

# Games from Folktales

Transcripts for March 2018

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An experiment in podcasting for the Ars Magica roleplaying game

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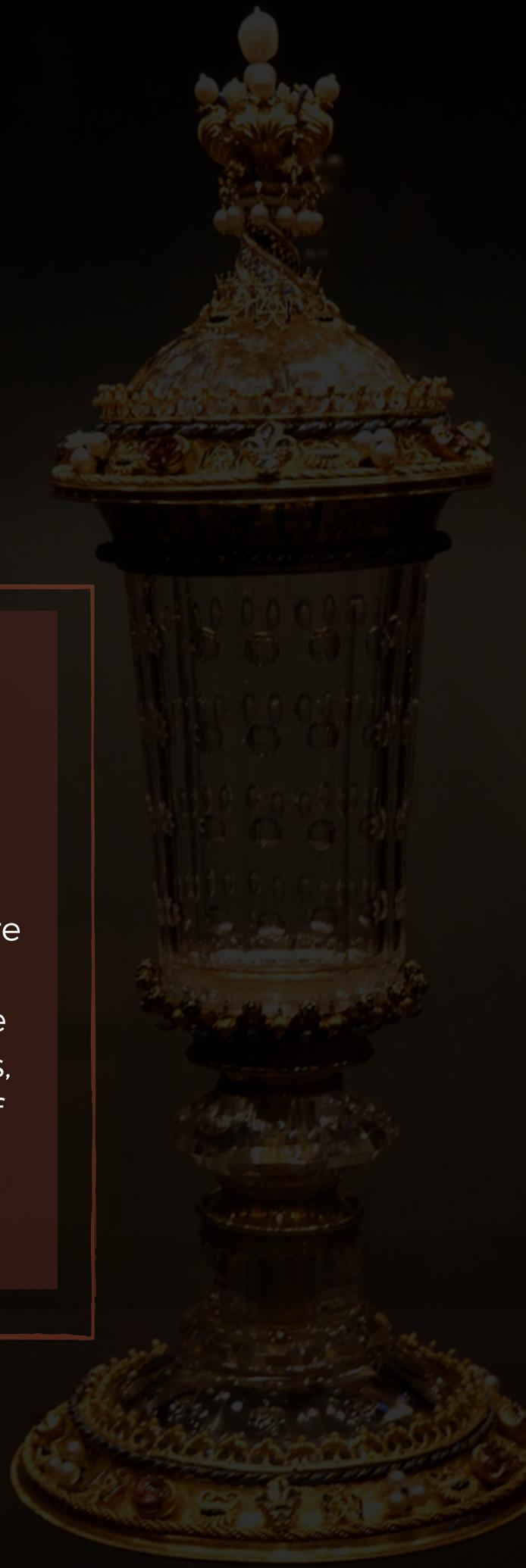
## *A note on Cornwall*

During November 2017 I made all of the Cornish material public on the blog, and I am reworking at as a single piece, a sort of Cornish gazetteer.

The pieces of raw research won't be included in these monthly transcripts, in expectation of a finished piece later this year.

# Dunsany: The Exiles Club

A story from Lord Dunsany, about a collection, of sorts, which the player characters may stumble upon. A redcap, Jerbiton or urban covenant may discover the Club, and find it necessary to defeat its members, or steal their treasures. Given that they are the treasures of distant fallen kingdoms they make excellent Arcane connections. They are wondrous items, so they are perfect for enchantment, if they have not become tied to another realm due to their collection in the club.



It was an evening party; and something someone had said to me had started me talking about a subject that to me is full of fascination, the subject of old religions, forsaken gods. The truth (for all religions have some of it), the wisdom, the beauty, of the religions of countries to which I travel have not the same appeal for me; for one only notices in them their tyranny and intolerance and the abject servitude that they claim from thought; but when a dynasty has been dethroned in heaven and goes forgotten and outcast even among men, one's eyes no longer dazzled by its power find something very wistful in the faces of fallen gods suppliant to be remembered, something almost tearfully beautiful, like a long warm summer twilight fading gently away after some day memorable in the story of earthly wars. Between what Zeus, for instance, has been once and the half-remembered tale he is today there lies a space so great that there is no change of fortune known to man whereby we may measure the height down which he has fallen. And it is the same with many another god at whom once the ages trembled and the twentieth century treats as an old wives' tale. The fortitude that such a fall demands is surely more than human.

Some such things as these I was saying, and being upon a subject that much attracts me I possibly spoke too loudly, certainly I was not aware that standing close behind me was no less a person than the ex-King of Eritivaria, the thirty islands of the East, or I would have moderated my voice and moved away a little to give him more room. I was not aware of his presence until his satellite, one who had fallen with him into exile but still revolved about him, told me that his master desired to know me; and so to my surprise I was presented though neither of them

even knew my name. And that was how I came to be invited by the ex-King to dine at his club.

At the time I could only account for his wishing to know me by supposing that he found in his own exiled condition some likeness to the fallen fortunes of the gods of whom I talked unwitting of his presence; but now I know that it was not of himself he was thinking when he asked me to dine at that club.

The club would have been the most imposing building in any street in London, but in that obscure mean quarter of London in which they had built it it appeared unduly enormous. Lifting right up above those grotesque houses and built in that Greek style that we call Georgian, there was something Olympian about it. To my host an unfashionable street could have meant nothing, through all his youth wherever he had gone had become fashionable the moment he went there; words like the East End could have had no meaning to him.

Whoever built that house had enormous wealth and cared nothing for fashion, perhaps despised it. As I stood gazing at the magnificent upper windows draped with great curtains, indistinct in the evening, on which huge shadows flickered my host attracted my attention from the doorway, and so I went in and met for the second time the ex-King of Eritivaria.

In front of us a stairway of rare marble led upwards, he took me through a side-door and downstairs and we came to a banqueting-hall of great magnificence. A long table ran up the middle of it, laid for quite twenty people, and I noticed the peculiarity that instead of chairs there were thrones for everyone except me, who was the only guest and for whom there was an ordinary

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chair. My host explained to me when we all sat down that everyone who belonged to that club was by rights a king.

In fact none was permitted, he told me, to belong to the club until his claim to a kingdom made out in writing had been examined and allowed by those whose duty it was. The whim of a populace or the candidate's own misrule were never considered by the investigators, nothing counted with them but heredity and lawful descent from kings, all else was ignored. At that table there were those who had once reigned themselves, others lawfully claimed descent from kings that the world had forgotten, the kingdoms claimed by some had even changed their names. Hatzgurh, the mountain kingdom, is almost regarded as mythical.

