

Excerpt terms and conditions



This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

You may view, print and download any of our excerpts for perusal purposes.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest reading the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.

Dramatic Publishing

CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX

A Play in One Act for Family Audiences

Adapted from Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*

by

JOSEPH ROBINETTE



Dramatic Publishing

Woodstock, Illinois • England • Australia • New Zealand

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our Web site: www.dramaticpublishing.com. Or we may be contacted by mail at: DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, P.O. Box 129, Woodstock IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play which are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MMIV by
JOSEPH ROBINETTE
Adapted from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*
Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX)

ISBN: 1-58342-226-9

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author(s) of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author(s) *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author(s), if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY of Woodstock, Illinois

A Note from the Playwright

This play is written in verse. It is the same style (heroic couplets, or, iambic pentameter) in which Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* more than 600 years ago. Obviously, I have updated the language a bit (although you'll still find a stray "ere" or "doth" or "alas" here and there), and I've even tossed in an occasional deliberate anachronism or two along the way. But, for the most part, the story and poetic form are true to the original Nun's Priest's tale—"Chanticleer and the Fox." (Note: The few "asides" and non-poetic lines in the dialogue are indicated by parentheses.)

Though the play is in verse, the actors should avoid delivering the lines in a "sing-song" rhythmic pattern and punctuating the rhyming words. Insofar as possible, the lines should be delivered in normal "dialogue" fashion. The audience will be—and should be—aware that this is a verse play, but the rhythm should be underplayed, just as a good drumbeat sets the cadence—but doesn't "take over"—in a band or orchestra. Similarly, the rhyming words should fall gently on the ears, as feathers—not hammers. So let it be with "Chanticleer."

CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX

A Play in One Act
For 4 Men and 3 Women

CHARACTERS

1ST PILGRIM (m) storyteller
2ND PILGRIM (w) a hen
3RD PILGRIM (m) a widow
4TH PILGRIM (w) a hen
5TH PILGRIM (m) a fox
6TH PILGRIM (w)Pertelote, a hen
7TH PILGRIM (m)Chanticleer, a rooster

THE TIME: The late 1300s.

THE PLACE: A roadside near Canterbury, England.

CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX

(The setting is an opening in a wooded area alongside a dusty road leading from Canterbury, England.)

Seven PILGRIMS, four men and three women, wearing medieval attire, enter as though riding horses. [Note: They may mime the action or ride on stick horses.] They make the “whinnying” and “neighing” sounds of the horses as they enter. When they stop, they notice the audience.)

1st PILGRIM (MAN).

Oh, look, we have some other travelers here.

2nd PILGRIM (WOMAN).

They’ve stopped to rest like us, it would appear.

3rd PILGRIM (MAN).

This is a pleasant place to take a break
To ease the trip—and for the horses’ sake.

4th PILGRIM (WOMAN) *(addressing the audience)*.

Are you from London, Stratford, Kent or Bath?

8 CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX

5th PILGRIM (MAN) (*addressing the audience*).

Where did you travel from and from which path?

6th PILGRIM (WOMAN) (*addressing the audience*).

And was your journey long or just a mile?

7th PILGRIM (MAN) (*to the OTHERS*).

It doesn't matter. Let them rest awhile.

(They relax, two or three sitting perhaps.)

1st PILGRIM.

Well, as for us, we're pilgrims on our way
From Canterbury where we spent a day
In worship at Saint Thomas Becket's shrine.

2nd PILGRIM.

The number in our group was twenty-nine.
The others plan a few more hours to stay,
But we must travel farther home than they.

4th PILGRIM.

The year is thirteen hundred ninety-eight,
And horses are the fastest thing to date.

3rd PILGRIM.

Except for mine which always seems to drag.
I swear on foot I'm faster than this nag!

(A "whinny," followed by laughter from the OTHERS, is heard.)

5th PILGRIM.

When all of us were Canterbury bound,
We each took turns till we had gone around
And told a tale we hoped would entertain—

6th PILGRIM.

—And be received with favor, not disdain.

7th PILGRIM.

We stop at times to let our horses rest,
And talk about the stories we liked best.

1st PILGRIM.

I think it's now the time for me to choose
The story that for me did most amuse.
It's of a rooster and a wily beast,
Told by the trav'ler with a nun—the priest.
And now, since all of us are gathered here,
We'll dramatize the Fox and Chanticleer.

(They put their "horses" away by miming tying them to trees or bushes, or if stick "horses" are used, piling them together UC away from the action. During this time, the dialogue continues uninterrupted.)

3rd PILGRIM.

May I play Chanticleer, the rooster's part?
My acting skills are such a work of art.

10 CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX

2nd PILGRIM (*teasing him*).

But Chanticleer was handsome, there's no doubt.
I fear your homely features leave you out.

3rd PILGRIM.

At least I might perform the clever fox.

4th PILGRIM (*also teasing*).

You'd be much better as a bed of rocks.

1st PILGRIM (*as OTHERS laugh*).

Now pay no heed to what these jesters say.
You're perfect for the widow in the play.

3rd PILGRIM.

A widow—that's a woman, don't you know?

1st PILGRIM.

Alas, we're short of ladies for the show.
But since you're such a talent, as you said,
You'll only need a scarf upon your head.

(A female PILGRIM quickly produces a scarf and hands it to the 3rd PILGRIM who examines it but does not put it on as yet.)

3rd PILGRIM.

Oh, very well, I'll play the part assigned.
This woman's character I'll try to find.
(He becomes lost in thought.)

5th PILGRIM.

Let me be Chanticleer. I'll be first-rate.

6th PILGRIM (*teasing him*).

Except, again, there is that "handsome" trait.

