

## THE BRADSHAW SHIFT:

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Chaucer never completed *The Canterbury Tales*. He left behind sections of the story without clearly showing his intentions for an overall order. However, most of the tales appear in ten constant groups (called fragments). These fragments are bits of narrative linked together by internal signs--pieces of dialogue or references to an earlier story or the story about to come next. The stories in each fragment tend to fall in a particular order, though we cannot be certain what order Chaucer intended for the fragments as a whole. These ten sections can combine in various ways to make a larger *Canterbury Tales* narrative. Scholars designate the fragments with Roman numerals (I-X) in modern editions of the text, but the Chaucer Society uses alphabetical designations to refer to these fragments (A-I).

The most common order in modern editions looks like the following chart:

Fragment I (A):	General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook
Fragment II (B <sup>1</sup> ):	Man of Law
Fragment III (D):	Wife, Friar, Summoner
Fragment IV (E):	Clerk, Merchant
Fragment V (F):	Squire, Franklin
Fragment VI (C):	Physician, Pardoner
Fragment VII (B <sup>2</sup> ):	Shipman, Prioress, <i>Sir Thopas</i> , <i>Melibee</i> , Monk, Nun's Priest.
Fragment VIII (G):	Second Nun, Canon Yeoman
Fragment IX (H):	Manciple
Fragment X (I):	Parson and Retraction

Only between Fragments IX-X (and in the case of the Ellesmere family, between Fragments IV-V) do we find explicit indication of an order. Consequently, modern editors differ in how they present the order of the tales. All of the manuscripts containing most of the tales do have some consistencies in order. They all start with the General Prologue and end with the Parson's Tale. Most orderings have either Fragment II, VI, or III following fragment I. Most of them have Fragment IV following Fragment III, linking the "marriage group" together, and so on.

One of the most controversial of these theorized orders is known as the **Bradshaw Shift**. In this arrangement, Fragment VII (B<sup>2</sup>) is moved to follow Fragment II (B<sup>1</sup>), with Fragment VI following. This maneuver assumes that the epilogue following the Man of Law's Tale should provide a link to the Shipman's Tale. Such an alteration involves splitting the "B" or "II/VII" Fragment into two halves (B<sup>1</sup> and B<sup>2</sup>), a re-ordering that appears in the Skeat edition of Chaucer. The complete arrangement thus looks like this:

Fragment I (A):	General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook
Fragment II (B <sup>1</sup> ):	Man of Law
Fragment VII (B <sup>2</sup> ):	Shipman, Prioress, <i>Sir Thopas</i> , <i>Melibee</i> , Monk, Nun's Priest.
Fragment VI (C):	Physician, Pardoner
Fragment III (D):	Wife, Friar, Summoner
Fragment IV (E):	Clerk, Merchant
Fragment V (F):	Squire, Franklin
Fragment VIII (G):	Second Nun, Canon Yeoman
Fragment IX (H):	Manciple
Fragment X (I):	Parson and Retraction

While this certainly makes sense in terms of the storyline, there's one problem. This proposed order does not appear in a *single one* of the 82 surviving medieval manuscripts. A slight variant of the Bradshaw Shift is that of Baugh and Pratt, who move Fragment V so that it follows VI. The controversy about such an arrangement stems from the lack of textual support.

## Ordering the Fragments of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*:

Here are some of the orders we *do* find in various *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts:

### **The Ellesmere Manuscript** (British Museum MS HM 26.C9)

Fragment I (A): General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook  
Fragment II (B<sup>1</sup>): Man of Law  
Fragment III (D): Wife, Friar, Summoner  
Fragment IV (E): Clerk, Merchant  
Fragment V (F): Squire, Franklin  
Fragment VI (C): Physician, Pardoner  
Fragment VII (B<sup>2</sup>): Shipman, Prioress, *Sir Thopas*, *Melibee*, Monk, Nun's Priest.  
Fragment VIII (G): Second Nun, Canon Yeoman  
Fragment IX (H): Manciple  
Fragment X (I): Parson

### **The Hengwrt Manuscript** (National Library of Wales MS Peniarth 392 D)

Fragment I (A): General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook [scribe also adds his own ending to Cook's Tale]  
Fragment III (D): Wife, Friar, Summoner  
Additional Tales of Squire, Merchant, Franklin, Second Nun, and Clerk separated from original fragments  
Fragment VI (C): Physician, Pardoner  
Fragment VII (B<sup>2</sup>): Shipman, Prioress, *Sir Thopas*, *Melibee*, Monk, Nun's Priest.  
Fragment IX (H): Manciple  
Fragment X (I): Parson and Retraction

### **New College 314 Oxford Manuscript** (Oxford University, MS Ox. 314)

Fragment I (A): General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook  
Fragment II (B<sup>1</sup>): Man of Law  
Additional Tales of Squire and Merchant, both separated from original fragments  
Fragment III (D): Wife, Friar, Summoner  
Additional Tales of Clerk and Franklin separated from original fragments  
Fragment VIII (G): Second Nun, Canon Yeoman  
Fragment VI (C): Physician, Pardoner  
Fragment VII (B<sup>2</sup>): Shipman, Prioress, *Sir Thopas*, *Melibee*, Monk, Nun's Priest.  
Fragment IX (H): Manciple  
Fragment X (I): Parson and Retraction

### **Lansdowne and Sloane Manuscripts** (British Museum, Lansdowne MS 851 and Sloane MS 1686)

Fragment I (A): General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook  
[Additional Tale of Gamelyn inserted by later scribe]  
Fragment II (B<sup>1</sup>): Man of Law  
Additional Tale of Squire separated from original fragment  
Fragment III (D): Wife, Friar, Summoner  
Fragment IV (E): Clerk, Merchant  
Additional tale of Franklin separated from original fragment  
Fragment VIII (G): Second Nun, Canon Yeoman  
Fragment VI (C): Physician, Pardoner  
Fragment VII (B<sup>2</sup>): Shipman, Prioress, *Sir Thopas*, *Melibee*, Monk, Nun's Priest  
Fragment IX (H): Manciple  
Fragment X (I): Parson and Retraction

### **Harley Manuscript** (British Museum, Harley MS 7334)

Fragment I (A): General Prologue, Knight, Miller, Reeve, Cook  
[Additional Tale of Gamelyn inserted by a later scribe]  
Fragment II (B<sup>1</sup>): Man of Law  
Fragment III (D): Wife, Friar, Summoner  
Fragment IV (E): Clerk, Merchant  
Fragment V (F): Squire, Franklin  
Fragment VIII (G): Second Nun, Canon Yeoman  
Fragment VI (C): Physician, Pardoner  
Fragment VII (B<sup>2</sup>): Shipman, Prioress, *Sir Thopas*, *Melibee*, Monk, Nun's Priest  
Fragment IX (H): Manciple  
Fragment X (I): Parson and Retraction