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MAVZU: “GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S
CONTRIBUTIONS TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF
ENGLISH LITERATURE”

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DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

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INTRODUCTION

Actuality of theme. In Uzbek traditions elder people are highly respected. By the leadership of our President Islam Karimov great attention is being paid to elder people in our country. A solemn meeting, dedicated to the 22nd anniversary of the Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan was held on December 5, 2014 in Tashkent Palace of international forums.

The event included a speech by the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov, which summarized the results of the outgoing year and proposed to declare 2015 as a Year of Attention and Care for Older generation¹.

Speaking at the ceremony, the President of Uzbekistan Islam Karimov offered to name 2015 as the Year of Attention and Care for Elder People, which was supported by the participants.

As reported earlier, 2014 was announced as the Year of Healthy Children in Uzbekistan and the Government approved special programme. Uzbekistan plans to direct 4.51 trillion soums or US\$302.9 million to implementation of the programme².

Under the guidance of President Islam Karimov a special attention is paid to formation of harmoniously developed, highly educated, modern thinking generation, able to take responsibility for the fate of the Homeland³.

In consistent realization of the Law of the Republic of Uzbekistan “On Education”, National Program of Personnel Training, significant place is reserved for construction of new schools, academic lyceums, vocational colleges, higher education institutions, capital reconstruction and strengthening material-technical base of the existing ones, their provision with modern educational equipment.

The resolution of the President of Uzbekistan “On measures to further improve system of foreign languages teaching” dated from 10 December 2012 is being implemented in Tashkent region as well.

¹ http://news.uzreport.uz/news_3_e_127041.html

² <http://www.uzdaily.com/articles-id-30258.htm>

³ <http://www.gov.uz/en/press/society/17255>

This document serves as an important guideline in development of new textbooks for teaching foreign languages, introduction of advanced teaching methods using modern pedagogical and information-communication technologies, education of a new generation to foreign languages, cardinal improvement of the system of training of specialists, fluent in these languages, creation of conditions and opportunities for wide use of information resources by students.

Persistent works on raising awareness of the public concerning the essence and significance of the resolution, ensuring its execution are being carried out.

Geoffrey Chaucer is remembered as the author of *The Canterbury Tales*, which ranks as one of the greatest epic works of world literature. Chaucer made a crucial contribution to English literature in using English at a time when much court poetry was still written in Anglo-Norman or Latin.

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London. He was the son of a prosperous wine merchant and deputy to the king's butler, and his wife Agnes. Little is known of his early education, but his works show that he could read French, Latin, and Italian.

In 1359-1360 Chaucer went to France with Edward III's army during the Hundred Years' War. He was captured in the Ardennes and returned to England after the treaty of Brétigny in 1360. There is no certain information of his life from 1361 until c.1366, when he perhaps married Philippa Roet, the sister of John Gaunt's future wife. Philippa died in 1387 and Chaucer enjoyed Gaunt's patronage throughout his life.

Between 1367 and 1378 Chaucer made several journeys abroad on diplomatic and commercial missions. In 1385 he lost his employment and rent-free home, and moved to Kent where he was appointed as justice of the peace. He was also elected to Parliament. This was a period of great creativity for Chaucer, during which he produced most of his best poetry, among others *Troilus and Cressida* (c. 1385), based on a love story by Boccaccio.

Chaucer took his narrative inspiration for his works from several sources but still remained an entirely individual poet, gradually developing his personal style and techniques. His first narrative poem, *The Book of the Duchess*, was probably

written shortly after the death of Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, first wife of John Gaunt, in September 1369. His next important work, *The House of Fame*, was written between 1374 and 1385. Soon afterward Chaucer translated *The Consolation of Philosophy* by Boethius, and wrote the poem *The Parliament of Birds*.

Chaucer did not begin working on *The Canterbury Tales* until he was in his early 40s. The book, which was left unfinished when the author died, depicts a pilgrimage by some 30 people, who are going on a spring day in April to the shrine of the martyr, St. Thomas Becket. On the way they amuse themselves by telling stories. Among the band of pilgrims are a knight, a monk, a prioress, a plowman, a miller, a merchant, a clerk, and an oft-widowed wife from Bath. The stories are interlinked with interludes in which the characters talk with each other, revealing much about themselves.

According to tradition, Chaucer died in London on October 25, 1400. He was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the part of the church, which afterwards came to be called Poet's Corner. A monument was erected to him in 1555.⁴

Theoretical value of the work. There are many works devoted to life and creature of Geoffrey Chaucer but in our opinion some sides of comparison has not been fully investigated. There were done so many researches to investigate literary activity of Chaucer. They include Brewer, Derek, Hopper, Vincent Foster, Skeat, W.W., Speirs, John, Ward, Adolphus W, Skeat, W. W., Power, Eileen, Coulton, G. G., Benson, Larry, Potter, Russell A and many others⁵.

⁴ https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Geoffrey_Chaucer

⁵ Brewer, Derek, ed. (1978). *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*. Volume 1: 1385-1837. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 230. ISBN 0710084978. Retrieved 18 May 2014., Hopper, Vincent Foster, *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Selected): An Interlinear Translation*, Barron's Educational Series, 1970, ISBN 0-8120-0039-0
Skeat, W.W., *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899., Speirs, John, "Chaucer the Maker", London: Faber and Faber, 1951, Ward, Adolphus W. (1907). "Chaucer". Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, Ltd, Skeat, W. W., ed. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899; Vol. I p. ix., Power, Eileen (1988). *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*. Biblio & Tannen Publishers. p. 19. ISBN 0-8196-0140-3. , Coulton, G. G. (2006). *Chaucer and His England*. Kessinger Publishing. p. 74. ISBN 978-1-4286-4247-8. Retrieved 19 Dec 2007., Marchette Gaylord Chute, *Geoffrey Chaucer of England* E. P. Dutton, 1946, p. 89., Benson, Larry, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 1118., Potter, Russell A., "Chaucer and the Authority of Language: The Politics and Poetics of the Vernacular in Late Medieval England", *Assays VI* (Carnegie-Mellon Press, 1991), p. 91.

The basic purpose of the work is research features of the life and creature of Geoffrey Chaucer. His contribution to the development of English literature.

Tasks of the work:

- To research Chaucer's contribution to the development of English literature.
- To learn the history of middle age English literature in the world literature.
- To analyse the works of Geoffrey Chaucer. To learn literary aspects of "Counterberry tales" by Geoffrey Chaucer

From the **theoretical point of view** this work presents the comprehensive study of Chaucer's contribution to the development of English literature.

The practical value of the work is the fact that the results of the research can be used in the courses of lectures and seminars of English literature and analysis can be useful for practical courses of English language.

The works and creature of writer were **object for our research.**

Methods of the work: In this work there were used overview and comparative analyzing methods.

The work consists of introduction, three chapters, conclusion and bibliography.

CHAPTER I

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF CHAUCER'S PERIOD IN ENGLISH LITARATURE

1.1. Charachteristic features of Middle English literature

The term Middle English literature refers to the literature written in the form of the English language known as Middle English, from the 12th century until the 1470s. During this time the Chancery Standard, a form of London-based English became widespread and the printing press regularized the language. Between the 1470s and the middle of the following century there was a transition to early Modern English. In literary terms, the characteristics of the literary works written did not change radically until the effects of the Renaissance and Reformed Christianity became more apparent in the reign of King Henry VIII. There are three main categories of Middle English Literature: Religious, Courtly love, and Arthurian, though much of Geoffrey Chaucer's work stands outside these. Among the many religious works are those in the Katherine Group and the writings of Julian of Norwich and Richard Rolle.

After the Norman conquest of England, Law French became the standard language of courts, parliament, and society. The Norman dialects of the ruling classes mixed with the Anglo-Saxon of the people and became Anglo-Norman, and Anglo-Saxon underwent a gradual transition into Middle English. Around the turn of the thirteenth century, Layamon wrote in Middle English. Other transitional works were popular entertainment, including a variety of romances and lyrics. With time, the English language regained prestige, and in 1362 it replaced French and Latin in Parliament and courts of law. Early examples of Middle English literature are the *Ormulum* and *Havelock the Dane*. In the fourteenth century major works of English literature began once again to appear, including the works of Chaucer. The latter portion of the 14th century also saw not only the consolidation of English as a written language and a shift to secular writing. William Caxton printed four-fifths of his works in English, which helped to standardize the language and expand the vocabulary.

After the Norman conquest of England, the written form of the Anglo-Saxon language continued in some monasteries but few literary works are known from this period. Under the influence of the new aristocracy, Law French became the standard language of courts, parliament, and polite society.

As the invaders integrated, their language and literature mingled with that of the natives. The Norman dialects of the ruling classes became Anglo-Norman, and Anglo-Saxon underwent a gradual transition into Middle English. Political power was no longer in English hands, so the West Saxon literary language had no more influence than any other dialect. Middle English literature is written, then, in the many dialects that correspond to the history, culture, and background of the individual writers.

While Anglo-Norman or Latin was preferred for high culture and administration, English literature by no means died out, and a number of important works illustrate the development of the language. Around the turn of the thirteenth century, Layamon wrote his *Brut*, based on Wace's twelfth century Anglo-Norman epic of the same name. Layamon's language is recognisably Middle English, though his prosody shows a strong Anglo-Saxon influence remaining.⁶

Other transitional works were preserved as popular entertainment, including a variety of romances and lyrics. With time, the English language regained prestige, and in 1362 it replaced French and Latin in Parliament and courts of law. Early examples of Middle English literature are the *Ormulum* and *Havelock the Dane*.

The Mercian dialect thrived between the 8th and 13th centuries and was referred to by John Trevisa, writing in 1387:

"For men of the est with men of the west, as it were undir the same partie of hevene, acordeth more in sownynge of speche than men of the north with men of the south, therefore it is that Mercii, that beeth men of myddel Engelond, as it were

⁶ *Fables Ancient and Modern*". The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Stephen Greenblatt. 8th ed. Vol. C. New York, London: Norton, 2006. 2132-33. p. 2132.

parteners of the endes, understondeth better the side langages, northerne and southerne, than northerne and southerne understondeth either other..."

It was with the fourteenth century that major works of English literature began once again to appear; these include the so-called Pearl Poet's Pearl, Patience, Cleanness, and Sir Gawain and the Green Knight; Langland's political and religious allegory Piers Plowman; John Gower's *Confessio Amantis*; and the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, the most highly regarded English poet of the Middle Ages, who was seen by his contemporaries as an English successor to the great tradition of Virgil and Dante.

The latter portion of the 14th century also saw not only the consolidation of English as a written language, taking over from French or Latin in certain areas, but a large shift from primarily theological or religious subject matter to also include that of a more secular nature. Vernacular book production saw a growth in the amount of books being copied, both secular and religious. Thus, the latter portion of the 14th century can be seen as one of the most significant periods in the history of the English language.

The reputation of Chaucer's successors in the 15th century has suffered in comparison with him, though Lydgate, Thomas Hoccleve, and Skelton are widely studied. At this time the origins of Scottish poetry began with the writing of *The Kingis Quair* by James I of Scotland. The main poets of this Scottish group were Robert Henryson, William Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas. Henryson and Douglas introduced a note of almost savage satire, which may have owed something to the Gaelic bardic poetry, while Douglas's version of Virgil's *Aeneid* is one of the early monuments of Renaissance literary humanism in English.⁷

It was a vibrant time for religious drama as well: many morality plays and miracle plays were produced, and some scripts survive today. *Sidrak and Bokkus* is another example of late Middle English literature.

⁷ Carolyn Collette in "Fifteenth Century Chaucer", an essay published in the book *A Companion to Chaucer* ISBN 0-631-23590-6

The first English printer, William Caxton, printed four-fifths of his works in English. He translated a large number of works into English; Caxton translated 26 of the titles himself. Caxton is credited with printing as many as 108 books, 87 of which were different titles. However, the English language was changing rapidly in Caxton's time and the works he was given to print were in a variety of styles and dialects. Caxton was a technician rather than a writer and he often faced dilemmas concerning language standardisation in the books he printed. (He wrote about this subject in the preface to his *Eneydos*. His successor Wynkyn de Worde faced similar problems.

Caxton is credited with standardising the English language (that is, homogenising regional dialects) through printing. This facilitated the expansion of English vocabulary, the development of inflection and syntax and the ever-widening gap between the spoken and the written word. However, Richard Pynson, a Frenchman who started printing in London in 1491 or 1492 and who favoured Chancery Standard English, was a more accomplished stylist and consequently pushed the English language even further toward standardisation.

