

Final Project

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ENGL 223

The Tale of Hope

The Prologue of the Tale of Hope

The pilgrims are so enthralled by the Nun's Priest's Tale that they don't even notice the arrival of a newcomer during the story. A youthful voice calls out from the back and says that he greatly enjoyed the Nun's Priest's Tale! All the pilgrims turn to see a young slightly small student with patchy facial hair, not particularly handsome or strong looking. He says if they are looking for someone to tell another tale, the one he has just heard puts him in mind of telling a tale of his own. The host asks who is this person, how long he has been there, and how he arrived without any of them knowing. The newcomer says he is a student named Niall from a poor Catholic family, and that he is making a pilgrimage to Canterbury to see the remains of Saint Thomas Becket. Niall continues that he didn't mean to be rude by joining their party unannounced, but that he couldn't help but overhear the Nun's Priest's story, and curious about this tale of talking chickens, decided to listen in. The host remarks that this is a happy coincidence to have crossed paths, since they are also traveling to Canterbury for the same purpose. Harry Bailly then explains the nature of their tale-telling competition where the victor wins a free dinner. Niall asks if he may partake in the competition, as he has little money for the journey and would love a free dinner, and he thinks that he could tell a very good tale. Niall also tells the group of his studies in literature, and tries to convince everyone that he is smart,

although he clearly doesn't entirely know what he's talking about. He also tells them that his father was a poor farmer with a small flock of goats, and he has many amusing stories to tell about the antics of the goats and his father's love for his flock. The pilgrims think this young man surely cannot tell a tale to match the one they have just heard, but allow him to proceed.

Here begins The Tale of Hope

A dozen goats were in the goat herd's flock,
Though he was poor, he cared for them a lot!
With just tree cover over their abode,
The goats complained about the bitter cold.
The farmer chopped down trees to build a hut,
He planted berries, fed them fruits and nuts.
Blackberries and brambles filled his pasture,
They ate with glee all that they sought after.
Within this flock of goats was one named Hope,
The Catholic farmer loved her like the Pope!
She was pure black, with brown rings on her hooves,
With shapely lines and deeply clefted grooves,
Her hips were wide and sturdy to give birth,
Her kids would drop on soft and tended earth.
She boasted lovely udders, firm and round,
Untouched, un milked, they swayed above the ground,
Waiting to bear kids and serve their purpose,

Her perky teats protruded well, but useless.
He longed to see her belly swell with child,
To fill his pail with milk, so sweet and mild.
Hope came from worthy stock, the farmer knew,
Her Aunt was a prized show goat through and through.
The farmer loved this superb goat most dear,
Her baby goats would be quite fine, t'was clear.
He might have shown her at the county fair,
But wanted kid goats, sure to be as fair,
To gaze upon their beauty for himself,
I tell you this goat rose above all else!
The other goats were envious of her,
The farmer's preference, jealously did spur!
He gave her extra food and groomed her well,
Brushed her gently, bought a collar with a bell.
Her treatment was unfair, the others said,
Yet dared not harm her and bring wrath instead.
Hope's second birthday brought the farmer joy,
The time had come for her to mate a boy!
Hope took this news with worry and unease,
The male goats she had known, they didn't please,
Yet reassure her well, the farmer did,
A handsome buck with her would make good kids.

And so he bought a billy goat named James,
With money earned from milk sales by the Thames.
James was nice and treated Hope quite kindly.
He fetched her clover, watched her mindfully,
He showed the other goats his sweet respect.
He helped him get the brambles off their necks,
When they became entangled in the thorns,
He pulled the vines off using his large horns.
A kinder goat the farmer'd never seen,
He helped Hope groom her coat and kept her clean.
A goat so masculine and fit and lean,
Polite and pleasant, James was never mean.
With a full a beard and manly goatly smell,
Surely all the ladies would find him swell!
To farmer's surprise, Hope was not bemused,
She loved the clover, brambles she consumed.
James asked to meet her at the shed one night,
He told her she looked lovely by moonlight,
Not wishing to be rude or act with spite,
She passively accepted his invite.
When evening came, the farmer lit a light,
But James the goat found Hope was not in sight.
James tells the farmer Hope had been so rude,

As to reject their plans, t'was simply crude!
The farmer was upset, inquired of Hope,
Why had she rejected this handsome goat?
Hope said "I care not for goats so simple,
He may appeal to you in principal,
But I have standards for my own desire,
This goat named James just does not light my fire!"
The farmer asks what kind of stud she'd love,
She says "t'was you who thought he rose above,
I'll know the man meant for my affection
When we meet, I'll follow his direction.
The farmer knows not what to say or do,
He heads to market, viewing goats anew.
A seller there complains he has a buck,
That none of his female goats care to fuck!
A goat named Bob, this seller really loathed,
The bane of his existence, not betrothed,
To any goat within the seller's flock,
He'd gladly rid himself of Bob for naught!
Bob harassed the seller all day and night,
He butted heads with other goats to fight.
He sought out extra food and treats all day,
He scoffed at other goats who tried to play.

