

SHORT STORY AMERICA

THE COOK'S TALE

GEOFFREY CHAUCER

THE PROLOGUE

THE Cook of London, while the Reeve thus spake,
For joy he laugh'd and clapp'd him on the back:
"Aha!" quoth he, "for Christes passion,
This Miller had a sharp conclusion,
Upon this argument of herbergage.* *lodging
Well saide Solomon in his language,
Bring thou not every man into thine house,
For harbouring by night is perilous.
Well ought a man avised for to be *a man should take good heed*
Whom that he brought into his privity.
I pray to God to give me sorrow and care
If ever, since I highte* Hodge of Ware, *was called
Heard I a miller better *set a-work*;
He had a jape* of malice in the derk. *handled
*trick
But God forbid that we should stinte* here, *stop
And therefore if ye will vouchsafe to hear
A tale of me, that am a poore man,
I will you tell as well as e'er I can
A little jape that fell in our city."

Our Host answer'd and said; "I grant it thee.
Roger, tell on; and look that it be good,
For many a pasty hast thou letten blood,
And many a Jack of Dover<1> hast thou sold,
That had been twice hot and twice cold.

Of many a pilgrim hast thou Christe's curse,
 For of thy parsley yet fare they the worse.
 That they have eaten in thy stubble goose:
 For in thy shop doth many a fly go loose.
 Now tell on, gentle Roger, by thy name,
 But yet I pray thee be not *wroth for game*; *angry with my jesting*
 A man may say full sooth in game and play."
 "Thou sayst full sooth," quoth Roger, "by my fay;
 But sooth play quad play,<2> as the Fleming saith,
 And therefore, Harry Bailly, by thy faith,
 Be thou not wroth, else we departe* here, *part company
 Though that my tale be of an hostelere.* *innkeeper
 But natheless, I will not tell it yet,
 But ere we part, y-wis* thou shalt be quit."<3> *assuredly
 And therewithal he laugh'd and made cheer,<4>
 And told his tale, as ye shall after hear.

Notes to the Prologue to the Cook's Tale

1. Jack of Dover: an article of cookery. (Transcriber's note: suggested by some commentators to be a kind of pie, and by others to be a fish)
2. Sooth play quad play: true jest is no jest.
3. It may be remembered that each pilgrim was bound to tell two stories; one on the way to Canterbury, the other returning.
4. Made cheer: French, "fit bonne mine;" put on a pleasant countenance.

THE TALE.

A prentice whilom dwelt in our city,
 And of a craft of victuallers was he:

Galliard* he was, as goldfinch in the shaw**, *lively **grove
 Brown as a berry, a proper short fellow:
 With lockes black, combed full fetisly.* *daintily
 And dance he could so well and jollily,
 That he was called Perkin Revellour.
 He was as full of love and paramour,
 As is the honeycomb of honey sweet;
 Well was the wenche that with him might meet.
 At every bridal would he sing and hop;
 He better lov'd the tavern than the shop.
 For when there any riding was in Cheap,<1>
 Out of the shoppe thither would he leap,
 And, till that he had all the sight y-seen,
 And danced well, he would not come again;
 And gather'd him a meinie* of his sort, *company of fellows
 To hop and sing, and make such disport: *made appointment*
 And there they *sette steven* for to meet
 To playen at the dice in such a street.
 For in the towne was there no prentice
 That fairer coulde cast a pair of dice
 Than Perkin could; and thereto *he was free *he spent money liberally
 Of his dispence, in place of privity.* where he would not be seen*
 That found his master well in his chaffare,* *merchandise
 For oftentime he found his box full bare.
 For, soothely, a prentice revellour,
 That haunteth dice, riot, and paramour,
 His master shall it in his shop abie*, *suffer for
 All* have he no part of the minstrelsy. *although
 For theft and riot they be convertible,
 All can they play on *giterne or ribible.* *guitar or rebeck*
 Revel and truth, as in a low degree,
 They be full wroth* all day, as men may see. *at variance

This jolly prentice with his master bode,
 Till he was nigh out of his prenticehood,
 All were he snubbed* both early and late, *rebuked
 And sometimes led with revel to Newgate.
 But at the last his master him bethought,
 Upon a day when he his paper<2> sought,
 Of a proverb, that saith this same word;

Better is rotten apple out of hoard,	
Than that it should rot all the remenant:	
So fares it by a riotous servant;	
It is well lesse harm to let him pace*,	*pass, go
Than he shend* all the servants in the place.	*corrupt
Therefore his master gave him a quittance,	
And bade him go, with sorrow and mischance.	
And thus this jolly prentice had his leve*:	*desire
Now let him riot all the night, or leave*.	*refrain
And, for there is no thief without a louke,<3>	
That helpeth him to wasten and to souk*	*spend
Of that he bribe* can, or borrow may,	*steal
Anon he sent his bed and his array	
Unto a compere* of his owen sort,	*comrade
That loved dice, and riot, and disport;	
And had a wife, that held *for countenance*	*for appearances*
A shop, and swived* for her sustenance.	*prostituted herself
.<4>	

Notes to the Cook's Tale

1. Cheapside, where jousts were sometimes held, and which was the great scene of city revels and processions.
2. His paper: his certificate of completion of his apprenticeship.
3. Louke: The precise meaning of the word is unknown, but it is doubtless included in the cant term "pal".
4. The Cook's Tale is unfinished in all the manuscripts; but in some, of minor authority, the Cook is made to break off his tale, because "it is so foul," and to tell the story of Gamelyn, on which Shakespeare's "As You Like It" is founded. The story is not Chaucer's, and is different in metre, and inferior in composition to the Tales. It is supposed that Chaucer expunged the Cook's Tale for the same reason that made him on his death-bed lament that he had written so much "ribaldry."