lokkes brode, and made him gay;

3375 He woweth hir by menes and brocage, <sup>brocage</sup> ,

3376 And swoor he wolde been hir owne page;

3377 He singeth, brokkinge as a nightingale;

3378 He sente hir piment, meeth, and spyced ale,  
3379 And wafres, pyping hote out of the glede;  
3380 And for she was of toune, he profred mede, <sup>mede</sup>.  
3381 For som folk wol ben wonnen for richesse,  
3382 And som for strokes, and som for gentillesse.

3383 Somtyme, to shewe his lightnesse and maistrye,  
3384 He pleyeth Herodes, <sup>herod</sup> on a scaffold hye.  
3385 But what availleth him as in this cas?  
3386 She loveth so this hende Nicholas,  
3387 That Absolon may blowe the bukkes horn;  
3388 He ne hadde for his labour but a scorn;  
3389 And thus she maketh Absolon hir ape, <sup>ape</sup>,  
3390 And al his earnest turneth til a Iape, <sup>jape</sup>.  
3391 Ful sooth is this proverbe, it is no lye,  
3392 Men seyn right thus, 'alwey, <sup>proverb</sup> the nye slye

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3393 Maketh the ferre leve to be looth.'  
3394 For though that Absolon be wood or wrooth,  
3395 By-cause that he fer was from hir sighte,  
3396 This nye Nicholas stood in his lighte.

3397 Now bere thee wel, thou hende Nicholas!  
3398 For Absolon may waille and singe 'allas.'  
3399 And so bifel it on a Saterdag,  
3400 This carpenter was goon til Osenay;  
3401 And hende Nicholas and Alisoun  
3402 Acorded been to this conclusioun,  
3403 That Nicholas shal shapen him a wyle, <sup>wyle</sup>  
3404 This sely Ialous housbond to bigyle;  
3405 And if so be the game wente aright,  
3406 She sholde slepen in his arm al night,  
3407 For this was his desyr and hir also.  
3408 And right anon, with-ouen wordes mo,  
3409 This Nicholas no lenger wolde tarie,  
3410 But doth ful softe un-to his chambre carie  
3411 Bothe mete and drinke for a day or tweye,  
3412 And to hir housbonde bad hir for to seye,  
3413 If that he axed after Nicholas,  
3414 She sholde seye she niste where he was,  
3415 Of al that day she saugh him nat with yë;  
3416 She trowed that he was in maladye,  
3417 For, for no cry, hir mayde coude him calle;  
3418 He nolde answeere, for no-thing that mighte falle.

3419 This passeth forth al thilke Saterdag,  
3420 That Nicholas stille in his chambre lay,  
3421 And eet and sleep, or dide what him leste,  
3422 Til Sondag, that the sonne gooth to reste.

3423 This sely carpenter hath greet merveylye  
3424 Of Nicholas, or what thing mighte him eyle,  
3425 And seyde, 'I am adrad, by seint Thomas,  
3426 It stondeth nat aright with Nicholas.  
3427 God shilde that he deyde sodeynly!  
3428 This world is now ful tikel, <sup>tikel</sup>, sikerly;  
3429 I saugh to-day a cors y-born to chirche

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3430 That now, on Monday last, I saugh him wirche.

3431 Go up,' quod he un-to his knave anoon,  
3432 'Clepe at his dore, or knocke with a stoon,  
3433 Loke how it is, and tel me boldely.'

3434 This knave gooth him up ful sturdily,  
3435 And at the chambre-dore, whyl that he stood,  
3436 He cryde and knocked as that he were wood:—  
3437 'What! how! what do ye, maister Nicholay?  
3438 How may ye slepen al the longe day?'

3439 But al for noght, he herde nat a word;  
3440 An hole he fond, ful lowe up-on a bord,  
3441 Ther as the cat was wont in for to crepe;  
3442 And at that hole he looked in ful depe,  
3443 And at the laste he hadde of him a sighte.  
3444 This Nicholas sat gaping ever up-righte,  
3445 As he had kyked on the newe mone, <sup>kyked</sup>.  
3446 Adoun he gooth, and tolde his maister sone  
3447 In what array he saugh this ilke man.

3448 This carpenter to blessen him bigan,  
3449 And seyde, 'help us, seinte Frideswyde!, <sup>frideswyde</sup>  
3450 A man woot litel what him shal bityde.  
3451 This man is falle, with his astromye,  
3452 In som woodnesse, <sup>woodnesse</sup> or in som agonye;  
3453 I thoghte ay wel how that it sholde be!  
3454 Men sholde nat knowe of goddes privetee.  
3455 Ye, blessed be alwey a lewed, <sup>lewed</sup> man,  
3456 That noght but oonly his bileve can!  
3457 So ferde another clerk with astromye;

3458 He walked in the feeldes for to pry  
3459 Up-on the sterres, what ther sholde bifalle,  
3460 Til he was in a marle-pit y-falle, <sup>marle</sup>;  
3461 He saugh nat that. But yet, by seint Thomas,  
3462 Me reweth sore of hende Nicholas.  
3463 He shal be rated of his studying, <sup>rated</sup>,  
3464 If that I may, by Iesus, hevене king!