When did "English Literature" begin? Any answer to that question must be problematic, for the very concept of English literature is a construction of literary history, a concept that changed over time. There are no "English" characters in *Beowulf*, and English scholars and authors had no knowledge of the poem before it was discovered and edited in the nineteenth century. Although written in the language called "Anglo-Saxon," the poem was claimed by Danish and German scholars as their earliest national epic before it came to be thought of as an "Old English" poem. One of the results of the Norman Conquest was that the structure and vocabulary of the English language changed to such an extent that Chaucer, even if he had come across a manuscript of Old English poetry, would have experienced far more difficulty construing the language than with medieval Latin, French, or Italian. If a King Arthur had actually lived, he would have spoken a

Celtic language possibly still intelligible to native speakers of Middle Welsh but not to Middle English speakers.⁸

The literary culture of the Middle Ages was far more international than national and was divided more by lines of class and audience than by language. Latin was the language of the Church and of learning. After the eleventh century, French became the dominant language of secular European literary culture. Edward, the Prince of Wales, who took the king of France prisoner at the battle of Poitiers in 1356, had culturally more in common with his royal captive than with the common people of England. And the legendary King Arthur was an international figure. Stories about him and his knights originated in Celtic poems and tales and were adapted and greatly expanded in Latin chronicles and French romances even before Arthur became an English hero.

Chaucer was certainly familiar with poetry that had its roots in the Old English period. He read popular romances in Middle English, most of which derive from more sophisticated French and Italian sources. But when he began writing in the 1360s and 1370s, he turned directly to French and Italian models as well as to classical poets (especially Ovid). English poets in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries looked upon Chaucer and his contemporary John Gower as founders of English literature, as those who made English a language fit for cultivated readers. In the Renaissance, Chaucer was referred to as the "English Homer." Spenser called him the "well of English undefiled."

Nevertheless, Chaucer and his contemporaries Gower, William Langland, and the Gawain poet all writing in the latter third of the fourteenth century — are heirs to classical and medieval cultures that had been evolving for many centuries. Culture is put in the plural deliberately, for there is a tendency, even on the part of medievalists, to think of the Middle Ages as a single culture epitomized by the Great Gothic cathedrals in which architecture, art, music, and liturgy seem to join in magnificent expressions of a unified faith — an approach one recent

⁸ C. B. McCully and J. J. Anderson, *English Historical Metrics*, Cambridge University Press, 1996, p. 97.

scholar has referred to as "cathedralism." Such a view overlooks the diversity of medieval cultures and the social, political, religious, economic, and technological changes that took place over this vastly long period.

The texts included here from "The Middle Ages" attempt to convey that diversity. They date from the sixth to the late- fifteenth century. Eight were originally in Old French, six in Latin, five in English, two in Old Saxon, two in Old Icelandic, and one each in Catalan, Hebrew, Greek, and Arabic.

"The Linguistic and Literary Contexts of Beowulf" demonstrates the kinship of the Anglo-Saxon poem with the versification and literature of other early branches of the Germanic language group. An Anglo-Saxon poet who was writing an epic based on the book of Genesis was able to insert into his work the episodes of the fall of the angels and the fall of man that he adapted with relatively minor changes from an Old Saxon poem thought to have been lost until a fragment from it was found late in the nineteenth century in the Vatican Library. Germanic mythology and legend preserved in Old Icelandic literature centuries later than Beowulf provide us with better insights into stories known to the poet than anything in ancient Greek and Roman epic poetry.⁹

"Estates and Orders" samples ideas about medieval society and some of its members and institutions. Particular attention is given to religious orders and to the ascetic ideals that were supposed to rule the lives of men and women living in religious communities (such as Chaucer's Prioress, Monk, and Friar, who honor those rules more in the breach than in the observance) and anchorites (such as Julian of Norwich) living apart. The Rule of Saint Benedict, written for a sixth-century religious community, can serve the modern reader as a guidebook to the ideals and daily practices of monastic life. The mutual influence of those ideals and new aristocratic ideals of chivalry is evident in the selection from the *Ancrene Riwe* (Rule for Anchoresses, NAEL 8, [1.157–159]) and *The Book of the Order of Chivalry*. Though medieval social theory has little to say about women, women

⁹ A Leaf from *The Canterbury Tales*. Westminster, England: William Caxton, 1478

were sometimes treated satirically as if they constituted their own estate and profession in rebellion against the divinely ordained rule of men. An outstanding instance is the "Old Woman" from the *Romance of the Rose*, whom Chaucer reinvented as the Wife of Bath. The tenth-century English Benedictine monk Aelfric gives one of the earliest formulations of the theory of three estates — clergy, nobles, and commoners — working harmoniously together. But the deep-seated resentment between the upper and lower estates flared up dramatically in the Uprising of 1381 and is revealed by the slogans of the rebels, which are cited here in selections from the chronicles of Henry Knighton and Thomas Walsingham, and by the attack of the poet John Gower on the rebels in his *Vox Clamantis*. In the late-medieval genre of estates satire, all three estates are portrayed as selfishly corrupting and disrupting a mythical social order believed to have prevailed in a past happier age.¹⁰

The selections under "Arthur and Gawain" trace how French writers in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries transformed the *Legendary Histories of Britain* (NAEL 8, 1.117–128) into the narrative genre that we now call "romance." The works of Chrétien de Troyes focus on the adventures of individual knights of the Round Table and how those adventures impinge upon the cult of chivalry. Such adventures often take the form of a quest to achieve honor or what Sir Thomas Malory often refers to as "worship." But in romance the adventurous quest is often entangled, for better or for worse, with personal fulfillment of love for a lady — achieving her love, protecting her honor, and, in rare cases such as Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, resisting a lady's advances. In the thirteenth century, clerics turned the sagas of Arthur and his knights — especially Sir Lancelot — into immensely long prose romances that disparaged worldly chivalry and the love of women and advocated spiritual chivalry and sexual purity. These were the "French books" that Malory, as his editor and printer William Caxton tells us, "abridged

¹⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Geoffrey_Chaucer

into English," and gave them the definitive form from which Arthurian literature has survived in poetry, prose, art, and film into modern times.

"The First Crusade," launched in 1096, was the first in a series of holy wars that profoundly affected the ideology and culture of Christian Europe. Preached by Pope Urban II, the aim of the crusade was to unite warring Christian factions in the common goal of liberating the Holy Land from its Moslem rulers. The chronicle of Robert the Monk is one of several versions of Urban's address. The Hebrew chronicle of Eliezer bar Nathan gives a moving account of attacks made by some of the crusaders on Jewish communities in the Rhineland — the beginnings of the persecution of European Jews in the later Middle Ages. In the biography of her father, the Byzantine emperor Alexius I, the princess Anna Comnena provides us with still another perspective of the leaders of the First Crusade whom she met on their passage through Constantinople en route to the Holy Land. The taking of Jerusalem by the crusaders came to be celebrated by European writers of history and epic poetry as one of the greatest heroic achievements of all times. The accounts by the Arab historian Ibn Al-Athir and by William of Tyre tell us what happened after the crusaders breached the walls of Jerusalem from complementary but very different points of view¹¹.

¹¹ <http://www.wwnorton.com/college/english/nael/middleages/welcome.htm>

1.2. Analyses of the features of medieval English Literature

It is commonly assumed that medieval chivalric literature, with its estimate of the values of romantic love and knightly prowess, is secular in orientation and sharply distinct from clerical literature, which espouses contempt for the world, suspicion of the flesh, and a rejection of prideful self-advancement. Discuss major chivalric works to test the validity of this distinction. Include at least three of the following: Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, Chaucer's *Troilus*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Chretien's *Lancelot*, and Malory's *Le Morte D'Arthur*.

Dante's *La Vita Nuova*, *Pearl*, and Chaucer's *Book of the Duchess* ostensibly present consolations for the death of a loved one. Explain what the death signifies in each case in light of the ultimate purpose, style, and strategy of each text. To what extent, if any, is each author drawing on Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy*?

The origins of the Renaissance "querelle des femmes" can be traced back to such late medieval works as the "marriage group" in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* (the tales of the Wife of Bath, Clerk, Merchant, and Franklin), his "Legend of Good Women" and Christine de Pizan's letters in the debate about the *Romance of the Rose*, her *Book of the City of Ladies*, and her *Treasure of the City of Ladies*. Choosing at least two works by each author (tales count as separate examples), examine the positions each text takes in the debate about the nature and character of women. Are these two authors consistent in their positions? In what sense, if any, are they proto-feminists as some critics have recently claimed?¹²

The late fourteenth century was a very tumultuous time, but it also coincided with the emergence of a vernacular literature in England. Explain how the prologues to the three major English poems produced during the last quarter of this century Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and Gower's *Confessio Amantis* address some of the social and/or political issues of the day and

¹² Ward, Adolphus W. (1907). "Chaucer". Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, Ltd

how the style and genre of each prologue contributes to its critique of society and is appropriate to the poem that it introduces.

Old English literary texts are often discussed as efforts to combine two cultural traditions, the Germanic and the Christian. Examine such elements as theme, genre, characterization, and style in *Beowulf* and at least two other Anglo-Saxon poems in order to explain how these two traditions are brought together, what the ultimate purpose of each text seems to be, and how successful the poet is in each case.

Chaucer's "early poetry" has been described as romantic and serious while *The Canterbury Tales* garners such descriptions as comic and realistic. How do you explain this difference? Or, can it be argued that the traditional dichotomy is a false one?

Complete a full explication de texte of a medieval work of your choice using the following medieval writers as your point of entry: Dante's "Accessus," Boccaccio's *On Poetry*, and St. Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine*.

An argument can be made that the dominant tone of Old English poetry is heroic in nature. The same assertion can be made that the mood is primarily elegiac. Which one of these seems most accurate to you? Why?

Using Boethius, Dante, Jean de Meun, Julian of Norwich, and Andreas Capellanus, formulate a comprehensive medieval definition of love. Apply this definition to an analysis of three medieval texts of your own choosing.¹³

Owing chiefly to the influence of Northrop Frye, romance is often perceived as a well-defined genre, or narrative mode, paradigmatically shaped by the quest of a single knight having a successful outcome. And romance is typically seen as the over-arching category into which fall all shorter, self-contained narratives about aristocratic knightly adventures. How useful, in practical analysis of actual chivalric narratives, is this conception of romance? Would it be more useful to conceive of this same body of literature as being defined by a set of espoused

¹³ *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer: To Which are Added an Essay on his Language and Versification, and an Introductory Discourse, Together with Notes and a Glossary by the late Thomas Tyrwhitt. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798. 2 Volumes.*

behavioral values (whether courtoisie, service, prowess in combat, a personal code of honor), rather than by any such structural pattern as Frye outlines? Your answer should include: one romance of Chretien de Troyes, as well as at least three of the four narratives listed as “Arthurian romances” on your reading list: “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell,” “The Alliterative Morte Arthure,” “The Stanzaic Morte Arthur,” and “The Rise of Gawain, Nephew of Arthur.” You may include Malory’s “Tale of Gareth” and Chaucer’s “Knight’s Tale” if you have not discussed either of these in depth in another of your exam essays.

Most of the texts written for anchorites during the Middle Ages were addressed to women. Choosing two of the following texts, *The Ancrene Riwe* (Books 6 & 7), “Holy Maidenhood,” or the “Wooing of Our Lord,” discuss the rhetorical strategies that the male authors use in these texts and the assumptions about their female readers and spirituality informing these strategies. Then choosing either Julian of Norwich’s *Showings* or Margery Kempe’s *Book*, explain whether or not the author seems to endorse or challenge the assumptions about female spirituality underlying the anchoritic literature.

“Sir Gawain and the Green Knight” appears in the same manuscript (Cotton Nero A.x) as “Pearl,” “Patience,” and “Cleanness,” and, like them, is written in alliterative verse in a West Midlands dialect. For these reasons, it is often alleged that the same author (the “Pearl-poet”, or the “Gawain-poet”), wrote all four poems. However, at least on its face, the Arthurian narrative reflects a courtly milieu and preoccupations, in sharp contrast with the clerical, religious focus of the other three poems. What argument can be made from the internal evidence of the works themselves that the same author composed all four poems? What evidence does not fit this thesis?

