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The Selected Canterbury Tales: A New Verse Translation



Synopsis

"A truly remarkable achievement." —Barry Unsworth In the tradition of Seamus Heaney's *Beowulf* and Marie Borroff's *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Sheila Fisher's *The Selected Canterbury Tales* is a vivid, lively, and readable translation of the most famous work of England's premier medieval poet. Preserving Chaucer's rhyme and meter, Fisher makes these tales accessible to a contemporary ear while inviting readers to the Middle English original on facing pages. Her informative introduction highlights Chaucer's artistic originality in his memorable portrayals of surprisingly modern women and men from across the spectrum of medieval society.

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Customer Reviews

Sheila Fisher's book is brilliant. There is a scholarly, well-written introductory chapter that gives a good background of Chaucer's life. It also explains how Fisher translated the original. The chapter contains important historical context and also explains how Fisher did the translation, and how and why the new version may differ from the original. The translation itself is very good. It takes few liberties with the original, and the ones it does take are adequately explained by Fisher in the beginning. She preserves wonderfully a poetic rhythm that allows for smooth reading. That rhythm is also great for reading the poem out loud: as Fisher notes, many people in Medieval England would have listened to the poem. Fans of Chaucer who want to listen to a modern version that also stays true to the original will be well served with this translation. The original Middle English is on the left page for reference. I found it interesting to see how the original compared with the translation, and I

think that the translation strikes a perfect balance between staying true to Chaucer and making him understandable to a modern audience. To read or listen to this book would be to spend time well.

I came across this translation of "The Canterbury Tales" while idly browsing in an airport bookstore, among transnational travelers making their own private pilgrimages to who-knows-where. It only took a few pages to hook me. (Had to buy it on the spot--sorry --but I might one-click it to friends and family.) How can you not love the juxtaposition of the medieval and the modern while people watching in an airport? Chaucer, that arch observer of human nature, would have felt right at home. And we have Sheila Fisher to thank for bringing Chaucer to us. Chaucer_Fan is right: her book is brilliant. She has achieved a perfect blend of scholarship and art. For example, I usually approach the introduction of a book with a nagging sense of duty, tinged with impatience - you know, "let's get this thing over with". Not this one. Her explication of the historical context of Chaucer's life and work is limned with grace and sensitivity: always lively, never anachronistic. What a joy to find a professor of English professor who writes so well! Now for the art. Chaucer's Middle English is on the left, Fisher's rendition on the right. It's a human comedy and the language flows and burbles along in the voices of the characters. The stories will carry you along, even as you want to pause and reread parts out loud. At other times you will want to compare her words with the original, which is a lot of fun (although nothing beats hearing a full declamation by a good professor - there is something about Middle English that really brings out the ham in scholars.). Fisher's ear for poetry is pitch perfect. Read "The Selected Canterbury Tales" and enjoy!

I often skip the introduction to books but did not in this instance. the introduction gave some really interesting information and background about Chaucer, and context about the times in which it was written, which made subsequent reading more enjoyable. I love the translation and also enjoyed sometimes looking to see what the original verse looks like (easy to do because the original verse is on the opposite page.)

It took only a few pages of this novel to get me hooked on the stories. I really enjoyed how the introduction gave me some insight into Chaucer background/ life. The background given on the time in which the stories were written also made for that much more of an enjoyable read. This translation is absolutely one of the better ones because it included the original verses in middle English. Having the translation along with the original version of the story side by side makes you want to try your tongue at old English and read/ re-read the verses out loud. Sheila Fisher has

achieved an impeccable blend of a professional/scholarly work with a piece of fine art. Her book is incredibly brilliant.

Chaucerian language on verso, modern verse translation on recto, so the reader can enjoy both, and the translation really helps understanding.

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