3465 Get me a staf, that I may underspore, <sup>underspore</sup>,

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3466 Whyl that thou, Robin, hevest up the dore.  
3467 He shal out of his studying, as I gesse'—  
3468 And to the chambre-dore he gan him dresse.  
3469 His knave was a strong carl, <sup>carl</sup> for the nones,  
3470 And by the haspe he haf it up atones;  
3471 In-to the floor the dore fil anon.  
3472 This Nicholas sat ay as stille as stoon,  
3473 And ever gaped upward in-to the eir.  
3474 This carpenter wende he were in despeir,  
3475 And hente him by the sholdres mightily,  
3476 And shook him harde, and cryde spitously, <sup>spitously</sup>,  
3477 'What! Nicholay! what, how! what! loke adoun!  
3478 Awake, and thenk on Cristes passioun;  
3479 I crouche thee from elves and fro wightes! <sup>elves</sup>,  
3480 Ther-with the night-spel, <sup>nightspel</sup> seyde he anon-rightes  
3481 On foure halves of the hous aboute,  
3482 And on the threshfold of the dore with-oute:—  
3483 'Iesu Crist, and seynt Benedight, <sup>benedict</sup>,  
3484 Blesse this hous from every wikked wight,  
3485 For nightes veye, the white pater-noster <sup>paternoster</sup>!  
3486 Where wentestow, seynt Petres soster, <sup>sister</sup>?'

3487 And atte laste this hende Nicholas  
3488 Gan for to syke sore, and seyde, 'allas!  
3489 Shal al the world be lost eftsones now?'

3490 This carpenter answerde, 'what seystow?  
3491 What! thenk on god, as we don, men that swinke, <sup>swinke</sup>.'

3492 This Nicholas answerde, 'fecche me drinke;  
3493 And after wol I speke in privetee  
3494 Of certeyn thing that toucheth me and thee;  
3495 I wol telle it non other man, certeyn.'

3496 This carpenter goth doun, and comth ageyn,  
3497 And broghte of mighty ale a large quart;  
3498 And whan that ech of hem had dronke his part,

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3499 This Nicholas his dore faste shette,  
3500 And doun the carpenter by him he sette.

3501 He seyde, 'Iohn, myn hoste lief and dere,  
3502 Thou shall up-on thy trouthe swere me here, <sup>trouthe</sup>,  
3503 That to no wight thou shalt this conseil wreye;  
3504 For it is Cristes conseil that I seye,  
3505 And if thou telle it man, thou are forlore;  
3506 For this vengauce thou shalt han therfore,  
3507 That if thou wreye me, thou shalt be wood!'  
3508 'Nay, Crist forbede it, for his holy blood!'  
3509 Quod tho this sely man, 'I nam no labbe, <sup>labbe</sup>,  
3510 Ne, though I seye, I nam nat lief to gabbe.  
3511 Sey what thou wolt, I shal it never telle  
3512 To child ne wyf, by him that harwed helle!'

3513 'Now John,' quod Nicholas, 'I wol nat lye;  
3514 I have y-founde in myn astrologye,  
3515 As I have loked in the mone bright,  
3516 That now, a Monday next, at quarter-night,  
3517 Shal falle a reyn and that so wilde and wood,  
3518 That half so greet was never Noës flood, <sup>noe</sup>.  
3519 This world,' he seyde, 'in lasse than in an hour  
3520 Shal al be dreynt, so hidous is the shour;  
3521 Thus shal mankynde drenche and lese hir lyf.'

3522 This carpenter answerde, 'allas, my wyf!  
3523 And shal she drenche? allas! myn Alisoun!'  
3524 For sorwe of this he fil almost adoun,  
3525 And seyde, 'is ther no remedie in this cas?'

3526 'Why, yis, for gode,' quod hende Nicholas,  
3527 'If thou wolt werken after lore and reed, <sup>lore</sup>;  
3528 Thou mayst nat werken after thyn owene heed.  
3529 For thus seith Salomon, <sup>salomon</sup>, that was ful trewe,  
3530 "Werk al by conseil, and thou shalt nat rewe."  
3531 And if thou werken wolt by good conseil,  
3532 I undertake, with-ouen mast and seyl,  
3533 Yet shal I saven hir and thee and me  
3534 Hastow nat herd how saved was Noë,

3535 Whan that our lord had warned him biforn  
3536 That al the world with water sholde be lorn?’

3537 ‘Yis,’ quod this carpenter, ‘ful yore ago.’

3538 ‘Hastow nat herd,’ quod Nicholas, ‘also  
3539 The sorwe of Noë with his felawshipe,  
3540 Er that he mighte gete his wyf to shipe, <sup>noahwife?</sup>  
3541 Him had be lever, I dar wel undertake,  
3542 At thilke tyme, than alle hise wetheres blake,  
3543 That she hadde had a ship hir-self allone.  
3544 And ther-fore, wostou what is best to done?  
3545 This asketh haste, and of an hastif thing  
3546 Men may nat preche or maken taryng.

3547 Anon go gete us faste in-to this in  
3548 A kneding-trogh, or elles a kimelin, <sup>kimelin</sup>,  
3549 For ech of us, but loke that they be large,  
3550 In whiche we mowe swimme as in a barge,  
3551 And han ther-inne vitaille, <sup>vitaille</sup> suffisant  
3552 But for a day; fy on the remenant!  
3553 The water shal aslake and goon away  
3554 Aboute pryme up-on the nexte day.  
3555 But Robin may nat wite of this, thy knave,  
3556 Ne eek thy mayde Gille I may nat save;  
3557 Axe nat why, for though thou aske me,  
3558 I wol nat tellen goddes privetee.  
3559 Suffiseth thee, but if thy wittes madde,  
3560 To han as greet a grace as Noë hadde.  
3561 Thy wyf shal I wel saven, out of doute,  
3562 Go now thy wey, and speed thee heer-aboute.