The prologues to Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales*, Langland’s *Piers Plowman*, and Gower’s *Confessio Amantis* all criticize late-medieval English society on the basis of implicit assumptions about the ideal social order. Moreover, each author uses a distinctive satiric method to express his critique. Selecting two of these prologues, compare and contrast them in order to articulate the social values

endorsed by each author and to identify the differences in the techniques for satirizing his contemporaries. How effectively does each prologue introduce its respective text and epitomize the concerns and methods of each author?

In any discussion of the much-debated question, whether Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* is one book or several, largely independent tales, the most problematic part of Malory's narrative is the lengthy middle section, embracing the "Tale of Sir Tristram" and "The Tale of the Sankgreal" (Vinaver's titles). Address the question of unity, focusing particularly on these two "tales" and employing critical topics you judge to be most relevant, whether of chronological consistency, causation, generic structure, character development, thematic coherence, historical/societal determinants, etc. Note: an either/or thesis is not essential.¹⁴

The dream vision is one of the most popular and generically supple poetic forms in the Middle Ages. Of it, Anthony Spearing has written that "the dream-framework inevitably brings the poet into his poem, not merely as the reteller of a story which has its origin elsewhere, but as the person who experiences the whole substance of the poem." Using three examples, discuss the figure of the dreamer in relationship to both the writer and the vision.

With the exception of Lancelot, Gawain is perhaps the most and famous of the knights of the Round Table. The trait most commonly associated with him is courtesy, with all its myriad inflections. Using three examples, discuss different representations of Gawain with respect to this virtue. How do texts involving this knight valorize or complicate this chivalric ideal?

Beowulf, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and *The Knight's Tale* are set in a pagan period and comment, either implicitly, on both this past and the poet's present time. Analyze each poem's portrayal of the social values of the pagan culture and how this past relates to its own Christian culture. What kind of consolation does each poem provide for the suffering of its pre-Christian hero?

¹⁴ Skeat, W.W., *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899.

Over the last quarter century many new methodologies have been introduced to displace the “old historicism” and the “new criticism” that dominated literary studies until the 1970s. The effectiveness of these critical approaches in studying the texts written during the Middle Ages has been debated. Using one critical method to elucidate two medieval texts or two different methods with the same medieval text, demonstrate whether or not the approach can be useful in medieval studies. (Methodology can mean a particular school or a renowned critic.)

Despite the apparent realism of the Wife of Bath, her Prologue and Tale have antecedents or analogues in the literary tradition. Discuss the relationship between the Wife’s Prologue and the character of the Old Woman in the Romance of the Rose and then compare and contrast her Tale with either Gower’s “Tale of Florent” or “The Wedding of Sir Gawain and Dame Ragnell.” Discuss how the changes that Chaucer makes in the tale suit the Wife and how they contribute to his development of the character as she is presented in the Prologue.¹⁵

In his letter to Sir Walter Raleigh, Spenser describes the Fairie Queene as an Allegory of “darke conceit.” In his letter to Con Grande Dante implies that The Divine Comedy can be interpreted according to the levels of Biblical exegesis used in the Middle Ages. Explain what these four levels are and then analyze the kind of allegory actually developed in three of the following texts: Dante’s Inferno; Pearl; Julian of Norwich’s parable of the lord and servant in chapter 51 of her Showings; Langland’s Piers Plowman, Prologue through Passus VII; and Malory’s “Tale of the Sankgreal.”

Much of Old English and Middle English secular literature focuses on the warrior class, but the values this class espouses differ somewhat between the two periods. Using Beowulf and either “The Wanderer” or “The Battle of Maldon” as representative of Anglo-Saxon attitudes and selections from Malory’s Morte d’Arthur (excluding the Sankgreal) and either Chaucer’s Knight’s Tale or Sir Gawain and the Green Knight as representative of the Middle English period,

¹⁵ Speirs, John, "Chaucer the Maker", London: Faber and Faber, 1951

discuss the similarities and differences in the depiction of the warrior class and its code of values. Does the conception of heroism change between these two periods?

Although the mystery and morality plays of the late Middle Ages seem very different from the secular drama of the Renaissance, one can ascertain certain similarities between the two. Using specific examples from both periods, including both a miracle and a morality play, discuss the vestiges of medieval drama on the Renaissance stage.

Many chivalric romances contain critiques of chivalry imbedded within them. Citing exactly three medieval romances, show how the narratives critique or interrogate the chivalric ideology and how these critiques are ultimately resolved.

Chaucer and Gower choose to tell several of the same tales in the *Canterbury Tales* and the *Confessio Amantis*: *Wife of Bath's Tale*/*Florent* in CA I; *Man of Law's Tale*/*Constance* in CA II; *Manciple's Tale*/*Phoebus and Cornide* in CA III; and *Physician's Tale*/*Virginia* in CA VII. Discuss the similarities and differences in plot, characterization, theme, style and purpose between the two author's versions of two pairs of tales.¹⁶

In 1215 the Fourth Lateran Council decreed that all Christians should make an annual confession. This mandate led to a proliferation of pastoral literature on the sacrament as well as a number of literary texts that emphasize the centrality of penitence to salvation. Selecting three texts from the following list, discuss how sin or human fallibility, the sacrament of penance, or repentance for sin is a central theme in each work: "Dream of the Rood" (even though it is earlier than 1215), Dante's *Inferno*, *Pearl*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, *Cleanness*, *Piers Plowman*, *Confessio Amantis*, "The Parson's Tale" in the *Canterbury Tales*, or *Julian of Norwich's Showings*.

Discuss the theme of exile or the journey into an inhospitable territory in three texts, at least one of which is not from the Anglo-Saxon period. How (if at all) does this theme develop over the Middle Ages?

¹⁶ Brewer, Derek, ed. (1978). *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*. Volume 1: 1385-1837. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 230. ISBN 0710084978. Retrieved 18 May 2014.

The medieval church considered virginity the highest state of life, followed by chaste widowhood, and then marriage. The anti-feminist tradition developed, at least in part, to persuade young men to forsake marriage for vocations as unmarried clerics. The issue of virginity is also important in texts depicting female characters and those addressed to or written by women. Analyze the author's rhetorical and/or narrative strategy, either in favor of or against virginity, in three of the following texts: The Letters of Abelard and Heloise, "Holy Maidenhood," Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Prologue or Second Nun's Tale, The Book of Margery Kempe, Christine de Pizan's Book of the City of Ladies.

From the publication of Walpole's *Castle of Otranto* in 1764 through to the poems of William Morris at the end of the nineteenth-century, English authors expressed their fascination with the medieval period through two different literary movements, the Gothic and the Gothic Revival. Select one of these movements and briefly identify its characteristic forms and conventions, citing two or three Gothic or Gothic Revival texts as examples. Then identify three medieval texts from which these conventions may have been derived and discuss how you would use them to provide a context in a course either in Gothic or Gothic Revival literature.

Though composed in the Anglo-Saxon and the late medieval periods respectively, *Beowulf* and Malory's *Morte D'Arthur* both survey the rise and fall of a ruler and the decline of his tribe or kingdom. Discuss the conception of heroism and the causes of social deterioration that each text presents in an effort to explain the differences in cultural context between these two texts.

Medieval writers are very concerned with establishing their *auctoritas*, whether it be through claims of divine revelation, references to older texts, the presentation of their ethos, or other means. Choosing three texts exemplifying different methods, explain how each author establishes his or her authority to speak and how each particular method is appropriate to the social situation of the author and the subject matter, genre, and theme of the given text.¹⁷

¹⁷ Power, Eileen (1988). *Medieval English Nunneries, c. 1275 to 1535*. Biblio & Tannen Publishers. p. 19. ISBN 0-8196-0140-3. Retrieved 19 Dec 2007.

CHAPTER II

CHAUCER'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE DEVELOPMENT OF ENGLISH LITERATURE

2.1. Geoffrey Chaucer – father of English literature

Geoffrey Chaucer known as the Father of English literature, is widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages and was the first poet to be buried in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

While he achieved fame during his lifetime as an author, philosopher, alchemist and astronomer, composing a scientific treatise on the astrolabe for his ten-year-old son Lewis, Chaucer also maintained an active career in the civil service as a bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. Among his many works, which include *The Book of the Duchess*, *the House of Fame*, *the Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde*, he is best known today for *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer was a crucial figure in developing the legitimacy of the vernacular, Middle English, at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were French and Latin.

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London sometime around 1343, though the precise date and location of his birth remain unknown. His father and grandfather were both London vintners; several previous generations had been merchants in Ipswich. (His family name derives from the French *chausseur*, meaning "shoemaker".) In 1324 John Chaucer, Geoffrey's father, was kidnapped by an aunt in the hope of marrying the twelve-year-old boy to her daughter in an attempt to keep property in Ipswich. The aunt was imprisoned and the £250 fine levied suggests that the family was financially secure—bourgeois, if not elite. John Chaucer married Agnes Copton, who, in 1349, inherited properties including 24 shops in London from her uncle, Hamo de Copton, who is described in a will dated 3 April 1354 and listed in the City Hustings Roll as "moneyer"; he was said to be moneyer at the Tower of London. In the City Hustings Roll 110, 5, Ric II, dated

June 1380, Geoffrey Chaucer refers to himself as *me Galfridum Chaucer, filium Johannis Chaucer, Vinetarii, Londonie'* .

While records concerning the lives of his contemporary poets, William Langland and the Pearl Poet are practically non-existent, since Chaucer was a public servant, his official life is very well documented, with nearly five hundred written items testifying to his career. The first of the "Chaucer Life Records" appears in 1357, in the household accounts of Elizabeth de Burgh, the Countess of Ulster, when he became the noblewoman's page through his father's connections. She was married to Lionel, Duke of Clarence, the second surviving son of the king, Edward III, and the position brought the teenage Chaucer into the close court circle, where he was to remain for the rest of his life. He also worked as a courtier, a diplomat, and a civil servant, as well as working for the king from 1389-1391 as Clerk of the King's Works.¹⁸

In 1359, in the early stages of the Hundred Years' War, Edward III invaded France and Chaucer travelled with Lionel of Antwerp, 1st Duke of Clarence, Elizabeth's husband, as part of the English army. In 1360, he was captured during the siege of Rheims. Edward paid £16 for his ransom, a considerable sum, and Chaucer was released.¹⁹

After this, Chaucer's life is uncertain, but he seems to have travelled in France, Spain, and Flanders, possibly as a messenger and perhaps even going on a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela. Around 1366, Chaucer married Philippa (de) Roet. She was a lady-in-waiting to Edward III's queen, Philippa of Hainault, and a sister of Katherine Swynford, who later (c. 1396) became the third wife of John of Gaunt. It is uncertain how many children Chaucer and Philippa had, but three or four are most commonly cited. His son, Thomas Chaucer, had an illustrious career, as chief butler to four kings, envoy to France, and Speaker of the House of Commons. Thomas's daughter, Alice, married the Duke of Suffolk. Thomas's great-grandson (Geoffrey's great-great-grandson), John de la Pole, Earl

¹⁸ Chaucer Life Records, p. 24

¹⁹ https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Geoffrey_Chaucer

of Lincoln, was the heir to the throne designated by Richard III before he was deposed. Geoffrey's other children probably included Elizabeth Chaucy, a nun at Barking Abbey, Agnes, an attendant at Henry IV's coronation; and another son, Lewis Chaucer. Chaucer's "Treatise on the Astrolabe" was written for Lewis.

Chaucer probably studied law in the Inner Temple (an Inn of Court) at this time. He became a member of the royal court of Edward III as a *varlet de chambre*, yeoman, or esquire on 20 June 1367, a position which could entail a wide variety of tasks. His wife also received a pension for court employment. He travelled abroad many times, at least some of them in his role as a valet. In 1368, he may have attended the wedding of Lionel of Antwerp to Violante Visconti, daughter of Galeazzo II Visconti, in Milan. Two other literary stars of the era were in attendance: Jean Froissart and Petrarch. Around this time, Chaucer is believed to have written *The Book of the Duchess* in honour of Blanche of Lancaster, the late wife of John of Gaunt, who died in 1369.

Chaucer travelled to Picardy the next year as part of a military expedition; in 1373 he visited Genoa and Florence. Numerous scholars such as Skeat, Boitani, and Rowland suggested that, on this Italian trip, he came into contact with Petrarch or Boccaccio. They introduced him to medieval Italian poetry, the forms and stories of which he would use later. The purposes of a voyage in 1377 are mysterious, as details within the historical record conflict. Later documents suggest it was a mission, along with Jean Froissart, to arrange a marriage between the future King Richard II and a French princess, thereby ending the Hundred Years War. If this was the purpose of their trip, they seem to have been unsuccessful, as no wedding occurred²⁰.

