

NAXOS
AudioBooks

Geoffrey Chaucer
The Canterbury Tales

Volume III

including **The Friar's Tale** • **The Seaman's Tale** • **The Physician's Tale**

Read by **Tim Pigott-Smith** • **Timothy West**
Michael Maloney and others

POETRY

**THE
GREAT TALES**

UNABRIDGED



NA330412D

1	The Friar's Tale (Tim Pigott-Smith)	2:21
2	Here begins the Friar's Tale	3:47
3	So it befell that on a certain day	2:46
4	Now by the truth, my brother dear	3:48
5	In various ways and figures we appear	2:47
6	So on their way they rode forth speedily	2:36
7	The summoner knocketh at the widow's gate	2:34
8	And when the fiend heard how she cursed him so	3:10
9	The Summoner's Tale (Stephen Tompkinson)	3:15
10	Here the Summoner begins his tale	3:12
11	Nay cried the friar	3:58
12	Dear Sir, with your permission	3:43
13	Lo, Moses fasted forty days and nights	2:40
14	For they, I think, are like Jovinian	3:42
15	And bear this word away now	3:20
16	Wrathful Cambyses loved both drink and revel	3:02
17	Nay, by St Simon, quickly answered he	3:03
18	Ha! Thought the friar.	3:19
19	The lady of the house sat listening	2:52
20	My lord, said Jankin	2:56
21	The Lawyer's Tale (Charles Kay)	5:36
22	The Prologue of the Lawyer's Tale	2:06

23	Here the Lawyer begins his tale	3:44
24	This sultan for his privy council sent	2:56
25	The day is come at last for their departing	3:48
26	The mother of the sultan	3:57
27	Part 2	3:43
28	A certain treasure that was with her sent	3:06
29	Into our English ocean thus she came	4:11
30	Satan, our ever-waiting arch-betrayer	3:19
31	Down on her knees she dropped	3:08
32	But who was wroth this wedding rite to see	3:33
33	Sad was the king, having this letter read	3:45
34	Now wept the young and old in all that place	3:29
35	Part 3	3:30
36	How could this feeble woman find the might	2:55
37	Aella, who caused his mother to be slain	3:15
38	Fair when they met did Aella give her greeting	3:23
39	Who can describe the piteous joy they know	3:25
40	The Seaman's Tale (Timothy West)	2:12
41	Here being the Seaman's Tale	4:23
42	Sir John had risen some little time ago	1:52
43	The monk began to stare upon this wife	3:46
44	This monk made answer as I tell you here	2:59

45	And afterwards, Sir John with gravity	2:46
46	On the first Sunday after he was gone	3:22
47	His wife was ready at the gate to greet him	3:43
48	The Prioress's Tale (Rosalind Shanks)	1:41
49	The Prologue of the Prioress's Tale	2:07
50	Here begins the Prioress's Tale	3:10
51	This child passed through the Jewish colony	3:44
52	The Christians on the street, that came and went	2:52
53	Therefore I sing, and sing I must indeed	2:07
54	The Manciple's Tale (Sean Barrett)	3:09
55	Then to the Manciple spoke up our Host	2:44
56	Here begins the Manciple's Tale	3:00
57	But to the end for which I first began	5:06
58	After this wife sent for her paramour	3:49
59	And to the crow he cried again	2:39
60	Thy first of actions, son, and thy chief care	2:36
61	The Physician's Tale (Michael Maloney)	2:57
62	If she was unexcelled in beauty thus	3:34
63	This maid of whom I tell did not require	3:32
64	On this, and he not here,	3:45
65	O mercy, O dear father	3:31
66	The words of the Host to the Physician and the Pardoner	2:12

Total time: 3:33:32

Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales – Vol. III

The Canterbury Tales, written near the end of Chaucer's life and hence towards the close of the fourteenth century, is perhaps the greatest English literary work of the Middle Ages: yet it speaks to us today with almost undimmed clarity and relevance.

