

Cambridge University Press
 978-1-316-61561-4 — The Reeve's Prologue and Tale
 Geoffrey Chaucer, Edited by A. C. Spearing, J. E. Spearing
 Excerpt
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The portraits of the Reeve and the Cook

The portraits of the Reeve and the Cook

(From *The General Prologue*, lines 589–624 and 381–389)

The Reve was a splendre colerik man.
 His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;
 His heer was by his eris ful round yshorn;
 His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn.
 Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,
 Ylik a staf, ther was no calf ysene.
 Wel koude he kepe a gerner and a binne;
 Ther was noon auditour koude on him winne.
 Wel wiste he by the droghte and by the reyn
 The yeldinge of his seed and of his greyn.
 His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerie,
 His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrie
 Was hoolly in this Reves governinge,
 And by his covenant yaf the rekeninge,
 Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age.
 Ther koude no man bringe him in arrerage.
 Ther nas baillif, ne hierde, nor oother hine,
 That he ne knew his sleighte and his covine;
 They were adrad of him as of the deeth.
 His woning was ful faire upon an heeth;
 With grene trees yshadwed was his place.
 He koude better than his lord purchase.
 Ful riche he was astored prively:
 His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,
 To yeve and lene him of his owene good,
 And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood.
 In youthe he hadde lerned a good myster;
 He was a wel good wrighte, a carpenter.
 This Reve sat upon a ful good stot,

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That was al pomely grey and highte Scot.
A long surcote of pers upon he hade,
And by his side he baar a rusty blade.
Of Northfolk was this Reve of which I telle,
Biside a toun men clepen Baldeswelle.
Tukked he was as is a frere aboute,
And evere he rood the hindreste of oure route.

A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones
To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
And poudre-marchant tart and galingale.
Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.
He koude rooste, and sethe, and broille, and frie,
Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pie.
But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That on his shine a mormal hadde he.
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste.

The Reeve's Prologue

The prologue of the Reves Tale

Whan folk hadde laughen at this nice cas
 Of Absolon and hende Nicholas,
 Diverse folk diversely they seide,
 But for the moore part they loughe and pleyde.
 Ne at this tale I saugh no man him greve,
 But it were oonly Osewold the Reve.
 By cause he was of carpenteris craft,
 A litel ire is in his herte ylaft;
 He gan to grucche, and blamed it a lite.

 'So theek,' quod he, 'ful wel koude I thee quite 10
 With blering of a proud milleres ye,
 If that me liste speke of ribaudye.
 But ik am oold, me list not pley for age;
 Gras time is doon, my fodder is now forage;
 This white top writeth mine olde yeris;
 Myn herte is also mowled as mine heris,
 But if I fare as dooth an open-ers –
 That ilke fruit is ever lenger the wers,
 Til it be roten in mullok or in stree. 20
 We olde men, I drede, so fare we:
 Til we be roten, kan we nat be ripe;
 We hoppen alwey whil the world wol pipe.
 For in oure wil ther stiketh evere a nail,
 To have an hoor heed and a grene tail,
 As hath a leek; for thogh oure might be goon,
 Oure wil desireth folie evere in oon.
 For whan we may nat doon, than wol we speke;
 Yet in oure asshen olde is fyr yreke.

 Foure gleedes han we, which I shal devise –

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Avaunting, lying, anger, coveitise; 30
 These foure sparkles longen unto eelde.
 Oure olde lemes mowe wel been unweelde,
 But wil ne shal nat failen, that is sooth.
 And yet ik have alwey a coltes tooth,
 As many a yeer as it is passed henne
 Sin that my tappe of lif bigan to renne.
 For sikerly, whan I was bore, anon
 Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon;
 And ever sithe hath so the tappe yronne
 Til that almost al empty is the tonne. 40
 The stream of lyf now droppeth on the chimbe.
 The sely tonge may wel ringe and chimbe
 Of wrecchednesse that passed is ful yooore;
 With olde folk, save dotage, is namoore.’
 Whan that oure Hoost hadde herd this sermoning
 He gan to speke as lordly as a king.
 He seide, ‘What amounteth al this wit?
 What shul we speke alday of hooly writ?
 The devel made a reve for to preche,
 Or of a soutere a shipman or a leche. 50
 Sey forth thy tale, and tarie nat the time.
 Lo Depeford! and it is half-wey prime.
 Lo Grenewich, ther many a shrewe is inne!
 It were al time thy tale to biginne.’
 ‘Now, sires,’ quod this Osewold the Reve,
 ‘I pray yow alle that ye nat yow greve,
 Thogh I answeere, and somdeel sette his howve;
 For leveful is with force force of-showve.
 This dronke Millere hath ytoold us heer
 How that bigiled was a carpenteer, 60
 Peraventure in scorn, for I am oon.
 And, by youre leve, I shal him quite anoon;
 Right in his cherles termes wol I speke.