In 1378, Richard II sent Chaucer as an envoy (secret dispatch) to the Visconti and to Sir John Hawkwood, English condottiere (mercenary leader) in Milan. It has been speculated that it was Hawkwood on whom Chaucer based

²⁰ https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Geoffrey_Chaucer

his character the Knight in the Canterbury Tales, for a description matches that of a 14th-century condottiere.

A possible indication that his career as a writer was appreciated came when Edward III granted Chaucer "a gallon of wine daily for the rest of his life" for some unspecified task. This was an unusual grant, but given on a day of celebration, St George's Day, 1374, when artistic endeavours were traditionally rewarded, it is assumed to have been another early poetic work. It is not known which, if any, of Chaucer's extant works prompted the reward, but the suggestion of him as poet to a king places him as a precursor to later poets laureate. Chaucer continued to collect the liquid stipend until Richard II came to power, after which it was converted to a monetary grant on 18 April 1378.

Chaucer obtained the very substantial job of comptroller of the customs for the port of London, which he began on 8 June 1374. He must have been suited for the role as he continued in it for twelve years, a long time in such a post at that time. His life goes undocumented for much of the next ten years, but it is believed that he wrote (or began) most of his famous works during this period. He was mentioned in law papers of 4 May 1380, involved in the raptus of Cecilia Champaigne. What raptus means is unclear, but the incident seems to have been resolved quickly and did not leave a stain on Chaucer's reputation. It is not known if Chaucer was in the city of London at the time of the Peasants' Revolt, but if he was, he would have seen its leaders pass almost directly under his apartment window at Aldgate.²¹

While still working as comptroller, Chaucer appears to have moved to Kent, being appointed as one of the commissioners of peace for Kent, at a time when French invasion was a possibility. He is thought to have started work on *The Canterbury Tales* in the early 1380s. He also became a Member of Parliament for Kent in 1386. On 15 October that year, he gave a deposition in the case of *Scrope v. Grosvenor*. There is no further reference after this date to Philippa, Chaucer's

²¹ Morley, Henry, *A first sketch of English literature*, Cassell & Co., 1883, from Harvard University

wife, and she is presumed to have died in 1387. He survived the political upheavals caused by the Lords Appellants, despite the fact that Chaucer knew some of the men executed over the affair quite well.

On 12 July 1389, Chaucer was appointed the clerk of the king's works, a sort of foreman organising most of the king's building projects. No major works were begun during his tenure, but he did conduct repairs on Westminster Palace, St. George's Chapel, Windsor, continue building the wharf at the Tower of London, and build the stands for a tournament held in 1390. It may have been a difficult job, but it paid well: two shillings a day, more than three times his salary as a comptroller. Chaucer was also appointed keeper of the lodge at the King's park in Feckenham, which was a largely honorary appointment.

In September 1390, records say that he was robbed, and possibly injured, while conducting the business, and it was shortly after, on 17 June 1391, that he stopped working in this capacity. Almost immediately, on 22 June, he began as Deputy Forester in the royal forest of Petherton Park in North Petherton, Somerset. This was no sinecure, with maintenance an important part of the job, although there were many opportunities to derive profit. He was granted an annual pension of twenty pounds by Richard II in 1394. It is believed that Chaucer stopped work on the Canterbury Tales sometime towards the end of this decade.

Not long after the overthrow of his patron, Richard II, in 1399, Chaucer's name fades from the historical record. The last few records of his life show his pension renewed by the new king, and his taking of a lease on a residence within the close of Westminster Abbey on 24 December 1399. Although Henry IV renewed the grants assigned to Chaucer by Richard, Chaucer's own *The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse* hints that the grants might not have been paid. The last mention of Chaucer is on 5 June 1400, when some monies owed to him were paid.

He is believed to have died of unknown causes on 25 October 1400, but there is no firm evidence for this date, as it comes from the engraving on his tomb, erected more than one hundred years after his death. There is some speculation—

most recently in Terry Jones' book *Who Murdered Chaucer? : A Medieval Mystery* that he was murdered by enemies of Richard II or even on the orders of his successor Henry IV, but the case is entirely circumstantial. Chaucer was buried in Westminster Abbey in London, as was his right owing to his status as a tenant of the Abbey's close. In 1556, his remains were transferred to a more ornate tomb, making Chaucer the first writer interred in the area now known as Poets' Corner.

Chaucer's first major work, *The Book of the Duchess*, was an elegy for Blanche of Lancaster (who died in 1369). It is possible that this work was commissioned by her husband John of Gaunt, as he granted Chaucer a £10 annuity on 13 June 1374. This would seem to place the writing of *The Book of the Duchess* between the years 1369 and 1374. Two other early works by Chaucer were *Anelida and Arcite* and *The House of Fame*. Chaucer wrote many of his major works in a prolific period when he held the job of customs comptroller for London (1374 to 1386). His *Parlement of Foules*, *The Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde* all date from this time. Also it is believed that he started work on *The Canterbury Tales* in the early 1380s. Chaucer is best known as the writer of *The Canterbury Tales*, which is a collection of stories told by fictional pilgrims on the road to the cathedral at Canterbury; these tales would help to shape English literature.

The Canterbury Tales contrasts with other literature of the period in the naturalism of its narrative, the variety of stories the pilgrims tell and the varied characters who are engaged in the pilgrimage. Many of the stories narrated by the pilgrims seem to fit their individual characters and social standing, although some of the stories seem ill-fitting to their narrators, perhaps as a result of the incomplete state of the work. Chaucer drew on real life for his cast of pilgrims: the innkeeper shares the name of a contemporary keeper of an inn in Southwark, and real-life identities for the Wife of Bath, the Merchant, the Man of Law and the Student have been suggested. The many jobs that Chaucer held in medieval society—page, soldier, messenger, valet, bureaucrat, foreman and administrator—probably exposed him to many of the types of people he depicted in the *Tales*. He was able

to shape their speech and satirise their manners in what was to become popular literature among people of the same types.²²

Chaucer's works are sometimes grouped into first a French period, then an Italian period and finally an English period, with Chaucer being influenced by those countries' literatures in turn. Certainly *Troilus and Criseyde* is a middle period work with its reliance on the forms of Italian poetry, little known in England at the time, but to which Chaucer was probably exposed during his frequent trips abroad on court business. In addition, its use of a classical subject and its elaborate, courtly language sets it apart as one of his most complete and well-formed works. In *Troilus and Criseyde* Chaucer draws heavily on his source, Boccaccio, and on the late Latin philosopher Boethius. However, it is *The Canterbury Tales*, wherein he focuses on English subjects, with bawdy jokes and respected figures often being undercut with humour, that has cemented his reputation.

Chaucer also translated such important works as Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* and *The Romance of the Rose* by Guillaume de Lorris (extended by Jean de Meun). However, while many scholars maintain that Chaucer did indeed translate part of the text of *Roman de la Rose* as *The Romaunt of the Rose*, others claim that this has been effectively disproved. Many of his other works were very loose translations of, or simply based on, works from continental Europe. It is in this role that Chaucer receives some of his earliest critical praise. Eustache Deschamps wrote a ballade on the great translator and called himself a "nettle in Chaucer's garden of poetry". In 1385 Thomas Usk made glowing mention of Chaucer, and John Gower, Chaucer's main poetic rival of the time, also lauded him. This reference was later edited out of Gower's *Confessio Amantis* and it has been suggested by some that this was because of ill feeling between them, but it is likely due simply to stylistic concerns.

One other significant work of Chaucer's is his *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, possibly for his own son, that describes the form and use of that instrument in

²² Hopper, Vincent Foster, *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Selected): An Interlinear Translation*, Barron's Educational Series, 1970, ISBN 0-8120-0039-0

detail and is sometimes cited as the first example of technical writing in the English language. Although much of the text may have come from other sources, the treatise indicates that Chaucer was versed in science in addition to his literary talents. Another scientific work discovered in 1952, *Equatorie of the Planetis*, has similar language and handwriting compared to some considered to be Chaucer's and it continues many of the ideas from the *Astrolabe*. Furthermore, it contains an example of early European encryption. The attribution of this work to Chaucer is still uncertain.

Chaucer wrote in continental accentual-syllabic meter, a style which had developed since around the 12th century as an alternative to the alliterative Anglo-Saxon metre. Chaucer is known for metrical innovation, inventing the rhyme royal, and he was one of the first English poets to use the five-stress line, a decasyllabic cousin to the iambic pentameter, in his work, with only a few anonymous short works using it before him. The arrangement of these five-stress lines into rhyming couplets, first seen in his *The Legend of Good Women*, was used in much of his later work and became one of the standard poetic forms in English. His early influence as a satirist is also important, with the common humorous device, the funny accent of a regional dialect, apparently making its first appearance in *The Reeve's Tale*.

The poetry of Chaucer, along with other writers of the era, is credited with helping to standardise the London Dialect of the Middle English language from a combination of the Kentish and Midlands dialects. This is probably overstated; the influence of the court, chancery and bureaucracy of which Chaucer was a part remains a more probable influence on the development of Standard English. Modern English is somewhat distanced from the language of Chaucer's poems owing to the effect of the Great Vowel Shift some time after his death. This change in the pronunciation of English, still not fully understood, makes the reading of Chaucer difficult for the modern audience. The status of the final -e in Chaucer's verse is uncertain: it seems likely that during the period of Chaucer's writing the final -e was dropping out of colloquial English and that its use was

somewhat irregular. Chaucer's versification suggests that the final -e is sometimes to be vocalised, and sometimes to be silent; however, this remains a point on which there is disagreement. When it is vocalised, most scholars pronounce it as a schwa. Apart from the irregular spelling, much of the vocabulary is recognisable to the modern reader. Chaucer is also recorded in the Oxford English Dictionary as the first author to use many common English words in his writings. These words were probably frequently used in the language at the time but Chaucer, with his ear for common speech, is the earliest manuscript source.²³

Acceptable, alkali,altercation, amble, angrily, annex, annoyance, approaching, arbitration, armless, army, arrogant, arsenic, arc, artillery and aspect are just some of the many English words first attested in Chaucer.

Widespread knowledge of Chaucer's works is attested by the many poets who imitated or responded to his writing. John Lydgate was one of the earliest poets to write continuations of Chaucer's unfinished Tales while Robert Henryson's Testament of Cresseid completes the story of Cressida left unfinished in his Troilus and Criseyde. Many of the manuscripts of Chaucer's works contain material from these poets and later appreciations by the romantic era poets were shaped by their failure to distinguish the later "additions" from original Chaucer. Writers of the 17th and 18th centuries, such as John Dryden, admired Chaucer for his stories, but not for his rhythm and rhyme, as few critics could then read Middle English and the text had been butchered by printers, leaving a somewhat unadmirable mess. It was not until the late 19th century that the official Chaucerian canon, accepted today, was decided upon, largely as a result of Walter William Skeat's work. Roughly seventy-five years after Chaucer's death, The Canterbury Tales was selected by William Caxton to be one of the first books to be printed in England.

The poet Thomas Hoccleve, who may have met Chaucer and considered him his role model, hailed Chaucer as "the firste fyndere of our fair langage." John

²³ Chawcer undoubtedly did excellently in his Troilus and Creseid: of whome trulie I knowe not whether to mervaile more, either that hee in that mistie time could see so clearly, or that wee in this cleare age, goe so stumblingly after him." The text can be found at uoregon.edu

Lydgate referred to Chaucer within his own text *The Fall of Princes* as the "lodesterre ... off our language". Around two centuries later, Sir Philip Sidney greatly praised *Troilus and Criseyde* in his own *Defence of Poesie*.²⁴

The large number of surviving manuscripts of Chaucer's works is testimony to the enduring interest in his poetry prior to the arrival of the printing press. There are 83 surviving manuscripts of the *Canterbury Tales* (in whole or part) alone, along with sixteen of *Troilus and Criseyde*, including the personal copy of Henry IV. Given the ravages of time, it is likely that these surviving manuscripts represent hundreds since lost. Chaucer's original audience was a courtly one, and would have included women as well as men of the upper social classes. Yet even before his death in 1400, Chaucer's audience had begun to include members of the rising literate, middle and merchant classes, which included many Lollard sympathisers who may well have been inclined to read Chaucer as one of their own, particularly in his satirical writings about friars, priests, and other church officials. In 1464, John Baron, a tenant farmer in Agmondesham, was brought before John Chadworth, the Bishop of Lincoln, on charges he was a Lollard heretic; he confessed to owning a "boke of the Tales of Caunterburie" among other suspect volumes.²⁵

William Caxton, the first English printer, was responsible for the first two folio editions of *The Canterbury Tales* which were published in 1478 and 1483. Caxton's second printing, by his own account, came about because a customer complained that the printed text differed from a manuscript he knew; Caxton obligingly used the man's manuscript as his source. Both Caxton editions carry the equivalent of manuscript authority. Caxton's edition was reprinted by his successor, Wynkyn de Worde, but this edition has no independent authority.