3563 But whan thou hast, for hir and thee and me,  
3564 Y-geten us thise kneding-tubbes three,  
3565 Than shaltow hange hem in the roof ful hye,  
3566 That no man of our purveyaunce spye.  
3567 And whan thou thus hast doon as I have seyd,  
3568 And hast our vitaille faire in hem y-leyd,  
3569 And eek an ax, to smyte the corde atwo, <sup>corde</sup>  
3570 When that the water comth, that we may go,

3571 And broke an hole an heigh, up-on the gable,  
3572 Unto the gardin-ward, over the stable,



3573 That we may frely passen forth our way  
3574 Whan that the grete shour is goon away—  
3575 Than shaltow swimme as myrie, I undertake,  
3576 As doth the whyte doke after hir drake.  
3577 Than wol I clepe, “how! Alison! how! John!  
3578 Be myrie, for the flood wol passe anon.”  
3579 And thou wolt seyn, “hayl, maister Nicholay!  
3580 Good morwe, I se thee wel, for it is day.”  
3581 And than shul we be lordes al our lyf  
3582 Of al the world, as Noë and his wyf.

3583 But of o thyng I warne thee ful right,  
3584 Be wel avysed, on that ilke night  
3585 That we ben entred in-to shippes bord,  
3586 That noon of us ne speke nat a word,  
3587 Ne clepe, ne crye, but been in his preyere;  
3588 For it is goddes owne heste dere.

3589 Thy wyf and thou mote hange fer a-twinne, <sup>atwinne</sup>,  
3590 For that bitwixe yow shal be no sinne  
3591 No more in looking than ther shal in dede;  
3592 This ordinance is seyde, go, god thee spede!  
3593 Tomorwe at night, whan men ben alle aslepe,  
3594 In-to our kneding-tubbes wol we crepe,  
3595 And sitten ther, abyding goddes grace.  
3596 Go now thy wey, I have no lenger space  
3597 To make of this no lenger sermoning.  
3598 Men seyn thus, “send the wyse, and sey no-thing;”  
3599 Thou art so wys, it nedeth thee nat teche;  
3600 Go, save our lyf, and that I thee biseche.’

3601 This sely carpenter goth forth his wey.  
3602 Ful ofte he seith ‘allas’ and ‘weylawey,’  
3603 And to his wyf he tolde his privetee;  
3604 And she was war, and knew it bet than he,  
3605 What al this queynte cast was for to seye.  
3606 But natheles she ferde as she wolde deye,

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3607 And seyde, ‘allas! go forth thy wey anon,  
3608 Help us to scape, or we ben lost echon;  
3609 I am thy trewe verray wedded wyf;  
3610 Go, dere spouse, and help to save our lyf.’

3611 Lo! which a greet thyng is affeccioun!  
3612 Men may dye of imaginacioun,  
3613 So depe may impressioun be take.

3614 This sely carpenter biginneth quake;  
3615 Him thinketh verrailly that he may see  
3616 Noës flood come walwing as the see  
3617 To drenchen Alisoun, his hony dere.  
3618 He wepeth, weyleth, maketh sory chere,  
3619 He syketh with ful many a sory swogh.  
3620 He gooth and geteth him a kneding-trogh,  
3621 And after that a tubbe and a kimelin,  
3622 And prively he sente hem to his in,  
3623 And heng hem in the roof in privetee.  
3624 His owne hand he made laddres three,  
3625 To climben by the ronges and the stalkes  
3626 Un-to the tubbes hanginge in the balkes, <sup>balkes</sup>,  
3627 And hem vitailed, bothe trogh and tubbe,  
3628 With breed and chese, and good ale in a Iubbe,  
3629 Suffysinge right y-nogh as for a day.  
3630 But er that he had maad al this array,  
3631 He sente his knave, and eek his wenche also,  
3632 Up-on his nede to London for to go.  
3633 And on the Monday, whan it drow to night,  
3634 He shette his dore with-oute candel-light,  
3635 And dressed al thing as it sholde be.  
3636 And shortly, up they clomben alle three;  
3637 They sitten stille wel a furlong-way.  
  
3638 ‘Now, *Pater-noster* , <sup>paternoster</sup>, clom!’ seyde Nicholay,  
3639 And ‘clom,’ quod John, and ‘clom,’ seyde Alisoun.  
3640 This carpenter seyde his devocioun,  
3641 And stille he sit, and biddeth his preyere,

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3642 Awaytinge on the reyn, if he it here.  
  
3643 The dede sleep, for wery businesse,  
3644 Fil on this carpenter right, as I gesse,  
3645 Aboute corfew-tyme, or litel more;  
3646 For travail of his goost, <sup>travail</sup> he groneth sore,  
3647 And eft he routeth, <sup>routeth</sup>, for his heed mislay.  
3648 Doun of the laddre stalketh Nicholay,  
3649 And Alisoun, ful softe adoun she spedde;  
3650 With-uten wordes mo, they goon to bedde  
3651 Ther-as the carpenter is wont to lye.  
3652 Ther was the revel and the melodye;  
3653 And thus lyth Alison and Nicholas,  
3654 In businesse of mirthe and of solas,  
3655 Til that the belle of laudes, <sup>laudes</sup> gan to ringe,

3656 And freres in the chauncel gonne singe.  
3657 This parish-clerk, this amorous Absolon,  
3658 That is for love alwey so wo bigon,  
3659 Up-on the Monday was at Oseneye  
3660 With companye, him to disporte and pleye,  
3661 And axed up-on cas a cloisterer  
3662 Ful prively after Iohn the carpenter;  
3663 And he drough him a-part out of the chirche,  
3664 And seyde, 'I noot, I saugh him here nat wirche  
3665 Sin Saterdag; I trow that he be went  
3666 For timber, ther our abbot hath him sent;  
3667 For he is wont for timber for to go,  
3668 And dwellen at the grange a day or two;  
3669 Or elles he is at his hous, certeyn;  
3670 Wher that he be, I can nat sothly seyn.'