I have seldom seen greater splendour than that long hall provided below the level of the street. No doubt by day it was a little sombre, as all basements are, but at night with its great crystal chandeliers, and the glitter of heirlooms that had gone into exile, it surpassed the splendour of palaces that have only one king. They had come to London suddenly most of those kings, or their fathers before them, or forefathers; some had come away from their kingdoms by night, in a light sleigh, flogging the horses, or had galloped clear with morning over the border, some had trudged roads for days from their capital in disguise, yet many had had time just as they left to snatch up some small thing without price in markets, for the sake of old times as they said, but quite as much, I thought, with an eye to the future. And there these treasures glittered on that long table in the banqueting-hall of the basement of that strange club. Merely to see them was much, but to hear their story that their owners

I left that club very swiftly indeed, never to see it again, scarcely pausing to say farewell to those menial kings, and as I left the door a great window opened far up at the top of the house and a flash of lightning streamed from it and killed a dog.



***Here's a poem by Walter de la  
Mare that I love, and think  
some redcap has repeated by  
an inn fire. The recording  
quoted in the podcast is from  
MarryAnn at LibriVox.***

'Is there anybody there?' said the Traveller,  
Knocking on the moonlit door;  
And his horse in the silence champed the grasses  
Of the forest's ferny floor:  
And a bird flew up out of the turret,  
Above the Traveller's head:  
And he smote upon the door again a second time;  
'Is there anybody there?' he said.  
But no one descended to the Traveller;  
No head from the leaf-fringed sill  
Leaned over and looked into his grey eyes,  
Where he stood perplexed and still.  
But only a host of phantom listeners  
That dwelt in the lone house then  
Stood listening in the quiet of the moonlight  
To that voice from the world of men:  
Stood thronging the faint moonbeams on the dark  
stair,  
That goes down to the empty hall,  
Hearkening in an air stirred and shaken  
By the lonely Traveller's call.  
And he felt in his heart their strangeness,  
Their stillness answering his cry,  
While his horse moved, cropping the dark turf,  
'Neath the starred and leafy sky;  
For he suddenly smote on the door, even  
Louder, and lifted his head:—  
'Tell them I came, and no one answered,  
That I kept my word,' he said.  
Never the least stir made the listeners,  
Though every word he spake  
Fell echoing through the shadowiness of the still  
house  
From the one man left awake:  
Ay, they heard his foot upon the stirrup,  
And the sound of iron on stone,  
And how the silence surged softly backward,  
When the plunging hoofs were gone.

# The Listeners

by Walter de La Mare

As always with philosophy episodes let's start with defining terms. The Omphalos Hypothesis was defined in the late 19th Century by Phillip Gosse, but the same idea had cropped up for at least 1500 years. It's that at creation God placed evidence of false age into the world. We don't need to plumb the depths of geology and palaeontology for this: let's focus on Eden.

# The Omphalos Hypothesis and Magic

The thesis name is Greek for the belly button. Gosse stated that Adam must have had an umbilical scar, because he was created as an adult and adults have navels. Adam, to Gosse, did not arise from the dust hairless and without fingernails. This is less odd than it sounds. Gosse notes that the trees in the Garden had only been around for a day when they had fruit on them.

Hermetic magic creates items which are more perfect than natural objects. They are, technically, closer to the Realm of Forms. They contain only such accidents as are required for the object to exist, and to express the sigil of the magus. Magical towers, for example, are stronger than natural ones, because they are single pieces of stone, not two layers of ashlar bricks with gravel fill between. There are no faults in the stone unless this is required by the sigil, or it is definitional to the stone. Magical sandstone, for example, probably has a weaker direction, so it shears off in plates. Is sandstone without stripes really sandstone?

You might not agree with Gosse. When Gosse published this idea, it was widely hated, because it argued for a deceptive God that had coded a lie not just in the Eden story, but into the very bones of the Earth. God does not make lies, so the created thing has no accidental properties.

So, if your magus has an affinity, think through what scars, or accidents, you are assuming for the items that the character creates. If you make a horse, does it have a navel? If you make a wooden table, does it have grain, caused by growth rings? Does it have knots? If you make a beehive does it have larvae in it? Do things which are created by processes of aging, like wine and cheese, have the signs of aging, like dregs and rind? Grosse argued that yes, all created things would have accidents, because every object is just at one point in the cyclical processes of life, and needs to begin midcycle, but there were a lot of people who clearly didn't agree.

## *The gold more expensive than gold*

Saffron is the most expensive agricultural product, weight for weight, in Mythic Europe. There's some question as to how hardy it is: people at the time claimed it grows best in arid climates, but in the 16th century, the centre of saffron growing in Europe was Saffron Walden, slightly south of Cambridge in England. In 1220, it's Cyprus. Saffron is grown on plantations controlled by Venetian merchants. There are legends concerning how saffron escaped to the west.

The Arabs in Iberia grew it for a while in the 10th century, but in the 13th Century it was introduced into Italy, France and Germany. The stories tend to suggest it was smuggled home in the sword hilts of Crusaders. In the 14th Century it is transferred to England in a cavity within a pilgrim's staff. Saffron use predates saffron growing in Britain. The Phoenicians who traded for tin in Cornwall bought it, and it's still used in various regional dishes.

Saffron plants have abundant purple flowers. At the centre of each are three stigmas which must be harvested unbroken, so they are all picked by hand. It takes between 70 000 and 250 000 flowers to harvest a pound of saffron. At the lowest number, that's 10 pounds of saffron to the acre.

Saffron produces a deep yellow dye, which is used for art, as a flavouring and as a cosmetic. I, personally, can't taste saffron. I've tried to make extremely potent saffron tinctures, using both the hot water and acidulated water methods, and I simply can't taste it. Other people say it has a delicious, earthy taste, completely different from the turmeric which is often used to adulterate it.

Alexander the Great used saffron to blonde his hair. Cleopatra used to bathe in a mixture of saffron and milk, to give her skin an artificial glow. Mystagogic cults may use large amounts of saffron in their ordeals, such that it is a sacrifice of treasure.

In Germany, particularly, wealthy nuns kept saffron as a stimulant, much as we might keep coffee. It was used to treat melancholy. This ties into the earlier episode on acedia: saffron may be a Ward for the demon that spreads the shattered glass plague.

### *A note on roosters in Chaucer*

Chaucer notes that roosters are natural astronomers. They innately know the time of dawn, dusk and the equinoxes.

If your magus has a rooster familiar do they innately know when Sun and Year spells end, to the second?

Is one of the astrological mystery cults led by a Bjonaer rooster? Many Bjonaers become a kaiju instead of falling into Twilight. What does an astrologer rooster become? Is this where the ibbu and the phoenix come from?

## *Is there an "N word" for magi?*

I listen to a podcast called Lexicon Valley, which is about the way language changes. In a recent episode, the presenter suggested the words "gangster" and "gangsta" are now separate words. When you think about them, he posits, you are not thinking about the same sorts of stereotypes. Similarly, he then revels in breaking the American taboo against the "n word". He's black and is interested in the taboo here. He suggests the "n word" when said as a racial slur, ends in "-er", like gangster, and that when black men are using it as a synonym for "buddy", it ends in an "a" sound. He believes they are two, separated, words. This, for him, is the solution to the "why can't I use the slur if black people are using it?" question: they aren't the same word.