Richard Pynson, the King's Printer under Henry VIII for about twenty years, was the first to collect and sell something that resembled an edition of the collected works of Chaucer, introducing in the process five previously printed texts that we

²⁴ *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3rd ed. Houghton-Mifflin, 1987

²⁵ https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Geoffrey_Chaucer

now know are not Chaucer's. (The collection is actually three separately printed texts, or collections of texts, bound together as one volume.) There is a likely connection between Pynson's product and William Thynne's a mere six years later. Thynne had a successful career from the 1520s until his death in 1546, when he was one of the masters of the royal household. His editions of Chaucer's Works in 1532 and 1542 were the first major contributions to the existence of a widely recognised Chaucerian canon. Thynne represents his edition as a book sponsored by and supportive of the king who is praised in the preface by Sir Brian Tuke. Thynne's canon brought the number of apocryphal works associated with Chaucer to a total of 28, even if that was not his intention. As with Pynson, once included in the Works, pseudepigraphic texts stayed within it, regardless of their first editor's intentions.²⁶

In the 16th and 17th centuries, Chaucer was printed more than any other English author, and he was the first author to have his works collected in comprehensive single-volume editions in which a Chaucer canon began to cohere. Some scholars contend that 16th-century editions of Chaucer's Works set the precedent for all other English authors in terms of presentation, prestige and success in print. These editions certainly established Chaucer's reputation, but they also began the complicated process of reconstructing and frequently inventing Chaucer's biography and the canonical list of works which were attributed to him.

Probably the most significant aspect of the growing apocrypha is that, beginning with Thynne's editions, it began to include medieval texts that made Chaucer appear as a proto-Protestant Lollard, primarily the Testament of Love and The Plowman's Tale. As "Chaucerian" works that were not considered apocryphal until the late 19th century, these medieval texts enjoyed a new life, with English Protestants carrying on the earlier Lollard project of appropriating existing texts and authors who seemed sympathetic—or malleable enough to be construed as sympathetic—to their cause. The official Chaucer of the early printed volumes of his Works was construed as a proto-Protestant as the same was done,

²⁶ *Studies in the Age of Chaucer* 36: 139–68. doi:10.1353/sac.2014.0028. Retrieved 25 May 2015.

concurrently, with William Langland and *Piers Plowman*. The famous *Plowman's Tale* did not enter Thynne's Works until the second, 1542, edition. Its entry was surely facilitated by Thynne's inclusion of Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love* in the first edition. The *Testament of Love* imitates, borrows from, and thus resembles Usk's contemporary, Chaucer. (*Testament of Love* also appears to borrow from *Piers Plowman*.) Since the *Testament of Love* mentions its author's part in a failed plot (book 1, chapter 6), his imprisonment, and (perhaps) a recantation of (possibly Lollard) heresy, all this was associated with Chaucer. (Usk himself was executed as a traitor in 1388.) Interestingly, John Foxe took this recantation of heresy as a defence of the true faith, calling Chaucer a "right Wiclevian" and (erroneously) identifying him as a schoolmate and close friend of John Wycliffe at Merton College, Oxford. (Thomas Speght is careful to highlight these facts in his editions and his "Life of Chaucer.") No other sources for the *Testament of Love* exist—there is only Thynne's construction of whatever manuscript sources he had.

John Stow (1525–1605) was an antiquarian and also a chronicler. His edition of Chaucer's Works in 1561 brought the apocrypha to more than 50 titles. More were added in the 17th century, and they remained as late as 1810, well after Thomas Tyrwhitt pared the canon down in his 1775 edition. The compilation and printing of Chaucer's works was, from its beginning, a political enterprise, since it was intended to establish an English national identity and history that grounded and authorised the Tudor monarchy and church. What was added to Chaucer often helped represent him favourably to Protestant England.

In his 1598 edition of the Works, Speght (probably taking cues from Foxe) made good use of Usk's account of his political intrigue and imprisonment in the *Testament of Love* to assemble a largely fictional "Life of Our Learned English Poet, Geoffrey Chaucer." Speght's "Life" presents readers with an erstwhile radical in troubled times much like their own, a proto-Protestant who eventually came around the king's views on religion. Speght states that "In the second year of Richard the second, the King tooke Geoffrey Chaucer and his lands into his

protection. The occasion wherof no doubt was some daunger and trouble whereinto he was fallen by favouring some rash attempt of the common people." Under the discussion of Chaucer's friends, namely John of Gaunt, Speght further explains:

Yet it seemeth that was in some trouble in the daies of King Richard the second, as it may appeare in the Testament of Loue: where hee doth greatly complaine of his owne rashnesse in following the multitude, and of their hatred of him for bewraying their purpose. And in that complaint which he maketh to his empty purse, I do find a written copy, which I had of Iohn Stow (whose library hath helped many writers) wherein ten times more is adjoined, then is in print. Where he maketh great lamentation for his wrongfull imprisonment, wishing death to end his daies: which in my iudgement doth greatly accord with that in the Testament of Love. Moreover we find it thus in Record.

Later, in "The Argument" to the Testament of Love, Speght adds:

Chaucer did compile this booke as a comfort to himselfe after great griefs conceiued for some rash attempts of the commons, with whome he had ioyned, and thereby was in feare to loose the fauour of his best friends.²⁷

Speght is also the source of the famous tale of Chaucer being fined for beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street, as well as a fictitious coat of arms and family tree. Ironically—and perhaps consciously so—an introductory, apologetic letter in Speght's edition from Francis Beaumont defends the unseemly, "low", and bawdy bits in Chaucer from an elite, classicist position. Francis Thynne noted some of these inconsistencies in his *Animadversions*, insisting that Chaucer was not a commoner, and he objected to the friar-beating story. Yet Thynne himself underscores Chaucer's support for popular religious reform, associating Chaucer's views with his father William Thynne's attempts to include *The Plowman's Tale* and *The Pilgrim's Tale* in the 1532 and 1542 Works.

The myth of the Protestant Chaucer continues to have a lasting impact on a large body of Chaucerian scholarship. Though it is extremely rare for a modern

²⁷ Chaucer: Life-Records, Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olsen. (1966)

scholar to suggest Chaucer supported a religious movement that didn't exist until more than a century after his death, the predominance of this thinking for so many centuries left it for granted that Chaucer was at least hostile toward Catholicism. This assumption forms a large part of many critical approaches to Chaucer's works, including neo-Marxism.

Alongside Chaucer's Works, the most impressive literary monument of the period is John Foxe's Acts and Monuments.... As with the Chaucer editions, it was critically significant to English Protestant identity and included Chaucer in its project. Foxe's Chaucer both derived from and contributed to the printed editions of Chaucer's Works, particularly the pseudepigrapha. Jack Upland was first printed in Foxe's Acts and Monuments, and then it appeared in Speght's edition of Chaucer's Works. Speght's "Life of Chaucer" echoes Foxe's own account, which is itself dependent upon the earlier editions that added the Testament of Love and The Plowman's Tale to their pages. Like Speght's Chaucer, Foxe's Chaucer was also a shrewd (or lucky) political survivor. In his 1563 edition, Foxe "thought it not out of season ... to couple ... some mention of Geoffrey Chaucer" with a discussion of John Colet, a possible source for John Skelton's character Colin Clout.²⁸

Probably referring to the 1542 Act for the Advancement of True Religion, Foxe said that he "marvel[s] to consider ... how the bishops, condemning and abolishing all manner of English books and treatises which might bring the people to any light of knowledge, did yet authorise the works of Chaucer to remain still and to be occupied; who, no doubt, saw into religion as much almost as even we do now, and uttereth in his works no less, and seemeth to be a right Wicklevian, or else there never was any. And that, all his works almost, if they be thoroughly advised, will testify (albeit done in mirth, and covertly); and especially the latter end of his third book of the Testament of Love ... Wherein, except a man be altogether blind, he may espy him at the full: although in the same book (as in all

²⁸ Skeat, W.W., The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899.

others he useth to do), under shadows covertly, as under a visor, he suborneth truth in such sort, as both privily she may profit the godly-minded, and yet not be espied of the crafty adversary. And therefore the bishops, belike, taking his works but for jests and toys, in condemning other books, yet permitted his books to be read."

It is significant, too, that Foxe's discussion of Chaucer leads into his history of "The Reformation of the Church of Christ in the Time of Martin Luther" when "Printing, being opened, incontinently ministered unto the church the instruments and tools of learning and knowledge; which were good books and authors, which before lay hid and unknown. The science of printing being found, immediately followed the grace of God; which stirred up good wits aptly to conceive the light of knowledge and judgment: by which light darkness began to be espied, and ignorance to be detected; truth from error, religion from superstition, to be discerned."²⁹

Foxe downplays Chaucer's bawdy and amorous writing, insisting that it all testifies to his piety. Material that is troubling is deemed metaphoric, while the more forthright satire (which Foxe prefers) is taken literally.

John Urry produced the first edition of the complete works of Chaucer in a Latin font, published posthumously in 1721. Included were several tales, according to the editors, for the first time printed, a biography of Chaucer, a glossary of old English words, and testimonials of author writers concerning Chaucer dating back to the 16th century. According to A. S. G Edwards, "This was the first collected edition of Chaucer to be printed in roman type. The life of Chaucer prefixed to the volume was the work of the Reverend John Dart, corrected and revised by Timothy Thomas. The glossary appended was also mainly compiled by Thomas. The text of Urry's edition has often been criticised by subsequent editors for its frequent conjectural emendations, mainly to make it conform to his sense of Chaucer's metre. The justice of such criticisms should not obscure his achievement. His is the first edition of Chaucer for nearly a hundred and fifty years to consult any

²⁹ Ward, Adolphus W. (1907). "Chaucer". Edinburgh: R. & R. Clark, Ltd

manuscripts and is the first since that of William Thynne in 1534 to seek systematically to assemble a substantial number of manuscripts to establish his text. It is also the first edition to offer descriptions of the manuscripts of Chaucer's works, and the first to print texts of 'Gamelyn' and 'The Tale of Beryn', works ascribed to, but not by, Chaucer."

The following major works are in rough chronological order but scholars still debate the dating of most of Chaucer's output and works made up from a collection of stories may have been compiled over a long period.³⁰

Major works

- Translation of Roman de la Rose, possibly extant as The Romaunt of the Rose
- The Book of the Duchess
- The House of Fame
- Anelida and Arcite
- Parlement of Foules
- Translation of Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy as Boece
- Troilus and Criseyde
- The Legend of Good Women
- The Canterbury Tales
- A Treatise on the Astrolabe
- An ABC
- Chaucers Wordes unto Adam, His Owne Sciveyn
- The Complaint unto Pity
- The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse
- The Complaint of Mars
- The Complaint of Venus
- A Complaint to His Lady
- The Former Age
- Fortune

³⁰ Skeat, W.W., The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899.

- Gentilesse
- Lak of Stedfastnesse
- Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan
- Lenvoy de Chaucer a Bukton
- Proverbs
- Balade to Rosemounde
- Truth
- Womanly Noblesse
- Poems of dubious authorship
- Against Women Unconstant
- A Balade of Complaint
- Complaynt D'Amours
- Merciles Beaute

The Equatorie of the Planets – A rough translation of a Latin work derived from an Arab work of the same title. It is a description of the construction and use of aplanetary equatorium, which was used in calculating planetary orbits and positions (at the time it was believed the sun orbited the Earth). The similar Treatise on the Astrolabe, not usually doubted as Chaucer's work, in addition to Chaucer's name as a gloss to the manuscript are the main pieces of evidence for the ascription to Chaucer. However, the evidence Chaucer wrote such a work is questionable, and as such is not included in *The Riverside Chaucer*. If Chaucer did not compose this work, it was probably written by a contemporary.