3671 This Absolon ful Ioly was and light,  
3672 And thoghte, 'now is tyme wake al night;  
3673 For sikirly I saugh him nat stiringe  
3674 Aboute his dore sin day bigan to springe.  
3675 So moot I thryve, I shal, at cokkes crowe,  
3676 Ful prively knocken at his windowe  
3677 That stant ful lowe up-on his boures wal.

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3678 To Alison now wol I tellen al  
3679 My love-longing, for yet I shal nat misse  
3680 That at the leste wey I shal hir kisse.  
3681 Som maner confort shal I have, parfay,  
3682 My mouth hath icched al this longe day;  
3683 That is a signe of kissing atte leste.  
3684 Al night me mette eek, I was at a feste.  
3685 Therfor I wol gon slepe an houre or tweye,  
3686 And al the night than wol I wake and pleye.'

3687 Whan that the firste cok hath crowe, anon  
3688 Up rist this Ioly lover Absolon,  
3689 And him arrayeth gay, at point-devys, <sup>pointdevys</sup>.  
3690 But first he cheweth greyn and lycorys,  
3691 To smellen swete, er he had kembd his heer.  
3692 Under his tonge a trewe love he beer,  
3693 For ther-by wende he to ben gracious.  
3694 He rometh to the carpenteres hous,  
3695 And stille he stant under the shot-windowe;  
3696 Un-to his brest it raughte, it was so lowe;  
3697 And softe he cogheth with a semi-soun—

3698 'What do ye, hony-comb, swete Alisoun?  
3699 My faire brid, my swete cinamome,  
3700 Awaketh, lemman myn, and speketh to me!  
3701 Wel litel thenken ye up-on my wo,  
3702 That for your love I swete ther I go.  
3703 No wonder is thogh that I swelte and swete;  
3704 I moorne as doth a lamb after the tete,<sup>tete</sup>  
3705 Y-wis, lemman, I have swich love-longinge,  
3706 That lyk a turtel trewe is my moorninge;  
3707 I may nat ete na more than a mayde.'

3708 'Go fro the window, Iakke fool,' she sayde,  
3709 'As help me god, it wol nat be "com ba me,"  
3710 I love another, and elles I were to blame,  
3711 Wel bet than thee, by Iesu, Absolon!  
3712 Go forth thy wey, or I wol caste a ston,

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3713 And lat me slepe, a twenty devel wey,<sup>devel</sup>!

3714 'Allas,' quod Absolon, 'and weylawey!  
3715 That trewe love was ever so yvel biset!  
3716 Than kisse me, sin it may be no bet,  
3717 For Iesus love and for the love of me.'

3718 'Wiltow than go thy wey ther-with?' quod she.

3719 'Ye, certes, lemman,' quod this Absolon.

3720 'Thanne make thee redy,' quod she, 'I come anon;  
3721 And un-to Nicholas she seyde stille,  
3722 'Now hust, and thou shall laughen al thy fille.'

3723 This Absolon doun sette him on his knees,  
3724 And seyde, 'I am a lord at alle degrees;  
3725 For after this I hope ther cometh more!  
3726 Lemman, thy grace, and swete brid, thyn ore!'

3727 The window she undoth, and that in haste,  
3728 'Have do,' quod she, 'com of, and speed thee faste,  
3729 Lest that our neighebores thee espye.'

3730 This Absolon gan wype his mouth ful drye;  
3731 Derk was the night as pich, or as the cole,<sup>derk</sup>,  
3732 And at the window out she putte hir hole,<sup>hole</sup>,  
3733 And Absolon, him fil no bet ne wers,  
3734 But with his mouth he kiste hir naked ers,<sup>ers</sup>

3735 Ful savourly, er he was war of this.  
3736 Abak he sterte, and thoghte it was amis,  
3737 For wel he wiste a womman hath no berd, <sup>berd</sup>;  
3738 He felte a thing al rough and long y-herd,  
3739 And seyde, 'fy! allas! what have I do?'  
3740 'Tehee!' quod she, and clapte the window to;  
3741 And Absolon goth forth a sory pas.  
3742 'A berd, a berd!' quod hende Nicholas,  
3743 'By goddes corpus , <sup>corpus</sup>, this goth faire and weel!'  
3744 This sely Absolon herde every deel,  
3745 And on his lippe he gan for anger byte;  
3746 And to him-self he seyde, 'I shal thee quyte!'  
3747 Who rubbeth now, who froteth now his lippes

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3748 With dust, with sond, with straw, with clooth, with chippes,  
3749 But Absolon, that seith ful ofte, 'allas!  
3750 My soule bitake I un-to Sathanas,  
3751 But me wer lever than al this toun,' quod he,  
3752 'Of this despyt awroken for to be, <sup>despyt</sup>!  
3753 Allas!' quod he, 'allas! I ne hadde y-bleynt!'  
3754 His hote love was cold and al y-queynt;  
3755 For fro that tyme that he had kiste hir ers,  
3756 Of paramours he sette nat a kers, <sup>kers</sup>,  
3757 For he was heled of his maladye;  
3758 Ful ofte paramours he gan deffye,  
3759 And weep as dooth a child that is y-bete.  
3760 A softe paas he wente over the strete  
3761 Un-til a smith men cleped daun Gerveys,  
3762 That in his forge smithed plough-harneys;  
3763 He sharpeth shaar and culter bisily, <sup>shaar</sup>.  
3764 This Absolon knokketh al esily,  
3765 And seyde, 'undo, Gerveys, and that anon.'  
3766 'What, who artow?' 'It am I, Absolon.'  
3767 'What, Absolon! for Cristes swete tree,  
3768 Why ryse ye so rathe, <sup>rathe</sup>, ey, benedicite! , <sup>benedicite</sup>  
3769 What eyleth yow? som gay gerl, god it woot,  
3770 Hath broght yow thus up-on the viritoot, <sup>viritoot</sup>;  
3771 By sëynt Note, <sup>note</sup>, ye woot wel what I mene.'

