

FOUR VERSIONS OF THE *GENERAL PROLOGUE*: I. 1-18

A. The Hengwrt Manuscript:

When that Aveylle with his shoures soote
The droughte of March / hath perced to the roote
And bathed every veyne in swich lycour
Of which vertu engendred is the flour
What zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
Inspired hath in euery hold and heeth
The tendre croppes / and the yonge sonne
Hath in the Ram / his half cour yronne
And smale foweles maken melodye
That slepen al the nyght with open Iye
So priketh him nature / in hir corages
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilrymagges
And Palmeres for to seeken straunge strondes
To ferne halwes / kouthe in sondry londes
And specially / from euery shyres ende
Of Engelond / to Caunterbury they wende
The holy blisful martir / for to seke
That hem hath holpen whan ðat they weere seeke.

B. A "modern-spelling" edition by Michael Murphy:

When that April with his showers soot	its/ sweet
The drought of March hath piercéd to the root	
And bathéd every vein in such liquor	rootlet / liquid
Of which virtue engendered is the flower	
When Zephyrus eke with his sweet breath	West Wind / also
Inspiréd hath in every holt and heath	grove / field
The tender crops, and the young sun	Spring sun
Hath in the Ram his half course y-run,	In Aries / has run
And small fowls maken melody	make (pl.)
That sleepen all the night with open eye	sleep (pl.)
(So pricketh them Nature in their couráges)	spurs / spirits
Then longen folk to go on pilgrimages	people long
And palmers for to seek strange strands	pilgrims / shores
To ferné hallows couth in sundry lands,	distant shrines known
And specially from every shire's end	county's
Of England to Canterbury they wend	go
The holy blissful martyr for to seek,	St. Thomas Beckett
That them hath holpen when that they were sick.	helped

C. A modern translation by Neville Coghill

When in April the sweet showers fall
And pierce the drought of March to the root, and all
And veins are bathed in liquor of such power
As brings about the engendering of the flower,
When also Zephyrus with his sweet breath
Exhales an air in every grove and heath
Upon the tender shoots, and the young sun
His half-course in the sign of the *Ram* has run,
And the small fowl are making melody
That sleep away the night with open eye
(So nature pricks them and their heart engages)
Then people long to go on pilgrimages
And palmers long to seek the stranger strands
Of far-off saints, hallowed in sundry lands,
And specially, from every shire's end
In England, down to Canterbury they wend
To seek the holy blissful martyr, quick
To give his help to them when they were sick.

D. A modern translation by David Wright

When the sweet showers of April have pierced
The drought of March, and pierced it to the root,
And every vein is bathed in that moisture
Whose quickening force will engender the flower;
And when the west wind too with its sweet breath
Has given life in every wood and field
To tender shoots, and when the stripling sun
Has run his half-course in Aries, the Ram,
And when small birds are making melodies,
That sleep all the night long with open eyes,
(Nature so prompts them, and encourages):
Then people long to go on pilgrimages,
And palmers to take ship for foreign shores,
And distant shrines, famous in different lands;
And most especially, from all the shires
Of England, to Canterbury they come,
The holy blessed martyr there to seek,
Who gave his help to them when they were sick.