Presumedly lost works

Of the Wreched Engendrynge of Mankynde, possible translation of Innocent III's *De miseria conditionis humanae*

Origenes upon the Maudeleyne

The Book of the Leoun – The Book of the Leon is mentioned in Chaucer's retraction. It is likely he wrote such a work; one suggestion is that the work was such a bad piece of writing it was lost, but if that had been the case, Chaucer would

not have mentioned it. A likely source dictates it was probably a 'redaction of Guillaume de Machaut's 'Dit dou lyon,' a story about courtly love, a subject about which Chaucer frequently wrote.

Spurious works

- The Pilgrim's Tale – written in the 16th century with many Chaucerian allusions
- The Plowman's Tale or The Complaint of the Ploughman – a Lollard satire later appropriated as a Protestant text
- Pierce the Ploughman's Crede – a Lollard satire later appropriated by Protestants
- The Ploughman's Tale – its body is largely a version of Thomas Hoccleve's "Item de Beata Virgine"
- "La Belle Dame Sans Merci" – Richard Roos's translation of a poem of the same name by Alain Chartier
- The Testament of Love – actually by Thomas Usk
- Jack Upland – a Lollard satire
- The Floure and the Leafe – a 15th-century allegory
- Derived works
- God Spede the Plough – Borrows twelve stanzas of Chaucer's Monk's Tale

2.2. Chaucer's role in the development of English literature

As Muhammad Naeem cited, it is somewhat idle to talk of "fathers" in the history of literature, for it is questionable if a particular person can be wholly credited with in the founding of a new literary genre.

Literature is generally subject to the 'law of evolutionary development. And though a man may do more than others by way of contributing to this development we should be chary of inferring upon him the medal of fatherhood. When it is said that Chaucer is the father of English poetry, and even the father of English literature we broadly mean that his contribution to the evolution of English poetry or literature is much more significant than that of his contemporaries and predecessors, and to be similarly rated is his introduction of so many novel features into it³¹.

That Chaucer was a pioneer in many respects should be readily granted. "With him is born our real poetry," says Matthew Arnold. He has been acclaimed as the first realist, the first humorist, the first narrative artist the first great character-painter, and the first great metrical artist in English literature. Further, he has been credited not only with the "fatherhood" of English poetry but has also been hailed as the father of English drama before the drama was born, and the father of English novel before the novel was born. And, what is more, his importance is not due to precedence alone, but due to excellence. He is not only the first English poet, but a great poet in his own right. Justly has he been called "the fountain-source of the vast stream of English literature."

Well does Lowell say that "Chaucer found his English a dialect and left it a language." Borrowing Saintsbury's words about the transformation which Dryden effected in English poetry, we may justly say that Chaucer found the English language brick and left it marble. When Chaucer started his literary career, the English speech, and still less, the English of writing was confusingly fluid and unsettled. The English language was divided into a number of dialects

³¹ <http://neoenglishsystem.blogspot.com/2010/12/chaucers-contribution-to-english.html#more>

which were employed in different parts of the country. The four of them vastly more prominent than the others were:

- The Southern
- The Midland
- The Northern or Northumbrian
- The Kentish

Out of these four, the Midland or the East Midland dialect, which was spoken in London and its surrounding area, was the simplest in grammar and syntax. Moreover, it was the one patronised by the aristocratic and literary circles of the country. Gower used this dialect for his poem *Confessio Amantis* and Wyclif for his translation of the Bible. But this dialect was not the vehicle of all literary work. Other dialects had their votaries too. Langland in his *Piers Plowman*, to quote an instance, used a mixture of the Southern and Midland dialects. Chaucer employed in his work the East midland dialect, and by casting the enormous weight of his genius balance decided once for all which dialect was going to be the standard literary language of the whole of the country for all times to come. None after him thought of using any dialect other than the East Midland for any literary work of consequence. It is certain that if Chaucer had adopted some other dialect the emergence of the standard language of literature would have been considerably delayed. All the great writers of England succeeding Chaucer are, in the words of John Speirs, "masters of the language of which Chaucer is, before them, the great master."³²

Not only was Chaucer's selection of one dialect out of the four a happy one, but so was his selection of one of the three languages which were reigning supreme in England at that time—Latin, French, and English. In fact, Latin and French were more fashionable than the poor "vernacular" English. Latin was considered "the universal language" and was patronised at the expense of English by the Church as well as the learned. Before Wyclif translated it into the "vulgar tongue", the Bible

³² Speirs, John, "Chaucer the Maker", London: Faber and Faber, 1951

was read in its Latin version called the Vulgate. French was the language of the court and was used for keeping the accounts of the royal household till as late as 1365. Perplexed by the variety of languages offering themselves for use, Chaucer's friend and contemporary Gower could not decide which one of them to adopt. He wrote his *Mirour del'Omme* in French, *Vox Clamantis* in Latin, and *Confessio Amantis* in English, perhaps because he was not quite sure which of the three languages was going to survive. But Chaucer had few doubts about the issue. He chose English which was a despised language, and as the legendary king did to the beggar maid, raised her from the dust, draped her in royal robes, and conducted her coronation. That queen is ruling even now.³³

Chaucer's contribution to English versification is no less striking than to the English language. Again, it is an instance of a happy choice. He sounded the death-knell of the old Saxon alliterative measure and firmly established the modern one. Even in the fourteenth century the old alliterative measure had been employed by such a considerable poet as Langland for his *Piers the Plowman*, and the writer of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*. Let us give the important features of the old measure which Chaucer so categorically disowned:

- There is no regularity in the number of syllables in each line. One line may have as few as six syllables and another as many as fourteen.
- The use of alliteration as the chief ornamental device and as the lone structural principle. All the alliterative syllables are stressed.
- The absence of end-rimes; and
- Frequent repetition to express vehemence and intensity of emotion.
- Chaucer had no patience with the "rum, ram, ruf" of the alliterative measure.

So does he maintain in the *Parson's Tale*:

- But trusteth wel, I am a southern man,
- I cannot geste-rum, ram, ruf,-by lettere,
- Ne, God wot, rym holde I but litel bettere.

³³ https://en.wikipedia.org/?title=Geoffrey_Chaucer

- For that old-fashioned measure he substituted the regular line with end-rime, which he borrowed from France. The new measure has the following characteristics:

- All lines have the same number of syllables,
- End-rime,
- Absence of alliteration and frequent repetition.

After Chaucer, no important poet ever thought of reverting to the old measure. Thus, Chaucer may be designated "the father of modern English versification." Chaucer employs three principal metres in his works. In *The Canterbury Tales* he mostly uses lines of ten syllables each (with generally five accents); and the lines run into couplets; that is, each couple of lines has its end-syllables rhyming with each other. For example:

His eyes twinkled in his heed aright
As doon the sterres in the frosty night.

In *Troilus and Cryseyde* he uses the seven-line stanza of decasyllabic lines with five accents each having the rhyme-scheme a b abb c c. This measure was borrowed by him from the French and is called the rhyme-royal or Chaucerian stanza. The third principal metre employed by him is the octosyllabic couplet with four accents and end-rime. In *The Book of the Duchesse* this measure is used. The measures thus adopted by Chaucer were seized upon by his successors. The decasyllabic couplet known as the heroic couplet, was to be chiselled and invigorated to perfection three centuries later by Dryden and Pope. Apart from those three principal measures Chaucer also employed for the first time a number of other stanzaic forms in his shorter poems.³⁴

Not only this, Chaucer seems to be the first Englishman who realised and brought out the latent music of his language. "To read Chaucer's verse," observes a critic, "is like listening to a clear stream, in a meadow full of sunshine, rippling over its bed of pebbles." The following is the tribute of a worthy successor of his:

³⁴[Chaucer: The Critical Heritage. Volume 1: 1385-1837.](#) London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 230. ISBN 0710084978. Retrieved 18 May 2014.

The morning star of song, who made
His music heard below,
Don Chaucer, the first -warbler, whose sweet breath
Preluded those melodious bursts thatfiU",
The spacious times of great Elizabeth
With sounds that echo still

He made English a pliant and vigorous medium of poetic utterance. His astonishingly easy mastery of the language is indeed remarkable. With one step the writings of Chaucer carry us into a new era in which the language appears endowed with ease, dignity, and copiousness of expression and clothed in the hues of the imagination.

Chaucer was a pioneer not only in the linguistic and prosodic fields, but was one in the strictly poetic field also. Not only the form of poetry, but its content, too, is highly indebted to him. Not only did he give English poetry a new dress, but a new body and a new soul. His major contribution towards the content of poetry is in his advocacy of and strict adherence to realism. His Canterbury Tales embodies a new effort in the history of literature, as it strictly deals with real men, manners, and life. In the beginning of his literary career Chaucer followed his contemporaries and immediate predecessors, and wrote allegorical and dream poetry which in its content was as remote from life as a dream is from reality. But at the age of about fifty he realised that literature should deal first-hand with life and not look at it through the spectacles of books or the hazy hues of dreams and cumbersome allegory. He realised, to adopt Pope's famous couplet (with a little change) :

Know then thyself: presume not dreams to scan,
The proper study of mankind is man.

And the product of this realisation was The Canterbury Tales. This poem, as it were, holds a mirror to the life of Chaucer's age and shows its manners and morals completely, "not in fragments." Chaucer replaces effectively the shadowy

delineations of the old romantic and allegorical school with the vivid and pulsating pictures of contemporary life.

And Chaucer does not forget the universal beneath the particular, the dateless beneath the dated. The portraits of the pilgrims in the Prologue to *The Canterbury Tales* constitute not only an epitome of the society of fourteenth-century England, but the epitome of human nature in all climes and all ages. Grierson and Smith observe about Chaucer's pilgrims: "They are all with us today, though some of them have changed their names. The knight now commands a line regiment, the squire is in the guards, the shipman was a rum-runner while prohibition lasted and is active now in the black market, the friar is a jolly sporting publican, the pardoner vends quack medicines or holds seances, and the prioress is the headmistress of a fashionable girls' school. Some of them have reappeared in a later literature. The poor parson was reincarnated in the Vicar of Wakefield, the knight in Colonel Newcome and the Monk in *Archdeacon Grantly*."³⁵

His Geniality, Tolerance, Humour, and Freshness:

Chaucer's tone as a poet is wonderfully instinct with geniality, tolerance, humour, and freshness which are absent from that of his contemporaries and predecessors who are too dreamy or too serious to be interesting. In spite of his awareness of the corruption and unrest in the society of his age Chaucer is never upset or upsetting. He experiences what the French call *joie de vivre*, and communicates it to his readers. No one can read Chaucer without feeling that it is good to be alive in this world however imperfect may it be in numerous respects. He is a chronic optimist. He is never harsh, rancorous, bitter, or indignant, and never falls out with his fellow men for their failings. He leaves didacticism to Langland and "moral Gower" and himself peacefully coexists with all human imperfections. It does not mean that he is not sarcastic or satirical, but his satire and sarcasm are always seasoned with lively humour. In fact his forte is irony rather than satire. Aldous Huxley observes: "Where Langland cries aloud in anger

³⁵ Potter, Russell A., "Chaucer and the Authority of Language: The Politics and Poetics of the Vernacular in Late Medieval England", *Assays VI* (Carnegie-Mellon Press, 1991), p. 91.

threatening the world with hell fire, Chaucer looks on and smiles." The great English humorists like Shakespeare and Fielding share with Chaucer the same broad human sympathy which he first introduced into literature and which has bestowed upon his Canterbury Tales that character of perennial, vernal freshness which appears so abundantly on its every page,

The novel is one of the latest courses in the banquet of English literature. But in his narrative skill, his gift of vivid characterization, his aptitude for plot-construction, and his inventive skill Chaucer appears as a worthy precursor of the race of novelists who come centuries afterwards. If Chaucer is the father of English poetry he is certainly, to use G. K. Chesterton's phrase, "the grandfather of the English novel." His Tales are replete with intense human interest, and though he borrows his materials from numerous sundry sources, his narrative skill is all his own. That could not have been borrowed. His narration is lively and direct, if we make exception for the numerous digressions and philosophical and pseudo-philosophical animadversions having little to do with the tales proper, introduced after the contemporary fashion. It is difficult to find him flagging or growing dull and monotonous. It is perhaps only Burns who in Tom O' Shanter excels Chaucer in the telling of "merry tales."