3772 This Absolon ne roghte nat a bene  
3773 Of al his pley, no word agayn he yaf;  
3774 He hadde more tow on his distaf  
3775 Than Gerveys knew, and seyde, ‘freend so dere,  
3776 That hote culter, <sup>culter</sup> in the chimenee here,  
3777 As lene it me, I have ther-with to done,  
3778 And I wol bringe it thee agayn ful sone.’

3779 Gerveys answerde, ‘certes, were it gold,  
3780 Or in a poke nobles alle untold,  
3781 Thou sholdest have, as I am trewe smith;  
3782 Ey, Cristes foo! what wol ye do ther-with?’

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3783 ‘Ther-of,’ quod Absolon, ‘be as be may;  
3784 I shal wel telle it thee to-morwe day’—  
3785 And caughte the culter by the colde stele.  
3786 Ful softe out at the dore he gan to stele,  
3787 And wente un-to the carpenteres wal.  
3788 He cogheth first, and knokketh ther-with-al  
3789 Upon the windowe, right as he dide er.

3790 This Alison answerde, ‘Who is ther  
3791 That knokketh so? I warante it a theef.’

3792 ‘Why, nay,’ quod he, ‘god woot, my swete leef,  
3793 I am thyn Absolon, my dereling!  
3794 Of gold,’ quod he, ‘I have thee broght a ring;  
3795 My moder yaf it me, so god me save,  
3796 Ful fyn it is, and ther-to wel y-grave;  
3797 This wol I yeve thee, if thou me kisse!’

3798 This Nicholas was risen for to pisse,  
3799 And thoghte he wolde amenden al the Iape,  
3800 He sholde kisse his ers er that he scape.  
3801 And up the windowe dide he hastily,  
3802 And out his ers he putteth prively, <sup>outhisers</sup>  
3803 Over the buttoke, to the haunche-bon;  
3804 And ther-with spak this clerk, this Absolon,  
3805 ‘Spek, swete brid, I noot nat wher thou art.’

3806 This Nicholas anon leet flee a fart, <sup>fart</sup>,  
3807 As greet as it had been a thonder-dent,  
3808 That with the strook he was almost y-blent;  
3809 And he was redy with his iren hoot,  
3810 And Nicholas amidde the ers he smoot, <sup>smoot</sup>.

3811 Of gooth the skin an hande-brede aboute, <sup>skin</sup>,  
3812 The hole culter brende so his toute,  
3813 And for the smert he wende for to dye.  
3814 As he were wood, for wo he gan to crye—  
3815 Help! water! water! help, for goddes herte!’

3816 This carpenter out of his slomber sterte,  
3817 And herde oon cryen ‘water’ as he were wood,

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3818 And thoghte, ‘Allas! now comth Nowelis flood, <sup>nowelis</sup>!’  
3819 He sit him up with-ouen wordes mo,  
3820 And with his ax he smoot the corde a-two,  
3821 And doun goth al; he fond neither to selle,  
3822 Ne breed ne ale, til he cam to the celle  
3823 Up-on the floor; and ther aswowne he lay, <sup>aswowne</sup>.

3824 Up sterte hir Alison, and Nicholay,  
3825 And cryden ‘out’ and ‘harrow’ in the strete.  
3826 The neighebores, bothe smale and grete,  
3827 In ronnen, for to gauren, <sup>gauren</sup> on this man,  
3828 That yet aswowne he lay, bothe pale and wan;  
3829 For with the fal he brosten hadde his arm, <sup>brosten</sup>;  
3830 But stonde he moste un-to his owne harm.  
3831 For whan he spak, he was anon bore doun  
3832 With hende Nicholas and Alisoun.  
3833 They tolden every man that he was wood,  
3834 He was agast so of ‘Nowelis flood’  
3835 Thurgh fantasye, that of his vanitee  
3836 He hadde y-boght him kneding-tubbes three,  
3837 And hadde hem hanged in the roof above;  
3838 And that he preyed hem, for goddes love,  
3839 To sitten in the roof, par companye , <sup>companye</sup>.

3840 The folk gan laughen at his fantasye;  
3841 In-to the roof they kyken and they gape, <sup>kyken</sup>,  
3842 And turned al his harm un-to a lape.  
3843 For what so that this carpenter answerde,  
3844 It was for noght, no man his reson herde, <sup>reson</sup>;  
3845 With othes grete he was so sworn adoun,  
3846 That he was holden wood in al the toun;  
3847 For every clerk anon-right heeld with other.  
3848 They seyde, ‘the man is wood, my leve brother, <sup>wood</sup>’;  
3849 And every wight gan laughen of this stryf.

3850 Thus swyved was the carpenteres wyf, <sup>swyved</sup>,

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3851 For al his keping and his Ialousye;

3852 And Absolon hath kist hir nether yë, <sup>nether</sup>;

3853 And Nicholas is scalded in the toute, <sup>toute</sup>.

3854 This tale is doon, and god save al the route, <sup>route</sup>!

Here endeth the Millere his tale.