5th PILGRIM (*pretending to be insulted*).

I'm nothing if not fair of form and face.

2nd PILGRIM (*whispering aloud to the other female PILGRIMS*).

I'd call that form and face a true disgrace.

(They snicker and separate themselves from each other.)

1st PILGRIM.

But then he has a certain guile, it's true.

(A brief pause.)

My friend, the fox is just the part for you.

5th PILGRIM (*delighted*).

Shall I be shrewd and cunning, mean and sly?

1st PILGRIM.

Good sir, on all those points you qualify.

(Looking around.)

But still we need someone for Chanticleer.

(All look at the 7th PILGRIM, the remaining male. He takes two or three steps backward.)

12 CHANTICLEER AND THE FOX

7th PILGRIM (*uneasily*).

Oh, please...I'm not so good at this, I fear.

1st PILGRIM.

But sometimes it's the shy and reticent
Who show on stage the most accomplishment.
Whereas the noisy, loud and boisterous,
In front of crowds are oft disastrous.

7th PILGRIM.

All right, I'll try, but please don't laugh or scold.
Is there a prop or something I can hold?

1st PILGRIM (*reaching inside his cloak or tunic*).

A feather from the bed at Tabard Inn
I found next day imbedded in my skin.

7th PILGRIM.

It just might help me with my stage debut.

(*Weakly.*)

Cockadoodle-do.

(*1st PILGRIM produces the feather and gives it to him.
He holds it aloft and is suddenly transformed into the
vainglorious CHANTICLEER. He crows majestically.*)

Cockadoodle-do!

(*All applaud. He responds shyly.*)

(Thank you. Thank you very much.)

(*He puts the feather in his hair or somewhere on his
person and struts away.*)

1st PILGRIM.

And next we have the lovely Pertelote,

The hen upon whom Chanticleer doth dote.
 A charming lady, beauteous and fair.
(Glancing at 2nd PILGRIM.)
 I think I see her there—

4th PILGRIM *(stepping forward)*.
 (Ahem.)

1st PILGRIM *(quickly, to 4th PILGRIM)*.
 —and there—

6th PILGRIM *(stepping forward)*.
 (Ahem.)

1st PILGRIM.
 —and there!
(The three female PILGRIMS glare at him. He laughs nervously.)
 Perhaps this part we'll cast by drawing straws,
 For any one of you would draw applause.
(He quickly mimes picking up three straws from the ground.)
 The longest straw will play the comely hen.
(Aside, to the audience.)
 Praise be for straws. I think they saved my skin!
(The female PILGRIMS draw straws with the 6th PILGRIM drawing the longest. She emits a gleeful shout as the other two pout. The 1st PILGRIM quickly consoles the losers.)
 No matter, both of you can still be hens.
 They're quite important barnyard citizens.

(They smile and nod, agreeing to play their parts as he turns toward the audience.)

Now, as the storyteller, I will start.

Oh yes...I also play a tiny part.

(To the other PILGRIMS.)

So to your places as I set the scene—

A pleasant farm so quiet and serene.

(The OTHERS may exit or simply move to the perimeter of the stage with their backs to the audience until their characters are introduced.)

STORYTELLER (1st PILGRIM).

A poor, but happy, widow owned a farm.

She seemed quite free of any threat or harm.

WIDOW (3rd PILGRIM) *(entering or turning around, scarf on head, wearing glasses, using a stick for a cane).*

I have a sheep—

(A “baa” sound is made by another PILGRIM.)

—some laying hens—

(“Cackling” sounds are heard from the PILGRIMS playing hens.)

—three sows,

(“Oinks” are heard.)

—A dog or two—

(“Barking” is heard.)

—and three old milking cows.

(“Moos” are heard.)

I have no need of latches, chains or locks.

FOX (5th PILGRIM) (*entering sneakily or turning around*).
Which sounds inviting to a hungry fox.

WIDOW.

Oh, yes, and there's a rooster living here—
A glor'ous bird whose crowing's loud and clear.
He sounds each hour, so we need no clocks.

FOX (*chuckling*).

You will when he is eaten by a fox.
(*He exits or turns away.*)

CHANTICLEER (7th PILGRIM) (*entering cockily in a sing-song voice*).

Hey, cockadoodle-do, how do you do?
Well, cockadoodle-do, you know it's true.
I have a voice which no one can compare
To any living thing, it is so rare.

When I do croon there's so much to admire.
At church I lead the singing in the choir.
And when I hit a long high E at Mass—
They often have to order more stained glass!

1st HEN (2nd PILGRIM) (*entering*).

He is as gorgeous as the rising sun.
His golden feathers, beak of red, do stun.

2nd HEN (4th PILGRIM) (*entering*).

When he struts by, we hens all start to swoon,
Then melt like snowflakes when he sings a tune.

CHANTICLEER (*going to the HENS, singing to his own tune*).

“Hello, my beauties, radiant are you.

I don’t know which of you I should pursue.”

(The HENS giggle and swoon.)

WIDOW (*crossing to CHANTICLEER*).

I mean these young and sweet girls no offense.

(A bit flirtingly.)

But I’m a woman of experience.

(CHANTICLEER laughs as the HENS scold the WIDOW.)

HENS.

(Go away! Get back to your house! Etc.)

WIDOW (*backpedaling*).

No need to be so sassy or so smart.

I’m only trying hard to play my part.

So don’t blame me if my emotions flow.

(Playing the martyr.)

A widow must have feelings, too, you know.

(She turns away or exits.)

CHANTICLEER.

A widow may have feelings, but for *men*.

This rooster has his eye upon a hen.

(The 1st and 2nd HENS turn away and coyly await an advance from CHANTICLEER.)