Chaucer's Prologue to The Canterbury Tales has been rightly called "the prologue to modern fiction." It has characters if not plot, and vivid characterization is one of the primary jobs of a novelist. A novel, according to Meredith, should be "a summary of actual life." So is, indeed, the Prologue. Several of the tales, too, are novels in miniature and hold the attention of the reader from the beginning to the end, which, alas! very few novels of today do.³⁶

As regards Chaucer's Troilus and Cryseyde, it has been well called "a novel in verse." And it has all the salient features of a novel. It has plot, character, unravelling action, conflict, rising action, and denouement-every thing. Though the background of the action is the legendary Trojan war, and though some elements

³⁶ The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer: To Which are Added an Essay on his Language and Versification, and an Introductory Discourse, Together with Notes and a Glossary by the late Thomas Tyrwhitt. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798. 2 Volumes.

have been borrowed from the Italian writer Boccaccio, yet it is all very modern and close to life. It is not devoid even of psychological interest which is a major characteristic of the modern novel. "Its heroine," as a critic observes, "is the subtlest piece of psychological analysis in medieval fiction: and the shrewd and practical Pandarus is a character whose presence of itself brings the story down from the heights of romance to the plains of real life." S. D. Neill opines that "had Chaucer written in prose, it is possible that his Troilus and Cryseyde and not Richardson's Pamela would have been celebrated as the first English novel." A. W. Pollard facetiously observes that Chaucer was a compound of "thirty per cent of Goldsmith, fifty of Fielding, and twenty of Walter Scott." This means, in other words, that as a story-teller Chaucer had some of the sweetness of Goldsmith, the genial ironic attitude and realism of Fielding, and the high chivalrous tone of Sir Walter Scott. But, after all is said and done. Chaucer is Chaucer himself and himself alone.³⁷

Chaucer wrote at a time when, like the novel, secular drama had not been born, and yet his works have some dramatic elements which are altogether missing in the poetry before him. His mode of characterisation in the Prologue to The Canterbury Tales is, no doubt, static or descriptive, but in the tales proper it is dynamic or dramatic. There the characters reveal themselves, without the intervention of the author, through what they say and what they do. Even the tales they narrate, in most cases, are in keeping with their respective characters, avocations, temperaments, etc. In this way Chaucer is clearly ahead of his "model" Boccaccio, who in his Decameron allots various tales to his ladies and gentlemen indiscriminately, irrespective of their conformity or otherwise to their respective characters. The stories in The Decameron could without violence be re-distributed among the characters. Chaucer is abundantly showing here the essential gift of a dramatist. A critic goes so far as to assert that Chaucer is "a dramatist in all but the fact", and again : "If the drama had been known in Chaucer's time as a branch of

³⁷ A Leaf from The Canterbury Tales. Westminster, England: William Caxton, [1478]

living literature, he might have attained as high an excellence in comedy as any English or Continental writer."

Let us round off our discussion by briefly referring to some of Chaucer's limitations or what as "the father of English poetry" he could not give to it. Matthew Arnold feels in Chaucer's work the absence of "high seriousness" which is the characteristic of all great poetry. Then, Chaucer has, unlike Dante, no burning message to give. Again as Hudson avers, he is not the poet of the people. Moody and Loyett maintain that "Chaucer wrote for the court and cultivated classes to whom the sufferings of the poor were a matter of the utmost indifference." Still another critic finds missing from Chaucer's poetry those "mysterious significances" which are characteristics of all great poetry. All this is, in a measure, true. But those who charge Chaucer with the absence of pathos may well read the following passage from *The-Knight's Tale* in which 'Arcite laments his separation, consequent upon his death, from his lady-love:³⁸

Alas the woe! alas the paines strong
That I for you have suffered, and so long!
Alas the death: alas, mine Emilie!
Alas, departing of our company!
Alas, mine hertes queen! alas my wife!
Mine hertes lady, ender of my life.
WJiat is this world? What asken men to have?
Now with his love; now in his colde grave,
Alone, withouten any company!
Farewell my sweet! farewell mine Emilie!
And softe take me in your armes rwey,
Fore love of God and heakeneth what I say.

³⁸ Carolyn Collette in "Fifteenth Century Chaucer", an essay published in the book *A Companion to Chaucer* ISBN 0-631-23590-6

CHAPTER III

SOME LITERARY FEATURES OF THE CANTERBURY TALES BY CHAUCER

3.1. The Canterbury Tales – masterpiece of Geoffrey Chaucer

The Canterbury Tales are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.³⁹

After a long list of works written earlier in his career, including *Troilus and Criseyde*, *House of Fame*, and "*Parliament of Fowls*", *The Canterbury Tales* is near-unanimously seen as Chaucer's magnum opus. He uses the tales and the descriptions of its characters to paint an ironic and critical portrait of English society at the time, and particularly of the Church. Structurally, the collection resembles *The Decameron*, which Chaucer may have read during his first diplomatic mission to Italy in 1372.

It is sometimes argued that the greatest contribution *The Canterbury Tales* made to English literature was in popularising the literary use of vernacular, English, rather than French or Latin. English had, however, been used as a literary language centuries before Chaucer's time, and several of Chaucer's contemporaries John Gower, William Langland, the Pearl Poet, and Julian of Norwich also wrote major literary works in English. It is unclear to what extent Chaucer was responsible for starting a trend as opposed to simply being part of it.

While Chaucer clearly states the addressees of many of his poems, the intended audience of *The Canterbury Tales* is more difficult to determine. Chaucer was a courtier, leading some to believe that he was mainly a court poet who wrote exclusively for nobility.

The question of whether *The Canterbury Tales* is finished has not yet been answered. There are 83 known manuscripts of the work from the late medieval and early Renaissance periods, more than any other vernacular literary text with the

³⁹ http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/The_Canterbury_Tales

exception of *The Prick of Conscience*. This is taken as evidence of the tales' popularity during the century after Chaucer's death. Fifty-five of these manuscripts are thought to have been complete at one time, while 28 are so fragmentary that it is difficult to ascertain whether they were copied individually or as part of a set. The Tales vary in both minor and major ways from manuscript to manuscript; many of the minor variations are due to copyists' errors, while others suggest that Chaucer added to and revised his work as it was being copied and (possibly) distributed.⁴⁰

Even the earliest surviving manuscripts are not Chaucer's originals, the oldest being MS Peniarth 392 D (called "Hengwrt"), compiled by a scribe shortly after Chaucer's death. The most beautiful of the manuscripts of the tales is the Ellesmere Manuscript, and many editors have followed the order of the Ellesmere over the centuries, even down to the present day. The first version of *The Canterbury Tales* to be published in print was William Caxton's 1478 edition. Since this print edition was created from a now-lost manuscript, it is counted as among the 83 manuscripts.

No authorial, arguably complete version of the Tales exists and no consensus has been reached regarding the order in which Chaucer intended the stories to be placed.

Textual and manuscript clues have been adduced to support the two most popular modern methods of ordering the tales. Some scholarly editions divide the Tales into ten "Fragments". The tales that comprise a Fragment are closely related and contain internal indications of their order of presentation, usually with one character speaking to and then stepping aside for another character. However, between Fragments, the connection is less obvious. Consequently, there are several possible orders; the one most frequently seen in modern editions follows the numbering of the Fragments (ultimately based on the Ellesmere order). Victorians frequently used the nine "Groups", which was the order used by Walter William

⁴⁰ A Leaf from *The Canterbury Tales*. Westminster, England: William Caxton, [1478]

Skeat whose edition Chaucer: Complete Works was used by Oxford University Press for most of the twentieth century, but this order is now seldom followed.

Fragment	Group	Tales
Fragment I	A	General Prologue , The Knight's Tale , The Miller's Tale , The Reeve's Tale , The Cook's Tale
Fragment II	B1	The Man of Law's Tale
Fragment III	D	The Wife of Bath's Tale , The Friar's Tale , The Summoner's Tale
Fragment IV	E	The Clerk's Tale , The Merchant's Tale
Fragment V	F	The Squire's Tale , The Franklin's Tale
Fragment VI	C	The Physician's Tale , The Pardoner's Tale
Fragment VII	B2	The Shipman's Tale , The Prioress's Tale , Sir Thopas' Tale , The Tale of Melibee , The Monk's Tale , The Nun's Priest's Tale
Fragment VIII	G	The Second Nun's Tale , The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
Fragment IX	H	The Manciple's Tale
Fragment X	I	The Parson's Tale

An alternative ordering (seen in an early manuscript containing the Canterbury Tales, the early-fifteenth century Harley MS. 7334) places Fragment VIII before VI. Fragments I and II almost always follow each other, as do VI and VII, IX and X in the oldest manuscripts. Fragments IV and V, by contrast are located in varying locations from manuscript to manuscript.

Chaucer wrote in late Middle English, which has clear differences from Modern English. From philological research, we know certain facts about the pronunciation of English during the time of Chaucer. Chaucer pronounced -e at the

earlier stories, and that his work was influenced by the general state of the literary world in which he lived. Storytelling was the main entertainment in England at the time, and storytelling contests had been around for hundreds of years. In 14th-century England the English Pui was a group with an appointed leader who would judge the songs of the group. The winner received a crown and, as with the winner of the Canterbury Tales, a free dinner. It was common for pilgrims on a pilgrimage to have a chosen "master of ceremonies" to guide them and organise the journey. Harold Bloom suggests that the structure is mostly original, but inspired by the "pilgrim" figures of Dante and Virgil in *The Divine Comedy*.

The *Decameron* by Giovanni Boccaccio contains more parallels to the Canterbury Tales than any other work. Like the Tales, it features a number of narrators who tell stories along a journey they have undertaken (to flee from the Black Plague). It ends with an apology by Boccaccio, much like Chaucer's Retraction to the Tales. A quarter of the tales in Canterbury Tales parallel a tale in the *Decameron*, although most of them have closer parallels in other stories. Some scholars thus find it unlikely that Chaucer had a copy of the work on hand, surmising instead that he must have merely read the *Decameron* at some point. Each of the tales has its own set of sources which have been suggested by scholars, but a few sources are used frequently over several tales. These include poetry by Ovid, the Bible in one of the many vulgate versions it was available in at the time (the exact one is difficult to determine), and the works of Petrarch and Dante. Chaucer was the first author to utilise the work of these last two, both Italians. Boethius' *Consolation of Philosophy* appears in several tales, as do the works of John Gower, a known friend to Chaucer. A full list is impossible to outline in little space, but Chaucer also, lastly, seems to have borrowed from numerous religious encyclopaedias and liturgical writings, such as John Bromyard's *Summa praedicatorum*, a preacher's handbook, and Jerome's *Adversus Jovinianum*. Many scholars say there is a good possibility Chaucer met Petrarch or Boccaccio

Canterbury Tales is a collection of stories built around a frame narrative or frame tale, a common and already long established genre of its period. Chaucer's Tales differs from most other story "collections" in this genre chiefly in its intense variation. Most story collections focused on a theme, usually a religious one. Even in the Decameron, storytellers are encouraged to stick to the theme decided on for the day. The idea of a pilgrimage to get such a diverse collection of people together for literary purposes was also unprecedented, though "the association of pilgrims and storytelling was a familiar one".] Introducing a competition among the tales encourages the reader to compare the tales in all their variety, and allows Chaucer to showcase the breadth of his skill in different genres and literary forms.⁴²

While the structure of the Tales is largely linear, with one story following another, it is also much more than that. In the General Prologue, Chaucer describes, not the tales to be told, but the people who will tell them, making it clear that structure will depend on the characters rather than a general theme or moral. This idea is reinforced when the Miller interrupts to tell his tale after the Knight has finished his. Having the Knight go first, gives one the idea that all will tell their stories by class, with the Knight going first, followed by the Monk, but the Miller's interruption makes it clear that this structure will be abandoned in favour of a free and open exchange of stories among all classes present. General themes and points of view arise as tales are told which are responded to by other characters in their own tales, sometimes after a long lapse in which the theme has not been addressed.

Lastly, Chaucer does not pay much attention to the progress of the trip, to the time passing as the pilgrims travel, or specific locations along the way to Canterbury. His writing of the story seems focused primarily on the stories being told, and not on the pilgrimage itself.