## Footnotes

- intro *The Miller's Tale* is the second of the tales told among the company of pilgrims on their way to Canterbury. It immediately follows *The Knight's Tale*, a traditional chivalric romance set in Classical Greece. The Miller's Tale, by contrast, is a *fabliau*, a poetic genre recounting sexually explicit, satirical narratives. It is very much an inversion of the high style of the preceding tale, and sets the tone for the juxtaposition of style and genre that characterizes the whole of *The Canterbury Tales*.
- [AJB]
- skeat Walter William Skeat (1835–1912) was one of the most prolific and learned philologists of his time. While he was most famous for his *Etymological Dictionary of the English Language*, his edition of *The Canterbury Tales* was an academic standard until the publication of Larry Benson's *The Riverside Chaucer*.
- [AJB]
- gentils Members of the nobility. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- unbokeled Literally, 'the bag is unbuckled.' Figuratively, 'the game has now properly begun.'
- [AJB]
- quyte A semantically loaded word, simultaneously meaning 'pay for,' 'take revenge on,' or 'reward,' depending on the context. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- unnethe Uneasily. That is to say, the Miller is so drunk that he is having trouble sitting on his horse. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- pilate Pontius Pilate, the Roman official who condemned Christ to be crucified. In medieval mystery plays, actors playing Pontius Pilate would speak in a booming, commanding voice.
- [AJB]
- curse The 'armes' here are the *arma Christi*, or the weapons with which Christ was wounded during the Passion. To swear by the arms, as well as Christ's blood and bones, was seen as a particularly vulgar curse in the Middle Ages.

- [AJB]

nones 'For this occasion.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

soun 'I know it by my sound.' That is to say, the Miller can tell that he is drunk by the quality of his speech. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

cappe 'Set the carpenter's cap,' i.e., performed a trick on him. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

apeiren To harm a person's reputation. Here the Reve is arguing that it is sinful to tell debaucherous stories of people doing evil things. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

swich\_fam To bring wives into such [ill] fame.' The Miller's transgression is especially egregious because he is bringing into question the reputation of wives and, by proxy, the institution of marriage.

- [AJB]

leve Dear. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

who\_hath He who has no wife cannot be made into a cuckold.' That is to say, your wife can never cheat on you if you never get married in the first place.

- [AJB]

noon The Miller chooses to believe he is not a cuckold, not because he implicitly trusts his wife, but because doing so would bring him more trouble than he thinks it is worth.

- [AJB]

privetee 'A husband must not be inquisitive / About God's secrets or those of his wife.' That is to say, it is wise for a husband never to pry after his wife's secrets, lest he discover something he would rather not know.

- [AJB]

- foyson God's plenty. That is to say, if a husband is emotionally and sexually satisfied in his marriage, he does not need to inquire any deeper into his wife's activities.
- [AJB]
- apology Here Chaucer apologizes to the reader for the bawdy content of the upcoming tale, and, in an especially metatextual moment, reminds the reader that, if they are squeamish, they can simply turn the page to another, more respectable tale.
- [AJB]
- leef The piece of parchment on which the text is written.
- [AJB]
- storial Historically true; truthful; drawn from Scripture. This portion of Chaucer's apology is tongue-in-cheek, since none but two of the tales (the Monk's and the Parson's) can be described in this way.
- [AJB]
- gentillesse Nobility; kindness; gentleness. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- oxenford The city of Oxford, home to the University of Oxford.
- [AJB]
- gnof An ill-mannered churl. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- gestes 'That boarded guests.' That is to say, he rents a room in his house.
- [AJB]
- scoler Scholar. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- art One of the seven fields of university study: grammar, rhetoric, logic (the trivium), and arithmetic, geometry, astronomy, and music (the quadrivium).
- [AJB]

fantasye Inclination or desire. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

astrology While not in the trivium or quadrivium, astrology was seen as a legitimate field of inquiry in the Middle Ages—though not, it should be noted, for the purposes of prophecy or fortune-telling.

- [AJB]

certeyn 'Ascertain conclusions.' That is to say, Nicholas is claiming he can use astrology to see into the future.

- [AJB]

droghte 'Drought or [rain] showers.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

cleped Called; named. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

derne Secret. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

coude Know about; understand. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

solas Joy; pleasure. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

sleigh 'Sly and very secretive.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

ydight 'Very artfully decorated with sweet herbs.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

rote Root. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

licorys 'Licorice or zedoary,' two sweet-smelling herbs.

- [AJB]

almagest The Almagest is a classical textbook of astronomy written by Ptolemy, and was one of the standard astronomical treatises of the Middle Ages.

- [AJB]

astrelabe An astrolabe is a versatile tool for determining the position and movements of celestial bodies. Chaucer himself wrote a treatise on its use.

- [AJB]

augrim 'Algorithm-stones,' or stones marked with numbers and tables to assist with calculation.

- [AJB]

falding 'A red cloak.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

sautrye A Psalter, or a manuscript containing the Book of Psalms. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

angelus The *angelus* is a Christian prayer to the Virgin Mary that makes special reference to the archangel Gabriel's visitation to Mary at the Annunciation.

- [AJB]

kinges There are two interpretations of the phrase 'Kinges Noot.' It either refers generally to a song about kings (e.g., a romance), or to a particular song called the 'King's Note.'

- [AJB]

after 'Living on his friends' support and his income.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

ialous Jealous. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

narwe 'In a narrow cage.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

catoun Cato the Elder was a Roman statesman and historian.