Chaucer imagines a group of twenty-nine pilgrims who meet in the Tabard Inn in Southwark, intent on making the traditional journey to the martyr's shrine of St Thomas a Becket in Canterbury. Harry Bailly, landlord of the Tabard, proposes that the company should entertain themselves on the road with a storytelling competition. The teller of the best tale will be rewarded with a supper at the others' expense when the travellers return to London. Chaucer never completed this elaborate scheme – each pilgrim was supposed to tell four tales, but in fact we only have twenty-four altogether – yet, with the pieces of linking narrative and the prologues to each tale, the work as a whole constitutes a marvellously varied evocation of the medieval world which also goes beyond its period to penetrate (humorously, gravely, tolerantly) human nature itself.

Chaucer, as a member of this company

of pilgrims, presents himself with mock innocence as the admiring observer of his fellows, depicted in the General Prologue. Many of these are clearly rogues – the coarse, cheating Miller, the repulsive yet compelling Pardoner – yet in each of them Chaucer finds something human, often a sheer vitality or love of life which is irresistible: the Monk may prefer hunting to prayer, but he is after all a *manly man*, to be an *abbot able*. Perhaps only the unassuming, devoted Parson and his humbly labouring brother the Ploughman rise entirely above Chaucer's teasing irony; certainly the Parson's fellow clergy and religious officers belong to a Church riddled with gross corruption. Everyone, it seems, is on the make, in a world still recovering from the ravages of the Black Death.

The seventh tale (in Chaucer's original order) is told by the **Friar**, a member of a mendicant order who uses his privileged position to exploit the young people of his district. Many of the tales in Chaucer's collection are told in order to score points off other pilgrims: the Friar uses his to make fun of the Summoner. In the story, a

summoner makes a pact with the devil to share any ill-gotten gains they may make, but does not reckon on the perverse sincerity of the devil who will only take that which is 'ex corde' – from the heart – and is thus able to bear the summoner to hell and damnation when an old woman, with genuine feeling, wishes the duplicitous summoner to 'go to the devil'.

Not surprisingly, the **Summoner's Tale** takes the form of a riposte. Summoners were officers of the Church responsible for summoning miscreants under canon law to the Church courts: Chaucer's Summoner is an especially repulsive specimen, both morally and physically. Friars were equally known for their greed and corruption, so, in his tale, the Summoner has his Friar faced with the apparently impossible task of sharing out a legacy. This legacy consists of a fart 'donated' by a bedridden householder exasperated by the friar's repeated requests for money. The tale suggests a symbolism whereby the friar's hypocritical preaching is aptly represented by the fart.

The **Lawyer's Tale** is altogether more high-minded, befitting the dignity of its teller: Constance, a Christian princess, marries a sultan on condition that he converts to Christianity but then, victim of the sultan's mother's plotting, is cast away

on the seas. The story is an allegory of Christian fortitude: years later, the wicked mother-in-law long since executed, the mother and son who have been miraculously preserved in their wanderings are reunited in Rome with the grieving sultan. A similar tale is also found in the 'Confessio Amantis' of Gower, Chaucer's great contemporary, but both writers borrowed from an earlier text (or texts).

The **Seaman** (Chaucer calls him a 'shipman' in the original) relates a story of cynical amorality well suited to his own ruthless character: we hear in the Prologue of his thieving and violence. A rich, workaholic merchant neglects his pretty wife who seeks solace in the arms of a family friend, a well-off monk given free rein by his abbot to travel outside his religious house. The husband pays his wife a meagre allowance, both sexually and financially; she therefore borrows from the monk to pay for finery and grants him sexual favours in return; she is not aware that the monk has himself borrowed the money from the merchant. If the story *has* a moral, it can only be that he who thinks solely of money lays himself open to exploitation in other ways.

We know from the General Prologue that the **Prioress** is a lady who cultivates an air of selfless sensitivity but who

nevertheless seems unduly interested in her own appearance and the impression she makes on others, men especially. Her tale is a simple exercise in religious pathos: a little boy from an Asian city is murdered by members of the Jewish community as he sings a hymn. His body is found because, miraculously, he continues to sing even in death. Modern listeners may well be repelled by the unthinking anti-semitism, but we have to remember how endemic such attitudes were in the Middle Ages: the story itself makes explicit reference to Hugh of Lincoln, allegedly murdered by Jews in 1255.