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I pray to God his nekke mote to-breke!
He kan wel in myn eye seen a stalke,
But in his owene he kan nat seen a balke.'

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The Reeve's Prologue and Tale

The Reeve's Tale

Heere biginneth the Reves Tale.
 At Trumpingtoun, nat fer fro Cantebrigge,
 Ther gooth a brook, and over that a brigge,
 Upon the whiche brook ther stant a melle;
 And this is verray sooth that I yow telle: 70
 A millere was ther dwellinge many a day.
 As any pecok he was proud and gay.
 Piben he koude and fische, and nettes beete,
 And turne coppes, and wel wrastle and sheete;
 Ay by his belt he baar a long panade,
 And of a swerd ful trenchant was the blade.
 A joly poppere baar he in his pouche;
 Ther was no man, for peril, dorste him touche.
 A Sheffield thwitel baar he in his hose.
 Round was his face, and camus was his nose; 80
 As piled as an ape was his skulle.
 He was a market-betere atte fulle.
 Ther dorste no wight hand upon him legge,
 That he ne swoor he sholde anon abegge.
 A thief he was for sothe of corn and mele,
 And that a sly, and usaunt for to stele.
 His name was hootte deynous Simkin.
 A wyf he hadde, ycomen of noble kin;
 The person of the toun hir fader was.
 With hire he yaf ful many a panne of bras, 90
 For that Simkin sholde in his blood allye.
 She was yfostred in a nonnerye;
 For Simkin wolde no wyf, as he saide,
 But she were wel ynorissed and a maide,
 To saven his estaat of yomanrye.
 And she was proud, and peert as is a pye.
 A ful fair sighte was it upon hem two;

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On halydayes biforn hire wolde he go
 With his tipet bounden aboute his heed,
 And she cam after in a gyte of reed; 100
 And Simkin hadde hosen of the same.
 Ther dorste no wight clepen hire but 'dame';
 Was noon so hardy that wente by the weye
 That with hire dorste rage or ones pleye,
 But if he wolde be slain of Simkin
 With panade, or with knyf, or boidekin.
 For jalous folk ben perilous everemo,
 Algate they wolde hire wives wenden so,
 And eek, for she was somdel smoterlich,
 She was as digne as water in a dich, 110
 And ful of hoker and of bisemare.
 Hir thoughte that a lady sholde hire spare,
 What for hire kinrede and hir nortelrie
 That she hadde lerned in the nonnerie.
 A doghter hadde they bitwixe hem two
 Of twenty yeer, withouten any mo,
 Savinge a child that was of half yeer age;
 In cradel it lay and was a propre page.
 This wenche thikke and wel ygrowen was,
 With kamus nose, and eyen greye as glas, 120
 With buttokes brode, and brestes rounde and hye;
 But right fair was hire heer, I wol nat lie.
 This person of the toun, for she was feir,
 In purpos was to maken hire his heir,
 Bothe of his catel and his mesuage,
 And straunge he made it of hir mariage.
 His purpos was for to bistowe hire hye
 Into som worthy blood of auncetrye;
 For hooly chirches good moot been despended
 On hooly chirches blood, that is descended. 130
 Therefore he wolde his hooly blood honoure,

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Though that he hooly chirche sholde devoure.

Greet sokene hath this millere, out of doute,
 With whete and malt of al the land aboute;
 And nameliche ther was a greet collegge
 Men clepen the Soler Halle at Cantebregge;
 Ther was hir whete and eek hir malt ygrounde.
 And on a day it happed, in a stounde,
 Sik lay the maunciple on a maladye;
 Men wenden wisly that he sholde die.

140

For which this millere stal bothe mele and corn
 An hundred time moore than biforn;
 For therbiforn he stal but curteisly,
 But now he was a thief outrageously,
 For which the wardeyn chidde and made fare.
 But therof sette the millere nat a tare;
 He craketh boost, and swoor it was nat so.