This led me to wonder if there was a term which was offensive if used by outsiders, but accepted my magi within the Oder, and I think I've found one. It was hiding in plain sight, all along. It's "wizard".

Now, some people will tell you it just means "wise man" and that's superficially true. What they are missing is that the -ard suffix is a perjorative: it's a mark of disdain in English. Look at the other words where "ard" means a man, and you'll notice they aren't respectable people. Bastard. Dullard. Drunkard. Coward. Sluggard. Wizard is a term of abuse, that magi seem to throw around anyway.

The one word that initially seemed to escape this meaning of -ard is the personal name "Richard", which means "king who is hearty", but the abbreviation for Richard is Dick. That doesn't have its current, genital-related meaning in print until the 19th Century. As it happens I'm listening to the Canterbury Tales at the moment, and it has a verb in it, to "dighte", meaning to have sex with, which may throw even this back to the 14th Century.

So, I'd suggest "wizard" is a term magi use only among themselves. The title to outsiders is magus or maga, and the use of the insider term is a mark of fellowship.

I was listening to a somewhat modernised version of The Canterbury Tales and was struck by a description of a demon given there. This is from The Friar's Tale. It uses the word "sompnour" which is a "summoner", a sort of bailiff that calls people to the ecclesiastical court. The friar hates, and is hated by, a summoner in the party. In the text below, there are little notes to explain some of the strange terms. At the end there are stats for the demon.

The recording contained in the episode was by Kara Schallenberg and was released into the public domain through LibriVox.

Whilom\* there was dwelling in my country  
An archdeacon, a man of high degree,  
That boldely did execution,  
In punishing of fornication,  
Of witchecraft, and eke of bawdery,  
Of defamation, and adultery,  
Of churche-reeves,\* and of testaments,  
Of contracts, and of lack of sacraments,  
And eke of many another manner\* crime,  
Which needeth not rehearsen at this time,  
Of usury, and simony also;  
But, certes, lechours did he greatest woe;  
They shoulde singen, if that they were hent;\*  
And smale tithers were foul y-shent,\*  
If any person would on them complain;  
There might astert them no pecunial pain.  
For smallle tithes, and small offering,  
He made the people piteously to sing;  
For ere the bishop caught them with his crook,  
They weren in the archedeacon's book;  
Then had he, through his jurisdiction,  
Power to do on them correction.

\*once on a time

He had a Sompnour ready to his hand,  
A slier boy was none in Engleland;  
For subtely he had his espiaille,\*  
That taught him well where it might aught avail.  
He coulde spare of lechours one or two,  
To teache him to four and twenty mo'.  
For, — though this Sompnour wood\* be as a hare, — \*furious, mad  
To tell his harlotry I will not spare,  
For we be out of their correction,  
They have of us no jurisdiction,  
Ne never shall have, term of all their lives.

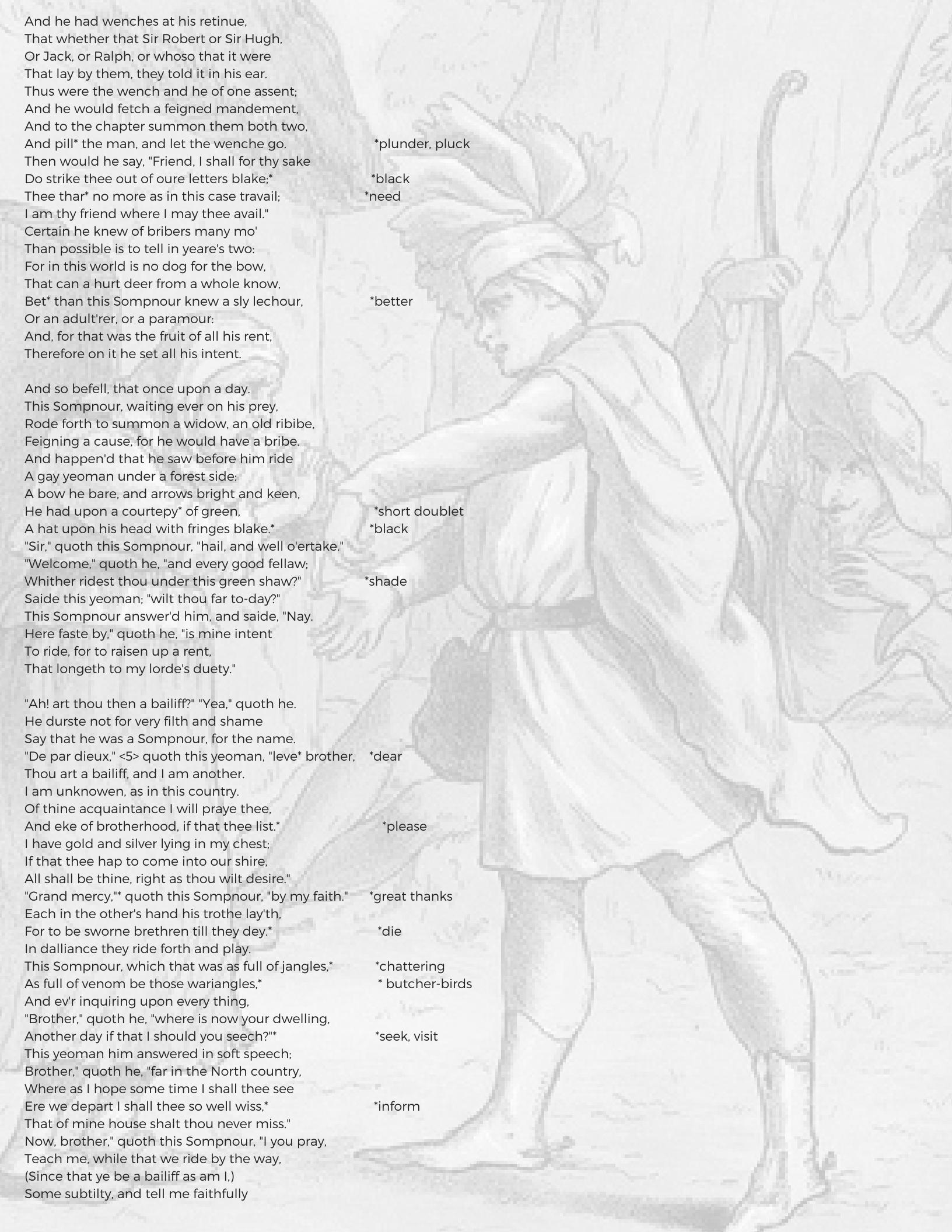
\*espionage

"Peter; so be the women of the stives,"\*  
Quoth this Sompnour, "y-put out of our cure."\*\*  
  
"Peace, with mischance and with misaventure,"  
Our Hoste said, "and let him tell his tale.  
Now telle forth, and let the Sompnour gale,\*  
Nor spare not, mine owen master dear."  
This false thief, the Sompnour (quoth the Frere),  
Had always bawdes ready to his hand,  
As any hawk to lure in Engleland,  
That told him all the secrets that they knew, —  
For their acquaintance was not come of new;  
They were his approvers\* privily.  
He took himself at great profit thereby:  
His master knew not always what he wan.\*  
Without mandement, a lewed\* man  
He could summon, on pain of Christe's curse,  
And they were inly glad to fill his purse,  
And make him greate feastes at the nale.\*  
And right as Judas hadde purses smale,\*  
And was a thief, right such a thief was he,  
His master had but half \*his duety.\*  
He was (if I shall give him his laud)  
A thief, and eke a Sompnour, and a bawd.