The female goat intended as his bride,
Wanted none of him, and despised his pride.
She hated him so much she would not mate,
With this jackass named Bob she'd come to hate.
The farmer saw his chance for thrift with Bob,
He offered pennies and he got a nod.
He thought perhaps he'd resell to a fool,
Spinning tales of Bob's greatness like a spool,
For unsuspecting buyers to unwind,
After the farmer made a pretty dime.
But grudgingly he brought Bob home to see,
If Hope perhaps saw something else than he.
Bob was ornery, stubborn, and downright mean,
And a slob as well, he kept nothing clean.
Not handsome, tall, nor finely bred was he,
The other goats disliked him, let him be.
But for a male not to flirt made Hope mad,
She told him the opinion that she had,
"No wonder you are so disliked you runt,
You'd be lucky to mate with my fine cunt!"
Bob replied "yes, I do desire to mate,"
"But problems you would only perpetuate."
"You are shallow and a nuisance" said he,

“A massive pain in my butt you would be”
Hope stood there shocked by how he had acted,
But at the same time deeply attracted,
Her lustful desire she could not deny,
He was truly the apple of her eye!
His lack of sex appeal was overcome,
By his skill in getting latches undone,
He opened the hay barn gate with swift ease,
Let the other goats in to eat their please!
The farmer’s anger Bob would never mind,
He ignored scoldings and showed his behind,
And because he was so cool and clever,
Hope thought he was the hottest goat ever!
So she whispered in his ear “meet at night”-
Deep in the dark woods and far out of sight,
There passionate goaty sex they had,
A fair maiden shagged by an ugly lad.
After they cuddled and talked beneath the moon,
About how they’re farmer was a buffoon.
Spring arrived and Hope saw her belly grow,
She told Bob she was beginning to show,
And that he must atone for what he did,
By caring for her and her unborn kids.

Bob promised that he would not disappear,
But that he had never wanted kids to rear.
Hope's temper grew cranky, her face pudgy,
Of Bob she was relentlessly judgy,
And while she used to be gorgeous and frail,
She now began to resemble a whale!
Luna and Milky were born in July,
Hope ate her placenta and went to cry.
In front of the kids the parents would fight,
Going back and forth about who was right,
Each argument would only build their spite,
Loud bleats and headbutts gave their kids a fright.
And Hope would remember James the billy,
And how youthful love had made her silly,
And how she had denied such a nice goat,
Now she had Bob and wished to slit his throat!

Analysis

The Tale of Hope is a 2024 addition to the Canterbury Tales, written by me, Niall Fulghum, as a college student at UNC Chapel Hill. Having read the Canterbury tales all semester, I decided to try to write my own tale that seeks to fit in with some of the compelling thematic trends that I have noticed throughout the Canterbury Tales.

Not only did I make myself the author, I also inserted myself into the story as a pilgrim in the character of a student who arrives after the Nun's Priest's Tale and tells his own story. I felt like I could do this since Chaucer puts himself into his own story, telling the Tale of St. Topas and the Tale of Melibee (which is why I named my tale "the Tale of Hope" rather than "the student's prologue and tale" as well as the double-entendre in the phrase "the tale of hope" as this is not a particularly hopeful tale).

Since Chaucer mocked himself in the Canterbury Tales, I also mocked myself in the prologue. Chaucer is known by the pilgrims as a famous writer in the Canterbury Tales, but not a good one. The Man of Law complains that Chaucer has already told all the tales that he can think of, however poorly, and the two tales Chaucer tells himself, the Tale of Melibee and the Tale of Sr. Thopas are quite weak, which doesn't fit with what we know about Chaucer's talent as writer from stories like the Miller's Tale and the Wife of Bath. Chaucer also mocks his physical appearance, which I did as well.

My tale is told by a fictionalized version of Niall in a 14th century imagination of myself. Other than differences to account for the period, I wanted this fictionalized conception of myself to be as similar to me in temperament, appearance, and behavior as possible, which is of course to some extent impossible given how much everyone is a product of their generation and environment, but for the sake of the story we are going to imagine that I've grown up in the 1400's, I still have the same personality, and am still studying literature at university.

In my depiction of myself I also wanted to acknowledge that I may have some inflated sense of self that others can see when I write about the student trying to impress the travelers without really knowing what he's talking about.

The only difference between this fictionalized version of myself and reality, is that in this fictionalized version of myself I would be the son of a poor farmer that is going to school to try to improve his socio-economic class. In reality I grew up in a middle-class family. However, my dad was a “city kid” who bought land to have chickens and goats because he envied the more rural existence, so I was partially raised on a small homestead.

By telling the tale from a fictionalized version of myself, as well as acknowledging myself as the real-life writer, I can directly analyze the tale from a first-person perspective

Given that this is my only contribution to the Canterbury Tales, and one of the first major creative writing projects that I have taken on personally, it’s inevitably going to be linked to myself and my world view, so rather than try to inhabit the mindset of some other author/Chaucer scholar, I felt like it would be best if I just wrote a story that I wanted to write and was reflective of my own artistic vision. This would allow me to directly analyze the symbolism as it relates to my own life, since I know where I’m drawing all the characters and inspiration from, and I know my own interpretations of the Canterbury Tales. By making myself the author, I can write from my own perspective and not overthink what would otherwise be a daunting task.

