



Geoffrey Chaucer (c.1340-1400) was born into a wealthy merchant family. Chaucer had various jobs at court and became a diplomat for the king. Eventually, Chaucer started writing down the stories he had heard during his travels, resulting in *The Canterbury Tales*. The *Tales* are an example of a frame-story narrative: a preliminary narrative within which one or more characters continue to tell shorter narratives. Other well-known examples of frame-story narratives are Boccaccio's *Decameron* and *One Thousand and One Nights*.

The Nun's Priest's Tale

And so it happened as he cast his eye
towards the cabbage at a butterfly.
It fell upon the fox there, lying low.
Gone was all inclination then to crow.
'Cok cok,' he cried, giving a sudden start,
As one who feels a terror at his heart,
For natural instinct teaches beasts to flee
The moment they perceive an enemy,
Though they had never met with it before.
This Chanticleer was shaken to the core
And would have fled. The fox was quick to say
However, 'Sir! Whither so fast away?
Are you afraid of me, that am your friend?
A fiend, or worse, I should be, to intend
You harm, or practise villainy upon you;
Dear sir, I was not even spying on you!
Truly I came to do no other thing
Than just to lie and listen to you sing.
You have as merry a voice as God has given
To any angel in the courts of Heaven;
To that you add a musical sense as strong
As had Boethius who was skilled in song.
My Lord your Father (God receive his soul!),
Your mother too – how courtly, what control! –
Have honoured my poor house, to my great ease;
And you, sir, too, I should be glad to please.
For, when it comes to singing, I'll say this
(Else may these eyes of mine be barred from bliss),

There never was a singer I would rather
Have heard at dawn than your respected father.
All that he sang came welling from his soul
And how he put his voice under control!
The pains he took to keep his eyes tight shut
In concentration – then the tip-toe strut,
The slender neck stretched out, the delicate beak!
No singer could approach him in technique
Or rival him in song, still less surpass.

[...]

This Chanticleer stood high upon his toes,
He stretched his neck, his eyes began to close,
His beak to open; with his eyes shut tight
He then began to sing with all his might.
Sir Russel Fox then leapt to the attack,
Grabbing his gorge he flung him o'er his back
And off he bore him to the woods, the brute,
And for the moment there was no pursuit.

[...]

And now, good people, pay attention all.
See how Dame Fortune quickly changes side
And robs her enemy of hope and pride!