\*stews  
\*care

\*whistle; bawl  
\*informers  
  
\*won  
\*ignorant  
  
\*alehouse  
\*small  
  
\*what was owing him\*

The demon  
Chaucer's  
the friar's  
tale"



And he had wenches at his retinue,  
That whether that Sir Robert or Sir Hugh,  
Or Jack, or Ralph, or whoso that it were  
That lay by them, they told it in his ear.  
Thus were the wench and he of one assent;  
And he would fetch a feigned mandement,  
And to the chapter summon them both two,  
And pill\* the man, and let the wenche go.  
Then would he say, "Friend, I shall for thy sake  
Do strike thee out of oure letters blake;\*  
Thee that\* no more as in this case travail;  
I am thy friend where I may thee avail."  
Certain he knew of bribers many mo'  
Than possible is to tell in yeare's two:  
For in this world is no dog for the bow,  
That can a hurt deer from a whole know,  
Bet\* than this Sompnour knew a sly lechour,  
Or an adulterer, or a paramour:  
And, for that was the fruit of all his rent,  
Therefore on it he set all his intent.

And so befell, that once upon a day,  
This Sompnour, waiting ever on his prey,  
Rode forth to summon a widow, an old ribibe,  
Feigning a cause, for he would have a bribe.  
And happen'd that he saw before him ride  
A gay yeoman under a forest side:  
A bow he bare, and arrows bright and keen,  
He had upon a courtepy\* of green,  
A hat upon his head with fringes blake.\*  
"Sir," quoth this Sompnour, "hail, and well o'ertake."  
"Welcome," quoth he, "and every good fellow;  
Whither ridest thou under this green shaw?"  
Saide this yeoman; "wilt thou far to-day?"  
This Sompnour answer'd him, and saide, "Nay.  
Here faste by," quoth he, "is mine intent  
To ride, for to raisen up a rent,  
That longeth to my lorde's duety."

"Ah! art thou then a bailiff?" "Yea," quoth he.  
He durste not for very filth and shame  
Say that he was a Sompnour, for the name.  
"De par dieux," <5> quoth this yeoman, "leve\* brother, \*dear  
Thou art a bailiff, and I am another.  
I am unknownen, as in this country.  
Of thine acquaintance I will praye thee,  
And eke of brotherhood, if that thee list.\*  
I have gold and silver lying in my chest;  
If that thee hap to come into our shire,  
All shall be thine, right as thou wilt desire."  
"Grand mercy,"\* quoth this Sompnour, "by my faith."  
Each in the other's hand his trothe lay'th,  
For to be sworne brethren till they dey.\*  
In dalliance they ride forth and play.  
This Sompnour, which that was as full of jangles,\*  
As full of venom be those wariangles.\*  
And ev'r inquiring upon every thing,  
"Brother," quoth he, "where is now your dwelling,  
Another day if that I should you seech?\*\*  
This yeoman him answered in soft speech:  
"Brother," quoth he, "far in the North country,  
Where as I hope some time I shall thee see  
Ere we depart I shall thee so well wiss,\*  
That of mine house shalt thou never miss."  
Now, brother," quoth this Sompnour, "I you pray,  
Teach me, while that we ride by the way,  
(Since that ye be a bailiff as am I.)  
Some subtily, and tell me faithfully

\*plunder, pluck

\*black

\*need

\*better

\*short doublet

\*black

\*shade

\*please

\*great thanks

\*die

\*chattering

\*butcher-birds

\*seek, visit

\*inform

For mine office how that I most may win.  
And \*spare not\* for conscience or for sin,  
But, as my brother, tell me how do ye."  
Now by my trothe, brother mine," said he,  
As I shall tell to thee a faithful tale:  
My wages be full strait and eke full smale;  
My lord is hard to me and dangerous,\*  
And mine office is full laborious;  
And therefore by extortion I live,  
Forsooth I take all that men will me give.  
Alglate\* by sleighe, or by violence,  
From year to year I win all my dispence;  
I can no better tell thee faithfully."  
Now certes," quoth this Sompnour, "so fare\* I;  
I spare not to take, God it wot,  
\*But if\* it be too heavy or too hot.  
What I may get in counsel privily,  
No manner conscience of that have I.  
N'ere\* mine extortion, I might not live,  
For of such japes\* will I not be shrive.\*\*  
Stomach nor conscience know I none;  
I shrew\* these shrifte-fathers\*\* every one.  
Well be we met, by God and by St Jame.  
But, leve brother, tell me then thy name,"  
Quoth this Sompnour. Right in this meane while  
This yeoman gan a little for to smile.

\*conceal nothing\*

\*niggardly

\*whether

\*do

\*unless\*

\*were it not for

\*tricks \*\*confessed

\*curse \*\*confessors

"Brother," quoth he, "wilt thou that I thee tell?  
I am a fiend, my dwelling is in hell,  
And here I ride about my purchasing,  
To know where men will give me any thing.  
\*My purchase is th' effect of all my rent\*  
Look how thou ridest for the same intent sole revenue\*  
To winne good, thou reckest never how,  
Right so fare I, for ride will I now  
Into the worlde's ende for a prey."

\*what I can gain is my

"Ah," quoth this Sompnour, "benedicte! what say y?/  
I weened ye were a yeoman truly.  
Ye have a manne's shape as well as I  
Have ye then a figure determinate  
In helle, where ye be in your estate?\*\*  
"Nay, certainly," quoth he, there have we none,  
But when us liketh we can take us one,  
Or elles make you seem\* that we be shape  
Sometime like a man, or like an ape;  
Or like an angel can I ride or go;  
It is no wondrous thing though it be so,  
A lousy juggler can deceive thee.  
And pardie, yet can I more craft\* than he."  
"Why," quoth the Sompnour, "ride ye then or gon  
In sundry shapes and not always in one?"  
"For we," quoth he, "will us in such form make.  
As most is able our prey for to take."