The **Manciple** is a kind of domestic bursar or caterer, extremely shrewd in his business dealings yet almost entirely uneducated. His story is based on the well-known tale of the tell-tale crow: versions of it appear in Ovid, in the work of Guillaume de Machaut, and in Gower's 'Confessio Amantis'. Phoebus owns a talking crow which tells him of his wife's sexual treachery; enraged, Phoebus kills his wife; later, he turns upon the crow and plucks its feathers, declaring that he and his issue 'shall be black', the devil's colour. Again, the moral is a cynical one: never tell any man that his wife has been unfaithful.

The **Physician's Tale** takes us back to a world of principle and virtue – remote, as it

happens, from the Physician himself who, it is clear from the Prologue, is a charlatan. The story, derived from Livy but owing much to a later version in Jean de Meun's 'Romance of the Rose', is stark and shocking: a beautiful girl of impeccable virtue is cast into the power of a corrupt judge, Appius, but chooses to die at her father's hand rather than be shamed. The Host's reaction perhaps expresses the reader's: the gifts of beauty and virtue may often, in this wicked world, be our undoing.

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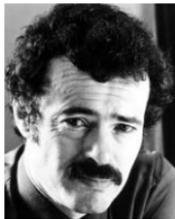
Son of a vintner, Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London in 1340 or thereabouts. He enjoyed a successful and varied career as courtier and diplomat, travelling extensively in France and Italy, where he may have met Boccaccio and Petrarch. In 1374 he was made Controller of Customs in the Port of London; in 1386 he represented Kent as Knight of the Shire, and may have lived there until his death in 1400. He is buried in Westminster Abbey.

Chaucer derives almost all his tales from known sources, classical, French or Italian, but he is brilliantly successful in giving them a tone and feeling which are very English (concrete, ironic) and very much his own. He wrote prolifically and in a number of styles: other works include the great

'Troilus and Criseyde', 'The Book of the Duchess' and 'A Treatise on the Astrolabe'. He also translated 'The Romance of the Rose'. His range of subject matter, width of reading and sophistication are remarkable; his most notable qualities are perhaps his

deeply sympathetic view of human aspiration and weakness, and (when required) his capacity for close, ironic observation.

Notes by Perry Keenlyside



Sean Barrett started acting as a boy on BBC children's television in the days before colour when it went out live and grew up through *Z Cars*, *Armchair Theatre*, *Minder* and *Father Ted*. His theatre credits include *Peter Pan* at the old Scala Theatre to the first Ludlow Festival, Regent's Park Open Air Theatre, and in the West End with Noel Coward in his *Suite in 3 Keys*. Films include *War & Peace*, *Dunkirk* and *A Cry from the Streets*. He was a member of the BBC radio drama company and performs frequently on radio and as a reader of audio books and has read *Molloy* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Philip Madoc's extensive theatre work includes the roles of Othello and Iago, Faust and Macbeth and recently, with the RSC, The Duke in *Measure for Measure* and Professor Raat in *The Blue Angel*. TV roles include Lloyd George, Magua in *The Last of the Mohicans*, *Brookside* and *A Mind to Kill*. He reads *The Death of Arthur*, *Canterbury Tales I* and read the part of Host in *Canterbury Tales II*, *Arabian Nights*, *The Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire*, *The Old Testament* and *Romeo and Juliet* for Naxos AudioBooks.



