



# A Shrine of Murders: Being the First of the Canterbury Tales of Kathryn Swinbrooke, Leech, and Physician

By C. L. Grace

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When a series of murders paralyzes the town of Canterbury in the fifteenth century, physician and chemist Kathryn Swinbrooke, assisted by bumbling Irish soldier Colum Murtagh, searches for a killer with literary tastes and rather personal motives.

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### **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

The unsettling, seemingly anachronistic figure of a serial killer haunts this otherwise convincing recreation of 15th-century Canterbury written under a pseudonym by P. C. Doherty ( *The Masked Man and The Fate of Princes* ). Kathryn Swinbrooke is an independent practitioner of medicine, discovering the benefits of an apple-rich diet for teeth, and prescribing herbs and vinegar for almost every known malady. Canterbury's tourist trade, already jeopardized by the War of the Roses, is further imperiled by a spate of poisoned pilgrims, each corpse accompanied by the appearance of a line or two of rough verse, in style remarkably similar to Geoffrey Chaucer's soon-to-be famous work. Suspecting the murderer is a doctor, the Archbishop asks for Kathryn's help. In a fascinating hunt that pits her against the august town physicians, Kathryn is aided only by her wits, her foul-mouthed, warmhearted servant Thomasina, and Colum Murtagh, a powerful Irish mercenary. While successfully demythologizing the period and people, the author offers thoughtful insights into such modern concerns as wife-beating and feminism.

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From School Library Journal

YA-Readers who know Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* will enjoy this medieval mystery in which a clever murderer's doggerel verse provides clues as to who his poison victims will be. In Canterbury, the town fathers, worried that fearful pilgrims will shun the city and its lucrative shrine and relic trade, seek the help of Katherine Swinbrooke, a physician and herbalist. She is joined by a soldier of fortune, Colum Murtagh, who backs up her knowledge with physical prowess and much-needed protection in these cutthroat times. Grace bases her strong female character on the fact that women played vital roles in English medieval medicine, only to be excluded from the profession in subsequent centuries. She writes with authority about the period, reflecting its bawdy and earthy qualities, and uses the literary twist of Chaucer's pilgrims and Becket's shrine to weave a tale of terrible deaths, tangled motives, and a terror-filled climax. Fans of serious historical mysteries should welcome this heroine as a new sleuth in an old tradition.

*Mary T. Gerrity, Queen Anne School, Upper Marlboro, MD*

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**Anne Braden:**

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