\*thought

\*at home

\*believe

\*skill, cunning

"What maketh you to have all this labour?"  
"Full many a cause, leve Sir Sompnour."  
Saide this fiend. "But all thing hath a time;  
The day is short and it is passed prime,  
And yet have I won nothing in this day:  
I will intend\* to winning, if I may,  
And not intend our thinges to declare:  
For, brother mine, thy wit is all too bare  
To understand, although I told them thee.  
\*But for\* thou askest why laboure we:  
For sometimes we be Godde's instruments  
And meanes to do his commandementes,  
When that him list, upon his creatures,  
In divers acts and in divers figures:  
Withouthe him we have no might certain,

\*apply myself

\*because\*

If that him list to stande thereagain.\* \*against it  
And sometimes, at our prayer have we leave  
Only the body, not the soul, to grieve:  
Witness on Job, whom that we did full woe,  
And sometimes have we might on both the two. —  
This is to say, on soul and body eke,  
And sometimes be we suffer'd for to seek  
Upon a man and do his soul unrest  
And not his body, and all is for the best,  
When he withstandeth our temptation,  
It is a cause of his salvation.  
Albeit that it was not our intent  
He should be safe, but that we would him hent.\* \*catch  
And sometimes be we servants unto man,  
As to the archbishop Saint Dunstan,  
And to th'apostle servant eke was I."  
"Yet tell me," quoth this Sompnour, "faithfully,  
Make ye you newe bodies thus alway  
Of th' elements?" The fiend answered, "Nay:  
Sometimes we feign, and sometimes we arise  
With deade bodies, in full sundry wise.  
And speak as reas'nably, and fair, and well,  
As to the Pythoness did Samuel:  
And yet will some men say it was not he.  
I \*do no force of\* your divinity. \*set no value  
But one thing warn I thee, I will not jape,  
Thou wilt \*algates weet\* how we be shape: \*jest  
Thou shalt hereafterward, my brother dear,  
Come, where thee needeth not of me to leare.\* \*assuredly kn  
For thou shalt by thine own experience  
\*Conne in a chair to rede of this sentence,\* \*learn to un  
Better than Virgil, while he was alive, what I have said  
Or Dante also. <10> Now let us ride blive,\* \*briskly  
For I will holde company with thee,  
Till it be so that thou forsake me."  
"Nay," quoth this Sompnour, "that shall ne'er betide.  
I am a yeoman, that is known full wide;  
My trothe will I hold, as in this case;  
For though thou wert the devil Satanas,  
My trothe will I hold to thee, my brother,  
As I have sworn, and each of us to other,  
For to be true brethren in this case,  
And both we go \*abouten our purchase.\* \*seeking w  
Take thou thy part, what that men will thee give, may pick up\*  
And I shall mine, thus may we bothe live.  
And if that any of us have more than other,  
Let him be true, and part it with his brother."  
"I grante," quoth the devil, "by my fay."  
And with that word they rode forth their way,  
And right at th'ent'ring of the towne's end,  
To which this Sompnour shope\* him for to wend,\*\* \*shaped \*  
They saw a cart, that charged was with hay,  
Which that a carter drove forth on his way.  
Deep was the way, for which the carte stood:  
The carter smote, and cried as he were wood,\* \*mad  
"Heit Scot! heit Brok! what, spare ye for the stones?  
The fiend (quoth he) you fetch body and bones,  
As farforthly\* as ever ye were foal'd. \*sure  
So muche woe as I have with you tholed.\* \*endured  
The devil have all, horses, and cart, and hay."  
The Sompnour said, "Here shall we have a prey."  
And near the fiend he drew, \*as nought ne were,\* \*as if noth  
Full privily, and rownd\* in his ear:were the matter\*  
"Hearken, my brother, hearken, by thy faith,  
Hearest thou not, how that the carter saith?  
Hent\* it anon, for he hath giv'n it thee,  
Both hay and cart, and eke his capels\* three."  
"Nay," quoth the devil, "God wot, never a deal,  
\*whit

It is not his intent, trust thou me well;  
Ask him thyself, if thou not trowest\* me,  
Or elles stint\* a while and thou shalt see."  
The carter thwack'd his horses on the croup,  
And they began to drawen and to stoop.  
"Heit now," quoth he: "there, Jesus Christ you bless,  
And all his handiwork, both more and less!  
That was well twight,\* mine owen liart,\*\* boy.  
I pray God save thy body, and Saint Loy!  
Now is my cart out of the slough, pardie."  
"Lo, brother," quoth the fiend, "what told I thee?  
Here may ye see, mine owen deare brother,  
The churl spake one thing, but he thought another.  
Let us go forth abouten our voyage;  
Here win I nothing upon this carriage."

When that they came somewhat out of the town,  
This Sompnour to his brother gan to roun;  
"Brother," quoth he, "here wons\* an old rebeck,  
That had almost as lief to lose her neck.  
As for to give a penny of her good.  
I will have twelvepence, though that she be wood,\*  
Or I will summon her to our office;  
And yet, God wot, of her know I no vice.  
But for thou canst not, as in this country,  
Winne thy cost, take here example of me."  
This Sompnour clapped at the widow's gate:  
"Come out," he said, "thou olde very trate;\*  
I trow thou hast some friar or priest with thee."  
"Who clappeth?" said this wife: "benedicite,  
God save you, Sir, what is your sweete will?"  
"I have," quoth he, "of summons here a bill.  
Up\* pain of cursing, looke that thou be  
To-morrow before our archdeacon's knee,  
To answer to the court of certain things."  
"Now Lord," quoth she, "Christ Jesus, king of kings,  
So wisely\* helpe me, \*as I not may.\* surely  
I have been sick, and that full many a day.  
I may not go so far," quoth she, "nor ride,  
But I be dead, so pricketh it my side.  
May I not ask a libel, Sir Sompnour,  
And answer there by my procuratour  
To such thing as men would appose\* me?"  
"Yes," quoth this Sompnour, "pay anon, let see,  
Twelvepence to me, and I will thee acquit.  
I shall no profit have thereby but lit:\*My master hath the profit and not I.  
Come off, and let me ride hastily;  
Give me twelvepence, I may no longer tarry."