- [AJB]

estaat 'Estaat' typically refers to one's social class. Here, however, it refers to one's age. That is, the Miller is citing Cato's proverb that individuals of similar ages should marry.

- [AJB]

wesele Weasel. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

ceynt A belt. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

barmcloon An apron. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

lendes Loins. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

gore A skirt. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

brouded 'Embroidered all in the front.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

tapes 'The ribbons of her white cap.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

filet Headband. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

likerous A lascivious eye. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

smale 'Her two brows were plucked very thin.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

sloo 'Black as any sloe.' A sloe is the fruit of the blackthorn bush. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

pere An early-ripening pear tree. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

wether 'And softer than the wool is of a sheep.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

latoun 'Latoun' is latten, an alloy of copper, tin, and other minerals. On Alisoun's purse, the latten is fashioned in the shape of pearls. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

popelote 'So lovely a darling, or such a wench.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

hewe Hue; complexion. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

noble 'Than the new-forged noble in the tower.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

yerne Lively. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

swalwe 'As any swallow sitting on a barn.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

bragot 'Bragget or mead.' Bragget is a beverage made of ale and honey. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).



- [AJB]

winsingeSkittish. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

bocler 'As broad as is the ornament on a buckler.' A buckler is a small shield. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

prymerolShe was a primrose, a pig's eye.' The pig's eye, known today as a pigsney or a cuckoo flower, is a delicate white flower.

- [AJB]

hende Clever. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

rage 'Flirt and play.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

oseneye Osney is a community just to the West of Oxford.

- [AJB]

queynte Clever. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

caughte 'And in secret he seized her by the genitals.' 'Queynte' is cognate with the modern English expletive for a vagina. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

spille 'I die.' That is to say, if he doesn't have her love, he will die.

- [AJB]

trave 'In the enclosure.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

- profred 'Proffered [himself] to her so earnestly.' Source: Middle English Dictionary.  
- [AJB]
- thomas St. Thomas of Canterbury, also known as St. Thomas à Becket, was a twelfth-century English bishop who was murdered on the order of King Henry II.  
- [AJB]
- leysen 'When she can best espie her opportunity.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- deed 'I right well know I am dead.' That is to say, Alisoun believes John will kill her if he finds out about her adultery.  
- [AJB]
- litherly 'A clerk has badly used his time / If he could not beguile a carpenter.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- thakked 'Patted her about the loins.' That is to say, after he touched her intimately.  
- [AJB]
- crul 'Curly was his hair, and it shone like gold.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- strouted 'It [his hair] stretched out like a large, wide fan.' Source: Middle English Dictionary.  
- [AJB]
- shode 'The handsome parting of his hair.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- rode 'His face was red, his eyes gray as a goose.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- powles St. Paul's Cathedral in London was famous for its rose-windows, for which was named a form of leather working in the production of shoes.

- [AJB]

kirtel 'All in a blue tunic.' Blue was a very expensive dye in this period. That Absolon wears it simultaneously marks his wealth and his preoccupation with material goods.

- [AJB]

poyntes Stitches. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

surplys A surplice, i.e., a liturgical garment. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

laten 'Well could he let blood and give haircuts and shave.' In addition to his other responsibilities, Absolon also serves as a local doctor and barber.

- [AJB]

chartre 'Make a charter of land or acquittance.' That is to say, as a parish clerk, Absolon serves as a local scribe, especially for legal writs.

- [AJB]

rubible A kind of fiddle or lute. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

quinible Falsetto. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

giterne Guitar. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

gaylard 'Gaily-dressed barmaid.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

squaymose squeamish. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

daungero**D**ifficult; critical. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

sencer A censer, i.e. a tool used in the Mass for burning incense. It could be carried and swung, and incense would thus be cast on parishioners during Mass. Here Chaucer is charging this act with a sexual undertone.

- [AJB]

hente 'He would have grabbed her right away.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

windowe'Casement-window,' i.e. a window attached to its frame by hinges. Source: Middle English Dictionary.

- [AJB]

rewe 'Have pity on me.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

giterning**G**uitar-playing. Literally, 'guitar-ing.' Source: Middle English Dictionary.

- [AJB]

boure 'The wall of our bedroom.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

bet 'What more would you have?' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

brocage 'Intermediaries and go-betweens.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

mede 'And because she was from the town, he offered her money.' That is to say, Absolon tries to pay Alisoun to have sex with him.

- [AJB]

herod That is to say, Absolon unsuccessfully tries to impress Alisoun by playing the role of Herod in the local Church play.

- [AJB]

ape Fool. Source: Middle English Dictionary

- [AJB]

jape Joke. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

proverb Literally, 'The nearby sly one always makes the distant beloved hated.' That is to say, when one's beloved is away, one is easily wooed by someone crafty and nearby.

- [AJB]

wyle 'Devise a trick.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

tikel Literally, 'this world is now very ticklish.' That is to say, there are many strange things happening. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

kyked 'As if he had gazed upon the new moon.'

- [AJB]

frideswyche St. Frideswide was an eight-century English princess and abbess who founded a priory in the city of Oxford. She is frequently invoked as the patroness of the city and University of Oxford.