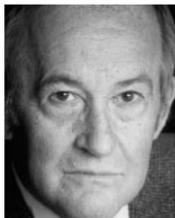
Michael Maloney's many Shakespearean roles on the London stage include Edgar in *King Lear*, the title roles in *Hamlet* and *Romeo and Juliet*, Prince Hal in *Henry IV Parts 1 & 2*; on film he has appeared in Branagh's productions of *Hamlet* and *Henry V*, as well as in Parker's *Othello*. Other notable films include Minghella's *Truly, Madly, Deeply*. He frequently performs on radio and TV. He has been involved in other Naxos AudioBooks productions including *King Richard III*, *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and *Poets of the Great War*. He has also played the part of George Tesman in *Hedda Gabler* and read the *Diary of Samuel Pepys* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Tim Pigott-Smith's busy acting career has covered stage, TV and film, and extensive work on radio and audio book. His films have varied from *Remains of the Day* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* to *Escape to Victory* and *The Four Feathers*. He has spent many seasons with the RSC and the National Theatre, the plays including *Shakespeare*, *Amadeus*, *The Iceman Cometh* and *Major Barbara*. *Fame is the Spur*, *Jewel in the Crown* and *Kavanagh QC* are among his TV credits. He read *A Life of Conan Doyle*, *They Saw it Happen* and *Jung* for Naxos AudioBooks.



Stephen Tompkinson has wide experience in television, film, radio and theatre. His most recent television work includes the third series of *In Deep*, *Ted and Alice* and the lead role in *Lucky Jim*. Television plays and single episodes include *Flint Street Nativity*, *First Signs Of Madness*, *A Very Open Prison*, *The Deep Blue Sea*, *Casualty* and as Eric in *And A Nightingale Sang*. Stephen's films include the critically acclaimed *Brassed Off*, *Treacle*, *Hotel Splendide* and *Tabloid TV*. He has also had parts in a wide range of plays including Ivan in *Art* and Mortimer Brewster in *Arsenic and Old Lace* (both West End) the title role in *Tartuffe* (on tour), Paul in *No One Sees The Video* (Royal Court), Alec in *Across The Ferry* (Bush Theatre) and Tony in *Women Laughing* (Manchester Royal Exchange).



Charles Kay trained at RADA. He joined the RSC in its early days to play Clarence in Peter Hall's *Wars of the Roses* and stayed with the company for four years, after which he joined Olivier's National Theatre at the Old Vic for six years appearing in *As You Like It*, *Danton's Death*, *Three Sisters* and *The National Health*. Seasons at the Royal Court appearing in *The Wesker Trilogy*, *The Kitchen*, *The Changeling* and *Luther*. West End theatre appearances include *The Homecoming*, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* and *The Woman In Black*. TV credits include *The Duchess of Malfi*, *Fall of Eagles*, *Loyalties*, *Serve Them All My Days*, *My Cousin Rachel*, *Edge of Darkness*, *Kind John*, *Fortunes of War* and *Darling Buds of May*. Films include *Amadeus*, *Henry V*, *Beautiful People* and *The Importance of Being Earnest*.



Rosalind Shanks began work in radio drama after winning the Carleton Hobbs Award. She has taken part in over 2000 broadcasts, playing a great many leading roles including Desdemona to Paul Scofield's Othello, and has read many times on 'Poetry Please' and 'With Great Pleasure'. After leading roles in repertory she appeared at the National Theatre and also in the West End with Judi Dench directed by John Gielgud. She toured the world in *Shakespeare's People* with Michael Redgrave. In television she has appeared in Muriel Spark's *The Girls of Slender Means* and Mrs Gaskell's *North and South*.



Timothy West's numerous London stage performances began in 1959 with the farce *Caught Napping*. He has appeared with the National, Royal Shakespeare Company and Prospect Theatre companies playing, among others, King Lear, Prospero, Shylock and Macbeth. Among his many TV appearances are: *Edward VII*, *Beecham*, *Brass* and *Churchill and the Generals*. His films include *Ever After*, *Joan of Arc* and *Villa of Roses*. In 1984 he was awarded a CBE for his services to the profession. He also read the part of Chorus in *Henry V* for Naxos AudioBooks.

The music on this recording is taken from the NAXOS catalogue

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The Prioress's Tale – Rosalind Shanks

The Manciple's Tale – Sean Barrett

The Physician's Tale – Michael Maloney

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Squire's Tale Walter Appleton Clark (1907)

Geoffrey Chaucer
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Volume III

The Friar's Tale • The Summoner's Tale
The Lawyer's Tale • The Seaman's Tale • The Prioress's Tale
The Manciple's Tale • The Physician's Tale

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