"Twelvepence!" quoth she; "now lady Sainte Mary  
So wisely\* help me out of care and sin,  
This wide world though that I should it win,  
No have I not twelvepence within my hold.  
Ye know full well that I am poor and old;  
\*Kithe your almes\* upon me poor wretch."  
"Nay then," quoth he, "the foule fiend me fetch,  
If I excuse thee, though thou should'st be spilt."  
"Alas!" quoth she, "God wot, I have no guilt."  
"Pay me," quoth he, "or, by the sweet Saint Anne,  
As I will bear away thy newe pan  
For debte, which thou owest me of old, —  
When that thou madest thine husband cuckold, —  
I paid at home for thy correction."  
"Thou liest," quoth she, "by my salvation;  
Never was I ere now, widow or wife,  
Summon'd unto your court in all my life;

\*believest  
\*stop  
\*pulled \*\*grey<13>

\*dwells

\*mad

\*trot

\*upon

\*as I cannot\*

\*accuse

\*little

\*surely

\*show your charity\*

\*ruined

Nor never I was but of my body true.  
Unto the devil rough and black of hue  
Give I thy body and my pan also."  
And when the devil heard her curse so  
Upon her knees, he said in this maniere;  
"Now, Mably, mine owen mother dear,  
Is this your will in earnest that ye say?"  
"The devil," quoth she, "so fetch him ere he dey.\*  
And pan and all, but\* he will him repent."  
"Nay, olde stoat,\* that is not mine intent,"  
Quoth this Sompnour, "for to repente me  
For any thing that I have had of thee;  
I would I had thy smock and every cloth."  
"Now, brother," quoth the devil, "be not wroth;  
Thy body and this pan be mine by right.  
Thou shalt with me to helle yet tonight,  
Where thou shalt knownen of our privity\*  
More than a master of divinity."

\*die  
\*unless  
\*polecat

\*secrets

\*seized

\*be horrified  
\*relate

\*that

\*on the watch\*

\*seized

# A conman from Chaucer

*I love reading about con artists. I'm an unskilled liar. They have what seems like a superpower to me. So, when I saw a conman in the Canterbury Tales, I wanted to share him with you. Technically to make this Ars Magica related we need a plot hook, so:*

## **Plot Hook:**

*A conman pretending to be an alchemist has taken forty pounds from a nobleman. He thinks the Order, being magi, are involved and should pay. Can they find the sham artist, and deliver him to the noble, to ease relations?*

*Honour being satisfied, it's time for some slightly modernised Chaucer.*

The tale

In London was a priest, an annualere,  
That therein dwelled had many a year,  
Which was so pleasant and so serviceable  
Unto the wife, where as he was at table,  
That she would suffer him no thing to pay  
For board nor clothing, went he ne'er so gay;  
And spending silver had he right enow;  
Thereof no force;\* will proceed as now,  
And tell forth my tale of the canon,  
That brought this priest to confusion.  
This false canon came upon a day

Unto the priest's chamber, where he lay,  
Beseeching him to lend him a certain  
Of gold, and he would quit it him again.  
"Lend me a mark," quoth he, "but days three,  
And at my day I will it quite thee.  
And if it so be that thou find me false,  
Another day hang me up by the halse."\*\*

This priest him took a mark, and that as swithe;\*

\*no matter  
\*neck  
\*quickly  
\*times

And this canon him thanked often sithe;\*

And took his leave, and went forth his way;

And at the third day brought his money;

And to the priest he took his gold again,

Whereof this priest was wondrous glad and fain.\*

"Certes," quoth he, "\*\*nothing annoyeth me"

\*pleased  
\*I am not unwilling\*

To lend a man a noble, or two, or three,

Or what thing were in my possession,

When he so true is of condition,

That in no wise he break will his day;

To such a man I never can say nay."

"What," quoth this canon, "should I be untrue?

Nay, that were \*thing y-fallen all of new!\*

Truth is a thing that I will ever keep,

Unto the day in which that I shall creep

Into my grave; and elles God forbid;

Believe this as sicker\* as your creed. \*sure

God thank I, and in good time be it said,

That there was never man yet \*evil apaide\*

For gold nor silver that he to me lent,

Nor ever falsehood in mine heart I meant.

And Sir," quoth he, "now of my privity,

Since ye so goodly have been unto me,

And kithed\* to me so great gentleness,

Somewhat, to quite with your kindness,

I will you shew, and if you list to lear;\*

I will you teach plainly the manner

How I can worken in philosophy.

Take good heed, ye shall well see \*at eye\*

That I will do a mas'try ere I go."

"Yea," quoth the priest; "yea, Sir, and will ye so?

Mary! thereof I pray you heartily."

"At your commandment, Sir, truly."

Quoth the canon, "and elles God forbid."

Lo, how this thief could his service bede!\*

\*a new thing to happen\*

\*displeased, dissatisfied\*

\*shown

\*learn

\*with your own eye\*

\*offer

Full sooth it is that such proffer'd service  
Stinketh, as witness \*these old wise;\*  
And that full soon I will it verify  
In this canon, root of all treachery,  
That evermore delight had and gladness  
(Such fiendly thoughts \*in his heart impress\*) \*press into his heart\*  
How Christe's people he may to mischief bring.  
God keep us from his false dissimulung!  
What wiste this priest with whom that he dealt?  
Nor of his harm coming he nothing felt.

O sely\* priest, O sely innocent!  
With covetise anon thou shalt be blent;\*

O graceless, full blind is thy conceit!

For nothing art thou ware of the deceit

Which that this fox y-shapen\* hath to thee;  
His wily wrenches\* thou not mayest flee.

Wherefore, to go to the conclusion

That referreth to thy confusion,

Unhappy man, anon I will me hie\*

To tell thine unwit\* and thy folly,

And eke the falseness of that other wretch,  
As farforth as that my conning\* will stretch.

This canon was my lord, ye would ween;\*

Sir Host, in faith, and by the heaven's queen,  
It was another canon, and not he,

That can\* an hundred fold more subtlety.

He hath betrayed folks many a time;

Of his falseness it doleth\* me to rhyme.

And ever, when I speak of his falsehead,

For shame of him my cheeks wax red;

Algates\* they begin for to glow,

For redness have I none, right well I know,

In my visage; for fumes diverse

Of metals, which ye have me heard rehearse,

Consumed have and wasted my redness.

Now take heed of this canon's cursedness.\*

"Sir," quoth he to the priest, "let your man go  
For quicksilver, that we it had anon;  
And let him bringen ounces two or three;  
And when he comes, as fast shall ye see  
A wondrous thing, which ye saw ne'er ere this."

"Sir," quoth the priest, "it shall be done, y-wis.\*" \*certainly  
He bade his servant fetch him this thing,

And he all ready was at his bidding,

And went him forth, and came anon again

With this quicksilver, shortly for to sayn;

And took these ounces three to the canoun;

And he them laid well and fair adown,

And bade the servant coals for to bring,

That he anon might go to his working.

The coals right anon weren y-fet,\*

And this canon y-took a crosselet\*

Out of his bosom, and shew'd to the priest.

"This instrument," quoth he, "which that thou seest,

Take in thine hand, and put thyself therein

Of this quicksilver an ounce, and here begin,

In the name of Christ, to wax a philosopher.