- [AJB]

woodness Madness. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

lewed Uneducated; ignorant. Source: Middle English Dictionary

- [AJB]

marle A fertilizer pit. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

- rated 'Scolded.' That is to say, John intends to warn Nicholas that studying astrology has brought him into contact with demons.  
- [AJB]
- underspoth That is, pry the door open from below. Source: Middle English Dictionary.  
- [AJB]
- carl 'A man, usually of low estate.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- spitously 'Piteously; pitifully.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- elves 'I bless you against elves and evil creatures.'  
- [AJB]
- nightspel 'Night-charm.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- sister Scholars are uncertain about the reference Chaucer is making here. There are no references in surviving late antique or medieval sources to Saint Peter having a sister.  
- [AJB]
- swinke 'Work'. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- trouthe An individual's 'trouthe' (cognate to the modern term 'truth') refers to one innate sense of dignity and honesty. It was, and occasionally still is, used in wedding vows (e.g., 'I plight thee my *troth* .')
- [AJB]
- labbe 'Blabbermouth'. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).  
- [AJB]
- noe In his scheme to have sex with Alisoun, Nicholas is trying to convince John that God has revealed to him that the world will soon be flooded and the human race destroyed, as it was in

Genesis 6–9. Nicholas' ploy here is especially ironic given that the Genesis narrative ends with God promising never to flood the earth again.

- [AJB]

lore 'Learning and counsel.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

salomon King Solomon, the son of King David and the third king of Israel. Solomon is the purported author of the Book of Proverbs in the Hebrew Bible and the Christian Old Testament, known principally known for his wisdom.

- [AJB]

noahwife According to a popular apocryphal medieval legend, Noah's wife was hesitant to board the ark, preferring instead to gossip with the other wives in her village.

- [AJB]

kimelin A kneading trough was a large hollow table used to knead large quantities of dough *en masse* . A 'kimelin' refers to a vat used for brewing beer. These are meant to be humorous reversals of Noah's Ark.

- [AJB]

vitaille 'Food'; cognate to the modern term 'victuals.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

corde Absolon has instructed John to tie bathtubs onto his roof, to store food and drink in them, and to cut the rope holding them when the 'flood' begins.

- [AJB]

atwinne Far apart. Absolon wants to make sure that John doesn't hear him and Alisoun leave their tubs to have sex.

- [AJB]

balkes The beams of the roof. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

benedict [Saint Benedict of Nursia](#) (ca. 480–547) is an early Christian saint who founded the monastic order known as the Benedictines. He is widely venerated as one of the fathers of Western monasticism.

- [AJB]

paternoster *the Pater Noster* is the Our Father, one of the most fundamental Christian prayers.

- [AJB]

travail 'For suffering of his spirit.' Chaucer is engaging in a bit of wordplay here, as 'travail' can also refer to the physical labor involved with preparing for the 'flood.'

- [AJB]

routeth 'To snore.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

laudes 'Lauds' is the second canonical hour in church time, occurring around 6:00 AM. The bells of the local parish church would ring at this hour to signal the beginning of the day.

- [AJB]

pointdevyn 'In every detail.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

tete 'I mourn as a lamb does for the teat.' 'Tete' here is a double entendre, inflected by Absolon's sexual interest in Alisoun. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

devel 'In the name of twenty devils!' A curse. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

derk 'The night was dark as pitch or coal.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

hole 'Anus.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]



- ers 'Ass.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).'
- [AJB]
- berd 'For well he knew that no woman had a beard.' This is to say, Absolon can tell something is amiss because he can feel Alisoun's pubic hair.
- [AJB]
- corpus Latin, meaning 'body.' Nicholas is swearing upon God's body, i.e., the Eucharist.
- [AJB]
- despyt 'I entrust my soul to Saton if I would not rather see all this town avenged after this insult.' Absolon's phrasing here is extremely convoluted, reflecting his furious and irrational state.
- [AJB]
- kers 'He did not consider sexual encounters to be worth a watercress.' Source: Middle English Dictionary.
- [AJB]
- shaar 'He sharpens ploughshares and plough-blades busily.' Source: Middle English Dictionary.
- [AJB]
- rathe 'Early.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).
- [AJB]
- benedicite Latin, meaning 'bless me!'
- [AJB]
- viritoot This is the only recorded instance of the word 'viritoot' in the English language. [There is no consensus among scholars about what the word means](#), though most translate it as some form of 'upon the move.'
- [AJB]
- note St. Neot (d. 877) was an English monk at Glastonbury Abbey. He is a patron of fish and fisherman.
- [AJB]

culter 'Hot plough-blade.' Absolon intends to attack Alisoun with a red-hot piece of metal.

- [AJB]

outhisers 'He secretly put out his ass.' Nicholas is hoping to trick Absolon in the same manner as Alisoun.  
Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

fart This scene is an even bawdier repetition of Absolon's kiss with Alisoun; here Alisoun's calling out to Absolon is replaced with Nicholas farting.

- [AJB]

smoot 'And he smote Nicholas in the middle of his ass.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

skin 'Off goes the skin, about the breadth of a hand.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

nowelis The flood narrative of the Book of Genesis, chapters 6–9. God floods the earth, sparing only the lives of Noah, his wife, his sons, and his sons' wives, who together repopulate the earth.

- [AJB]

aswowne 'And there in a swoon he lay.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

gauren 'To gawk.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

brosten 'He had broken his arm.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

company French, 'to keep him company.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

kyken 'Stare' and 'gape.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#)

- [AJB]

reson 'Reson' here can refer either to John's literal reason for having fallen from the roof, or to his sanity. Source: Middle English Dictionary

- [AJB]

wood 'The man is mad, my dear brother.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

swyved 'Swyved,' here is an expletive referring to sexual intercourse. Chaucer writes the Miller with an explicit lexicon to reinforce the bawdiness of his tale. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

nether Literally, 'lower eye,' i.e., his anus. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

toute Literally, 'burned on the rear.' Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]

route Company of people, i.e., the pilgrims. Source: [Middle English Dictionary](#).

- [AJB]