First, I wanted to write the best tale that I possibly could, which is a goal that works on multiple levels for my character. As a fictionalized version of myself, I’m a poor student so I would want to win the competition for the free meal. As a real-life student in 2024, I want to write a good tale to enjoy the projects and reflect on what the Canterbury Tales reveal about what makes stories “good” or have literary merit.

Not all the stories in the Canterbury Tales are “good”. While some tales Chaucer may have felt were necessary because they say something about the stereotype about a profession,

they aren't necessarily "good tales". For example, in the Cook's Tale, he's so drunk that he trails off halfway through and gives up. If I were to write another tale, perhaps I would try to write a tale with a different goal in mind, like trying to quit another pilgrim or comment on something clever about the socio-political outlook of a historical profession, but since I'm only contributing one tale, my primary goal in the tale is to win the free dinner, which I think metaphorically aligns quite well with my goals in real life. That's why I intentionally chose to have my character arrive during the Nun's Priest's Tale, so that he wouldn't even be aware of the prior quits and general tomfoolery that had been happening throughout the competition (although he would have gotten a taste at the end of the Nun's Priest's tale when the host says "Blessed be thy buttocks, and every testicle!" and that if the priest were not secular he would have need for 17 hens).

My tale drew most heavily from the Wife of Bath's prologue and tale - her five descriptions of love and then her tale about how women desire total submission from their husbands. I wrote the tale in rhyming couplets in reference to the Wife of Bath's Tale and how I was drawing on her darkly humorous take on love for inspiration.

One theme that I've identified through Chaucer that I really like is this darkly humorous portrayal of human nature, especially when it comes to romantic relationships. In addition to the Wife of Bath, the Clerk's Tale, Merchant's Tale, and Shipman's tale (as well as many others) all in some way portray a romantic relationship with some interesting element that causes conflict and drives the plot. The Clerk's tale shows men's desire for total loyalty from their wives, as Walter constantly tests/tortures Griselda, and at the end Chaucer advises men to not be like Walter and women to not be like Griselda. The Merchant's tale mocks intergenerational relationships, where an elderly January takes a young beautiful virgin as Wife, who then cheats on him right in front of his face with a handsome youth, Damian. And the Shipman's tale is a

fableux about transactional relationships and a rich merchant who lends money to the man that his wife is cheating on him with.

Although my tale comes after the Nun's Priest's Tale and falls into the same genre of beast fable, I didn't mean for it be a direct quit of the Nun's Priest's Tale. My character is instead using the Nun's Priest's Tale as inspiration to tell a story about talking animals, since the student was raised by a goat herding father and wants to tell a story anthropomorphizing the unique personality of goats in the same way that the fox and chickens are anthropomorphized in the Nun's Priest's Tale.

I really tried to not think too much about copying any particular story from the Canterbury Tales as I was writing this, but instead just write a story that is based on my own direct life experience and is true to my own artistic gaze of the world, and analyze the similarities later. The one thing that I did know was that I wanted to write in rhyming couplets in reference to the Wife of Bath's Tale and that I wanted to capture some sort of unique relationship dynamic, like Chaucer does across the Canterbury Tales.

Since the story is coming from me, I thought about what would be my cynical Chaucerian perspective on love at 23 years old, and I decided that I wanted to write about something that I've experienced in my life, where you like someone because you feel like you share a worldview and they "get you", but inevitably over time you start to have conflicts with that person and your differences grow to feel irreconcilable.

The first part of the story, where Hope takes interest in Bob, a goat that no one else likes, is symbolic of my desire for exceptionalism from other men in the eyes of women from a romantic perspective, despite my insecurities and unwillingness to change. The second part of

the story I wrote to be symbolic of how romantic relationships seem to always end in shared loathing and thus from the perspective of a 23 year old serious relationships aren't worth it.

I also wanted to include the element of Hope getting pregnant and the impact having kids would have on her life because I was thinking about how I would feel about relationships and sex if I were a woman and lived pre-birth control (pre-1960's), and how pregnancy would affect someone like Hope that prides themselves so much on their youth and beauty. Although Hope knows that she could get pregnant, she doesn't necessarily want to get pregnant and she doesn't fully grasp how pregnancy will change her body and her entire life. I also felt like that fit in with Chaucer's dark sense of humor to end with Hope cynically reflecting on her lost youth and lost love.

My story does not really follow any specific genre and deviates from what would have been typical decorum. It's a beast fable, and it contains elements of Fabliau, but it also has elements of romance like the Knight's Tale. Since I'm writing this tale as a student in 2024, I'm able to combine different elements that I like from different genres, like the absurdist humor of fabliau and the various perspectives on love in romance.