There be full few, which that I would proffer

To shewe them thus much of my science;

For here shall ye see by experience

That this quicksilver I will mortify,

Right in your sight anon without lie,

And make it as good silver, and as fine,

As there is any in your purse, or mine,

Or elleswhere; and make it malleable,

And elles hold me false and unable

Among folk for ever to appear.

\*those wise folk of old\*

\*simple

\*blinded; beguiled

\*contrived

\*snares

\*hasten

\*stupidity

\*knowledge

\*imagine

\*knows

\*paineth

\*at least

\*villainy

I have a powder here that cost me dear,  
Shall make all good, for it is cause of all  
My conning,\* which that I you shewe shall.  
Voide\* your man, and let him be thereout;  
And shut the door, while we be about  
Our privity, that no man us espy,  
While that we work in this philosophy."  
All, as he bade, fulfilled was in deed.  
This ilke servant right anon out yede.\*  
And his master y-shut the door anon,  
And to their labour speedily they gon.

\*knowledge

\*send away

\*went

This priest, at this cursed canon's bidding,

Upon the fire anon he set this thing,

And blew the fire, and bused him full fast.

And this canon into the croslet cast

A powder, I know not whereof it was

Y-made, either of chalk, either of glass,

Or somewhat elles, was not worth a fly,

To blinden\* with this priest; and bade him hie\*\* \*deceive

\*\*make haste

The coals for to couchen\* all above lay in order

The croslet; "for, in token I thee love."

Quoth this canon, "thine own hands two

Shall work all thing that here shall be do."

\*\*Grand mercy,"\* quoth the priest, and was full glad,

\*great

thanks\*

And couch'd the coals as the canon bade.

And while he busy was, this fiendly wretch,

This false canon (the foul fiend him fetch).

Out of his bosom took a beechen coal,

In which full subtly was made a hole,

And therein put was of silver limaile\*

\*filings

An ounce, and stopped was without fail

The hole with wax, to keep the limaile in.

And understand, that this false gin\*

Was not made there, but it was made before;

And other things I shall tell you more.

Hereafterward, which that he with him brought;

Ere he came there, him to beguile he thought,

And so he did, ere that they \*went atwin;\*

Till he had turned him, could he not blin.\*

It doleth\* me, when that I of him speak;

On his falsehood fain would I me awreak,\*

myself

If I wist how, but he is here and there;

He is so variant,\* he abides nowhere.

\*contrivance

\*separated\*

\*cease

\*paineth

\*revenge

\*changeable

But take heed, Sirs, now for Godde's love.

He took his coal, of which I spake above,

And in his hand he bare it privily,

And while the priest couched busily

The coales, as I tolde you ere this,

This canon saide, "Friend, ye do amiss;

This is not couched as it ought to be,

But soon I shall amenden it," quoth he.

"Now let me meddle therewith but a while,

For of you have I pity, by Saint Gile.

Ye be right hot, I see well how ye sweat;

Have here a cloth, and wipe away the wet."

And while that the priest wip'd his face,

This canon took his coal, — \*with sorry grace,\* —

And layed it above on the midward attend him!\*

Of the croslet, and blew well afterward,

Till that the coals began fast to brenn.\*

"Now give us drink," quoth this canon then,

"And swithe\* all shall be well, I undertake.

Sit we down, and let us merry make."

And when that this canon's beechen coal

Was burnt, all the limaile out of the hole

\*evil fortune

\*burn

\*quickly

Into the crosselet anon fell down;  
And so it must needs, by reason,  
Since it above so \*even couched\* was;  
But thereof wist the priest no thing, alas!  
He deemed all the coals alike good,  
For of the sleight he nothing understood.

And when this alchemister saw his time,  
"Rise up, Sir Priest," quoth he, "and stand by me;  
And, for I wot well ingot\* have ye none;  
Go, walk forth, and bring me a chalk stone;  
For I will make it of the same shape  
That is an ingot, if I may have hap.  
Bring eke with you a bowl, or else a pan,  
Full of water, and ye shall well see than\* \*then  
How that our business shall \*hap and preve\* \*succeed\*  
And yet, for ye shall have no misbelieve\* \*mistrust  
Nor wrong conceit of me, in your absence,  
I will not be out of your presence,  
But go with you, and come with you again."  
The chamber-door, shortly for to sayn,  
They opened and shut, and went their way,  
And forth with them they carried the key;  
And came again without any delay.  
Why should I tarry all the long day?  
He took the chalk, and shap'd it in the wise  
Of an ingot, as I shall you devise;  
I say, he took out of his own sleeve  
A teine\* of silver (evil may he cheve!\*\*)  
Which that ne was but a just ounce of weight.  
And take heed now of his cursed sleight;  
He shap'd his ingot, in length and in brede\*  
Of this teine, withouten any drede,\*  
So slyly, that the priest it not espied;  
And in his sleeve again he gan it hide;  
And from the fire he took up his matter,  
And in th' ingot put it with merry cheer;  
And in the water-vessel he it cast,  
When that him list, and bade the priest as fast  
Look what there is; "Put in thine hand and grope;  
There shalt thou find silver, as I hope."  
What, devil of helle! should it elles be?  
Shaving of silver, silver is, pardie.  
He put his hand in, and took up a teine  
Of silver fine; and glad in every vein  
Was this priest, when he saw that it was so.  
"Godde's blessing, and his mother's also,  
And alle hallows,\* have ye, Sir Canon!"  
Saide this priest, "and I their malison"  
But, an\* ye vouchesafe to teach me  
This noble craft and this subtlety,  
I will be yours in all that ever I may."  
Quoth the canon, "Yet will I make assay  
The second time, that ye may take heed,  
And be expert of this, and, in your need,  
Another day assay in mine absence  
This discipline, and this crafty science.  
Let take another ounce," quoth he tho,\*  
"Of quicksilver, without words mo',  
And do therewith as ye have done ere this  
With that other, which that now silver is. "

The priest him busied, all that e'er he can,  
To do as this canon, this cursed man,  
Commanded him, and fast he blew the fire  
For to come to th' effect of his desire.  
And this canon right in the meanwhile  
All ready was this priest eft\* to beguile,

\*exactly laid\*

\*mould

\*describe  
ttle piece / \*\*prosper

\*breadth  
\*doubt

\*saints  
\*curse  
\*if

\*then

\*again

and, for a countenance,\* in his hand bare  
An hollow stick (take keep\* and beware);  
Of silver limaile put was, as before  
Was in his coal, and stopped with wax well  
For to keep in his limaile every deal.\*  
And while this priest was in his business,  
This canon with his stick gan him dress\*

To him anon, and his powder cast in,  
As he did erst (the devil out of his skin  
Him turn, I pray to God, for his falsehead,  
For he was ever false in thought and deed),  
And with his stick, above the crosselet,  
That was ordained\* with that false get,\*\*

\*stratagem

\*heed

\*particle

\*apply

\*provided

\*\*contrivance  
He stirr'd the coals, till relente gan  
The wax against the fire, as every man,  
But he a fool be, knows well it must need.  
And all that in the stick was out yede,\*  
And in the croslet hastily\* it fell. \*quickly  
Now, good Sirs, what will ye bet\* than well?  
When that this priest was thus beguill'd again,  
Supposing naught but truth, sooth to sayn,  
He was so glad, that I can not express  
In no manner his mirth and his gladness;  
And to the canon he proffer'd eftsoon\*

Body and good. "Yea," quoth the canon soon,  
"Though poor I be, crafty\* thou shalt me find;  
I warn thee well, yet is there more behind.  
Is any copper here within?" said he.