Thanne were ther yonge povre scholers two,
 That dwelten in this halle, of which I seye.

Testif they were, and lusty for to pleye,
 And, oonly for hire mirthe and revelrye,
 Upon the wardeyn bisily they crye
 To yeve hem leve, but a litel stounde,

150

To goon to mille and seen hir corn ygrounde;
 And hardily they dorste leye hir nekke
 The millere sholde not stele hem half a pekke
 Of corn by sleighte, ne by force hem reve;
 And at the laste the wardeyn yaf hem leve.

John highte that oon, and Aleyn highte that oother;
 Of o toun were they born, that highte Strother,
 Fer in the north, I kan nat telle where.

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This Aleyn maketh redy al his gere,
 And on an hors the sak he caste anon.
 Forth goth Aleyn the clerk, and also John,
 With good swerd and with bokeler by hir side.

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John knew the wey, – hem nedede no gyde, –
 And at the mille the sak adoun he layth.
 Aleyn spak first, ‘Al hail, Simond, y-faith!
 Hou fares thy faire doghter and thy wyf?’
 ‘Aleyn, welcome,’ quod Simkin, ‘by my lyf! 170
 And John also, how now, what do ye heer?’
 ‘Simond,’ quod John, ‘by God, nede has na peer.
 Him boes serve himself that has na swain,
 Or elles he is a fool, as clerkes sayn.
 Oure manciple, I hope he wil be deed,
 Swa werkes ay the wanges in his heed;
 And forthy is I come, and eek Alayn,
 To grinde oure corn and carie it ham again;
 I pray yow spede us heythen that ye may.’
 ‘It shal be doon,’ quod Simkin, ‘by my fay! 180
 What wol ye doon whil that it is in hande?’
 ‘By God, right by the hopur wil I stande,’
 Quod John, ‘and se howgates the corn gas in.
 Yet saugh I nevere, by my fader kin,
 How that the hopur wagges til and fra.’
 Aleyn answerde, ‘John, and wiltow swa?
 Thanne wil I be binethe, by my croun,
 And se how that the mele falles down
 Into the trough; that sal be my disport.
 For John, y-faith, I may been of youre sort; 190
 I is as ille a millere as ar ye.’
 This millere smiled of hir nicetee,
 And thoghte, ‘Al this nis doon but for a wile.
 They wene that no man may hem bigile,
 But by my thrift, yet shal I blere hir ye,
 For al the sleighte in hir philosophye.
 The moore queynte crekes that they make,
 The moore wol I stele whan I take.
 In stide of flour yet wol I yeve hem bren.

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“The gretteste clerkes been nocht wisest men,” 200
 As whilom to the wolf thus spak the mare.
 Of al hir art ne counte I nocht a tare.’

Out at the dore he gooth ful prively,
 Whan that he saugh his time, softly.
 He looketh up and doun til he hath founde
 The clerkes hors, ther as it stood ybounde
 Bihinde the mille, under a levesel;
 And to the hors he goth him faire and wel;
 He strepeth of the bridel right anon.
 And whan the hors was laus, he ginneth gon 210
 Toward the fen, ther wilde mares renne,
 And forth with ‘wehee,’ thurgh thikke and thurgh thenne.

This millere gooth again, no word he seide,
 But dooth his note, and with the clerkes pleyde,
 Til that hir corn was faire and weel ygrounde.
 And whan the mele is sakked and ybounde,
 This John goth out and fint his hors away,
 And gan to crie ‘Harrow!’ and ‘Weylaway!
 Oure hors is lorn, Alayn, for Goddes banes,
 Step on thy feet! Com of, man, al atanes! 220
 Allas, our wardeyn has his palfrey lorn.’
 This Aleyn al forgat, bothe mele and corn;
 Al was out of his minde his housbondrie.
 ‘What, whilk way is he geen?’ he gan to crie.

The wyf cam lepinge inward with a ren.
 She seyde, ‘Allas! youre hors goth to the fen
 With wilde mares, as faste as he may go.
 Unthank come on his hand that boond him so,
 And he that better sholde han knit the reine!’
 ‘Allas,’ quod John, ‘Aleyn, for Cristes peyne, 230
 Lay doun thy swerd, and I wil myn alswa.
 I is ful wight, God waat, as is a raa;
 By Goddes herte, he sal nat scape us bathe!