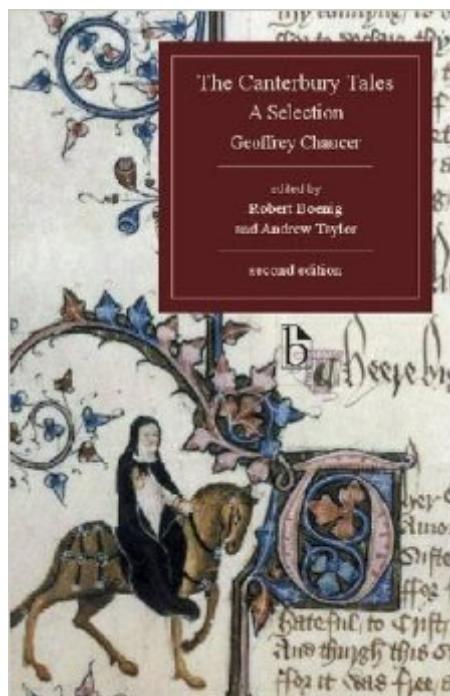


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The Canterbury Tales, A Selection - Second Edition (Broadview Editions)



Synopsis

Drawing from the same text as the complete Broadview edition of the Tales, which is based on the famous Ellesmere Manuscript, this selected edition also features a critical introduction, marginal glosses in modern English of difficult words, and explanatory footnotes. The most widely taught appendix material from the complete edition is included, along with ten illustrations from the Ellesmere Manuscript. The second edition includes a new glossary, a timeline of Chaucer's life and times, and detailed headers showing the section and line numbers, making it easier to find a specific section of the poem. Several popular prologues and tales have also been added to the selection: The Cook's Prologue and Tale, The Friar's Prologue and Tale, The Merchant's Prologue and Tale, and The Parson's Prologue.

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Customer Reviews

Over some period I have read several translations of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. My first experience, selections in a high school text, was not promising. (Perhaps, I was not yet ready for Chaucer.) Translating poetry from one language to another is difficult and often unsuccessful. Translating Chaucer from Middle English is not much easier. English has changed dramatically in the last 600 years, to the point that Middle English is nearly indecipherable. For example, we read Chaucer's description of the Knight's appearance: Of fustian he wered a gipoun (Of coarse cloth he wore a doublet) Al bismotered with his habergeoun (All rust-spotted by his coat-of-mail) A glossary, diligence, and time are required for reading the original Chaucer. If you choose to do so, the

Riverside Chaucer edition (edited by L. Benson) and the Norton Critical Edition (edited by Olson and Kolve) are highly recommended. The Signet Classic paperback edited by D. R. Howard modernizes the spelling a bit, but largely adheres to the original Chaucer and is an easier introduction to Middle English. Although in most cases the instructor assigns a particular version of Canterbury Tales, it can be exceedingly helpful to pick-up an additional version or two. A slightly different translation may entirely surprise you, even resonate with you, making Chaucer much more enjoyable. I suggest that you look for these versions: Selected Canterbury Tales, Dover Thrift edition - provides a poetic, rather than literal interpretation, and is quite readable. The collection of tales is fairly small, however. Canterbury Tales, Penguin edition, translated by Nevill Coghill, is an excellent poetic translation.

The version of this classic I read was a translation into modern English by Nevill Coghill. As you can see above, I awarded Chaucer (and the translation) five stars; but I do have a criticism. This translation (and many other publications of Chaucer) do not contain the two prose tales ("The Tale of Melibee" and "The Parson's Tale"). These are rarely read and I understand the publisher's and the translator's desire to keep the book to a manageable size. Still, that should be the reader's decision and no one else's. I had to go to the University library and get a complete copy in order to read those sections. As I mentioned, this copy is a translation into modern English. However, I do recommend that readers take a look at the Middle English version, at least of the Prologue. Many years ago, when I was in high school, my teacher had the entire class memorize the first part of the Prologue in the original Middle English. Almost forty years later, I still know it. I am always stunned at how beautiful, fluid, and melodic the poetry is, even if you don't understand the words.

Twenty-nine pilgrims meet in the Tabard Inn in Southwark on their way to Canterbury. The host suggests that the pilgrims tell four stories each in order to shorten the trip (the work is incomplete in that only twenty-four stories are told). The tales are linked by narrative exchanges and each tale is presented in the manner and style of the character providing the story. This book was a major influence on literature. In fact, the development of the "short story" format owes much to these tales.

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