"Yea, Sir," the priest said, "I trow there be."  
"Elles go buy us some, and that as swithe.\*  
Now, good Sir, go forth thy way and hie\* thee."  
He went his way, and with the copper came,  
And this canon it in his hands name,\*  
And of that copper weighed out an ounce.  
Too simple is my tongue to pronounce,  
As minister of my wit, the doubleness  
Of this canon, root of all cursedness.  
He friendly seem'd to them that knew him not;  
But he was fiendly, both in work and thought.  
It wearieh me to tell of his falseness;  
And nathelss yet will I it express,  
To that intent men may beware thereby,  
And for none other cause truly.

He put this copper in the crosselet,  
And on the fire as swithe\* he hath it set,  
And cast in powder, and made the priest to blow,  
And in his working for to stoop low,  
As he did erst,\* and all was but a jape;\*\*

Right as him list the priest \*he made his ape.\*

And afterward in the ingot he it cast,  
And in the pan he put it at the last  
Of water, and in he put his own hand;  
And in his sleeve, as ye beforehand  
Heard me tell, he had a silver teine;\*

He silly took it out, this cursed heine\*  
(Unweeting\* this priest of his false craft),

And in the pan's bottom he it laft\*  
And in the water rumbleth to and fro,  
And wondrous privily took up also  
The copper teine (not knowing thilke priest),  
And hid it, and him hente\* by the breast,  
And to him spake, and thus said in his game;  
"Stoop now adown; by God, ye be to blame;  
Help me now, as I did you whilere;\*

\*before \*\*trick

\*befooled him\*

\*small piece

\*wretch

\*unsuspecting

\*left

\*took

\*before

This priest took up this silver teine anon;  
 And then said the canon, "Let us gon,  
 With these three teines which that we have wrought,  
 To some goldsmith, and \*weet if they be aught:" \*find out if they are  
 For, by my faith, I would not for my hood worth anything\*  
 \*But if\* they were silver fine and good, \*unless  
 And that as swithe\* well proved shall it be." \*quickly  
 Unto the goldsmith with these teines three  
 They went anon, and put them in assay\* \*proof  
 To fire and hammer; might no man say nay.  
 But that they were as they ought to be.  
 This sotted\* priest, who gladder was than he? \*stupid, besotted  
 Was never bird gladder against the day;  
 Nor nightingale in the season of May  
 Was never none, that better list to sing;  
 Nor lady lustier in carolling,  
 Or for to speak of love and womanhead;  
 Nor knight in arms to do a hardy deed,  
 To stand in grace of his lady dear,  
 Than had this priest this craft for to lear;  
 And to the canon thus he spake and said;  
 "For love of God, that for us all died,  
 And as I may deserve it unto you,  
 What shall this receipt cost? tell me now."  
 "By our Lady," quoth this canon, "it is dear.  
 I warn you well, that, save I and a frere,  
 In England there can no man it make."  
 \*\*"No force,"\* quoth he; "now, Sir, for God's sake, \*no matter  
 What shall I pay? tell me, I you pray."  
 "Y-wis,"\* quoth he, "it is full dear, I say. \*certainly  
 Sir, at one word, if that you list it have,  
 Ye shall pay forty pound, so God me save;  
 And n'ere" the friendship that ye did ere this \*were it not for  
 To me, ye should pay more, y-wis."  
 This priest the sum of forty pound anon  
 Of nobles fet,\* and took them every one \*fetched  
 To this canon, for this like receipt.  
 All his working was but fraud and deceit.  
 "Sir Priest," he said, "I keep\* to have no los\*\*  
 Of my craft, for I would it were kept close;  
 And as ye love me, keep it secret:  
 For if men knew all my subtlety,  
 By God, they would have so great envy  
 To me, because of my philosophy,  
 I should be dead, there were no other way."  
 "God it forbid," quoth the priest, "what ye say.  
 Yet had I lever\* spend all the good \*rather  
 Which that I have (and elles were I wood\*), \*mad  
 Than that ye should fall in such mischief."  
 "For your good will, Sir, have ye right good proof,"\*  
 Quoth the canon; "and farewell, grand mercy."  
 He went his way, and never the priest him sey \*saw  
 After that day;

Thanks to the  
guys at

Arcane Connection

for the shout out

They are other Ars Magica  
podcast: genuinely from Europe!



Saffron is the most expensive agricultural product, weight for weight, in Mythic Europe. There's some question as to how hardy it is: people at the time claimed it grows best in arid climates, but in the 16th century, the centre of saffron growing in Europe was Saffron Walden, slightly south of Cambridge in England. In 1220, it's Cyprus. Saffron is grown on plantations controlled by Venetian merchants. There are legends concerning how saffron escaped to the west.

The Arabs in Iberia grew it for a while in the 10th century, but in the 13th Century it was introduced into Italy, France and Germany. The stories tend to suggest it was smuggled home in the sword hilts of Crusaders. In the 14th Century it is transferred to England in a cavity within a pilgrim's staff. Saffron use predates saffron growing in Britain. The Phoenicians who traded for tin in Cornwall bought it, and it's still used in various regional dishes.

Saffron plants have abundant purple flowers. At the centre of each are three stigmas which must be harvested unbroken, so they are all picked by hand. It takes between 70 000 and 250 000 flowers to harvest a pound of saffron. At the lowest number, that's 10 pounds of saffron to the acre.

Saffron produces a deep yellow dye, which is used for art, as a flavouring and as a cosmetic. I, personally, can't taste saffron. I've tried to make extremely potent saffron tinctures, using both the hot water and acidulated water methods, and I simply can't taste it. Other people say it has a delicious, earthy taste, completely different from the turmeric which is often used to adulterate it.

Alexander the Great used saffron to blonde his hair. Cleopatra used to bathe in a mixture of saffron and milk, to give her skin an artificial glow. Mystagogic cults may use large amounts of saffron in their ordeals, such that it is a sacrifice of treasure.

In Germany, particularly, wealthy nuns kept saffron as a stimulant, much as we might keep coffee. It was used to treat melancholy. This ties into the earlier episode on acedia: saffron may be a Ward for the demon that spreads the shattered glass plague.

# The gold more valuable than gold: saffron in Mythic Europe