The variety of Chaucer's tales shows the breadth of his skill and his familiarity with countless rhetorical forms and linguistic styles. Medieval schools

⁴² The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer: To Which are Added an Essay on his Language and Versification, and an Introductory Discourse, Together with Notes and a Glossary by the late Thomas Tyrwhitt. Second Edition. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1798. 2 Volumes.

of rhetoric at the time encouraged such diversity, dividing literature (as Virgil suggests) into high, middle, and low styles as measured by the density of rhetorical forms and vocabulary. Another popular method of division came from St. Augustine, who focused more on audience response and less on subject matter (a Virgilian concern). Augustine divided literature into "majestic persuades", "temperate pleases", and "subdued teaches". Writers were encouraged to write in a way that kept in mind the speaker, subject, audience, purpose, manner, and occasion. Chaucer moves freely between all of these styles, showing favouritism to none. He not only considers the readers of his work as an audience, but the other pilgrims within the story as well, creating a multi-layered rhetorical puzzle of ambiguities. Chaucer's work thus far surpasses the ability of any single medieval theory to uncover.⁴³

With this Chaucer avoids targeting any specific audience or social class of readers, focusing instead on the characters of the story and writing their tales with a skill proportional to their social status and learning. However, even the lowest characters, such as the Miller, show surprising rhetorical ability, although their subject matter is more lowbrow. Vocabulary also plays an important part, as those of the higher classes refer to a woman as a "lady", while the lower classes use the word "wenche", with no exceptions. At times the same word will mean entirely different things between classes. The word "pitee", for example, is a noble concept to the upper classes, while in the Merchant's Tale it refers to sexual intercourse. Again, however, tales such as the Nun's Priest's Tale show surprising skill with words among the lower classes of the group, while the Knight's Tale is at times extremely simple.

Chaucer uses the same meter throughout almost all of his tales, with the exception of Sir Thopas and his prose tales. It is a decasyllable line, probably borrowed from French and Italian forms, with riding rhyme and, occasionally, a caesura in the middle of a line. His meter would later develop into the heroic

⁴³ Hopper, Vincent Foster, Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Selected): An Interlinear Translation, Barron's Educational Series, 1970, [ISBN 0-8120-0039-0](https://www.barnesandnoble.com/?i=9780812000390)

meter of the 15th and 16th centuries and is an ancestor of iambic pentameter. He avoids allowing couplets to become too prominent in the poem, and four of the tales (the Man of Law's, Clerk's, Prioress', and Second Nun's) use rhyme royal.⁴⁴

The Canterbury Tales was written during a turbulent time in English history. The Catholic Church was in the midst of the Western Schism and, though it was still the only Christian authority in Europe, was the subject of heavy controversy. Lollardy, an early English religious movement led by John Wycliffe, is mentioned in the Tales, as is a specific incident involving pardoners (who gathered money in exchange for absolution from sin) who nefariously claimed to be collecting for St. Mary Rouncesval hospital in England. The Canterbury Tales is among the first English literary works to mention paper, a relatively new invention which allowed dissemination of the written word never before seen in England. Political clashes, such as the 1381 Peasants' Revolt and clashes ending in the deposing of King Richard II, further reveal the complex turmoil surrounding Chaucer in the time of the Tales' writing. Many of his close friends were executed and he himself was forced to move to Kent to get away from events in London.

In 2004, Professor Linne Mooney was able to identify the scrivener who worked for Chaucer as an Adam Pinkhurst. Mooney, then a professor at the University of Maine and a visiting fellow at Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, was able to match Pinkhurst's signature, on an oath he signed, to his lettering on a copy of The Canterbury Tales that was transcribed from Chaucer's working copy. While some readers look to interpret the characters of "The Canterbury Tales" as historical figures, other readers choose to interpret its significance in less literal terms. After analysis of his diction and historical context, his work appears to develop a critique against society during his lifetime. Within a number of his descriptions, his comments can appear complimentary in nature, but through clever language, the statements are ultimately critical of the pilgrim's actions. It is unclear whether Chaucer would intend for the reader to link his

⁴⁴ Benson, Larry, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 1118.

characters with actual persons. Instead, it appears that Chaucer creates fictional characters to be general representations of people in such fields of work. With an understanding of medieval society, one can detect subtle satire at work.⁴⁵

The Tales reflect diverse views of the Church in Chaucer's England. After the Black Death, many Europeans began to question the authority of the established Church. Some turned to lollardy, while others chose less extreme paths, starting new monastic orders or smaller movements exposing church corruption in the behaviour of the clergy, false church relics or abuse of indulgences. Several characters in the Tales are religious figures, and the very setting of the pilgrimage to Canterbury is religious (although the prologue comments ironically on its merely seasonal attractions), making religion a significant theme of the work.⁴⁶

Two characters, the Pardoner and the Summoner, whose roles apply the church's secular power, are both portrayed as deeply corrupt, greedy, and abusive. A pardoner in Chaucer's day was a person from whom one bought Church "indulgences" for forgiveness of sins, but pardoners were often thought guilty of abusing their office for their own gain. Chaucer's Pardoner openly admits the corruption of his practice while hawking his wares. The Summoner is a Church officer who brought sinners to the church court for possible excommunication and other penalties. Corrupt summoners would write false citations and frighten people into bribing them to protect their interests. Chaucer's Summoner is portrayed as guilty of the very kinds of sins he is threatening to bring others to court for, and is hinted as having a corrupt relationship with the Pardoner. In The Friar's Tale, one of the characters is a summoner who is shown to be working on the side of the devil, not God.

Churchmen of various kinds are represented by the Monk, the Prioress, the Nun's Priest, and the Second Nun. Monastic orders, which originated from a desire to follow an ascetic lifestyle separated from the world, had by Chaucer's time

⁴⁵ "From The Preface to Fables Ancient and Modern". The Norton Anthology of English Literature. Stephen Greenblatt. 8th ed. Vol. C. New York, London: Norton, 2006. 2132-33. p. 2132.

⁴⁶ A Leaf from The Canterbury Tales. Westminster, England: William Caxton, [1478]

become increasingly entangled in worldly matters. Monasteries frequently controlled huge tracts of land on which they made significant sums of money, while peasants worked in their employ. The Second Nun is an example of what a Nun was expected to be: her tale is about a woman whose chaste example brings people into the church. The Monk and the Prioress, on the other hand, while not as corrupt as the Summoner or Pardoner, fall far short of the ideal for their orders. Both are expensively dressed, show signs of lives of luxury and flirtatiousness and show a lack of spiritual depth. The Prioress's Tale is an account of Jews murdering a deeply pious and innocent Christian boy, a blood libel against Jews which became a part of English literary tradition. The story did not originate in the works of Chaucer and was well known in the 14th century.

Pilgrimage was a very prominent feature of medieval society. The ultimate pilgrimage destination was Jerusalem, but within England Canterbury was a popular destination. Pilgrims would journey to cathedrals that preserved relics of saints, believing that such relics held miraculous powers. Saint Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury, had been murdered in Canterbury Cathedral by knights of Henry II during a disagreement between Church and Crown. Miracle stories connected to his remains sprang up soon after his death, and the cathedral became a popular pilgrimage destination. The pilgrimage in the work ties all of the stories together, and may be considered a representation of Christians' striving for heaven, despite weaknesses, disagreement, and diversity of opinion.

The upper class or nobility, represented chiefly by the Knight and his Squire, was in Chaucer's time steeped in a culture of chivalry and courtliness. Nobles were expected to be powerful warriors who could be ruthless on the battlefield, yet mannerly in the King's Court and Christian in their actions. Knights were expected to form a strong social bond with the men who fought alongside them, but an even stronger bond with a woman whom they idealised to strengthen their fighting ability. Though the aim of chivalry was to noble action, often its conflicting values degenerated into violence. Church leaders often tried to place restrictions on jousts and tournaments, which at times ended in the death of the loser. The Knight's

Tale shows how the brotherly love of two fellow knights turns into a deadly feud at the sight of a woman whom both idealise, with both knights willing to fight the other to the death to win her. Chivalry was in Chaucer's day on the decline, and it is possible that *The Knight's Tale* was intended to show its flaws, although this is disputed. Chaucer himself had fought in the Hundred Years' War under Edward III, who heavily emphasised chivalry during his reign. Two tales, *Sir Topas* and *The Tale of Melibee* are told by Chaucer himself, who is travelling with the pilgrims in his own story. Both tales seem to focus on the ill-effects of chivalry—the first making fun of chivalric rules and the second warning against violence.

The Tales constantly reflect the conflict between classes. For example, the division of the three estates; the characters are all divided into three distinct classes, the classes being "those who pray" (the clergy), "those who fight" (the nobility), and "those who work" (the commoners and peasantry).⁴⁷ Most of the tales are interlinked by common themes, and some "quit" (reply to or retaliate against) other tales. Convention is followed when the Knight begins the game with a tale, as he represents the highest social class in the group. But when he is followed by the Miller, who represents a lower class, it sets the stage for the Tales to reflect both a respect for and a disregard for upper class rules. Helen Cooper, as well as Mikhail Bakhtin and Derek Brewer, call this opposition "the ordered and the grotesque, Lent and Carnival, officially approved culture and its riotous, and high-spirited underside." Several works of the time contained the same opposition.

Chaucer's characters each express different—sometimes vastly different—views of reality, creating an atmosphere of relativism. As Helen Cooper says, "Different genres give different readings of the world: the fabliau scarcely notices the operations of God, the saint's life focuses on those at the expense of physical reality, tracts and sermons insist on prudential or orthodox morality, romances

⁴⁷ [A Leaf from The Canterbury Tales. Westminster, England: William Caxton,](#)

privilege human emotion." The sheer number of varying persons and stories renders the Tales as a set unable to arrive at any definite truth or reality.

It is sometimes argued that the greatest contribution that this work made to English literature was in popularising the literary use of the vernacular, English, rather than French or Latin. English had, however, been used as a literary language for centuries before Chaucer's life, and several of Chaucer's contemporaries—John Gower, William Langland, and the Pearl Poet—also wrote major literary works in English. It is unclear to what extent Chaucer was responsible for starting a trend rather than simply being part of it. It is interesting to note that, although Chaucer had a powerful influence in poetic and artistic terms, which can be seen in the great number of forgeries and mistaken attributions (such as *The Flower and the Leaf* which was translated by John Dryden), modern English spelling and orthography owes much more to the innovations made by the Court of Chancery in the decades during and after his lifetime.

While Chaucer clearly states the addressees of many of his poems (the *Book of the Duchess* is believed to have been written for John of Gaunt on the occasion of his wife's death in 1368), the intended audience of *The Canterbury Tales* is more difficult to determine. Chaucer was a courtier, leading some to believe that he was mainly a court poet who wrote exclusively for the nobility. He is referred to as a noble translator and poet by Eustache Deschamps and by his contemporary John Gower. It has been suggested that the poem was intended to be read aloud, which is probable as this was a common activity at the time. However, it also seems to have been intended for private reading as well, since Chaucer frequently refers to himself as the writer, rather than the speaker, of the work. Determining the intended audience directly from the text is even more difficult, since the audience is part of the story. This makes it difficult to tell when Chaucer is writing to the fictional pilgrim audience or the actual reader.⁴⁸

⁴⁸ Hopper, Vincent Foster, *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Selected): An Interlinear Translation*, Barron's Educational Series, 1970, ISBN 0-8120-0039-0

Chaucer's works may have been distributed in some form during his lifetime in part or in whole. Scholars speculate that manuscripts were circulated among his friends, but likely remained unknown to most people until after his death. However, the speed with which copyists strove to write complete versions of his tale in manuscript form shows that Chaucer was a famous and respected poet in his own day. The Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts are examples of the care taken to distribute the work. More manuscript copies of the poem exist than for any other poem of its day except *The Prick of Conscience*, causing some scholars to give it the medieval equivalent of "best-seller" status. Even the most elegant of the illustrated manuscripts, however, is not nearly as decorated and fancified as the work of authors of more respectable works such as John Lydgate's religious and historical literature.⁴⁹

John Lydgate and Thomas Occleve were among the first critics of Chaucer's *Tales*, praising the poet as the greatest English poet of all time and the first to show what the language was truly capable of poetically. This sentiment was universally agreed upon by later critics into the mid-15th century. Glosses included in *Canterbury Tales* manuscripts of the time praised him highly for his skill with "sentence" and rhetoric, the two pillars by which medieval critics judged poetry. The most respected of the tales was at this time the *Knight's*, as it was full of both.⁵⁰

The incompleteness of the *Tales* led several medieval authors to write additions and supplements to the tales to make them more complete. Some of the oldest existing manuscripts of the tales include new or modified tales, showing that even early on, such additions were being created. These emendations included various expansions of the *Cook's Tale*, which Chaucer never finished, *The Plowman's Tale*, *The Tale of Gamelyn*, *the Siege of Thebes*, and *the Tale of Beryn*.

The Tale of Beryn, written by an anonymous author in the 15th century, is preceded by a lengthy prologue in which the pilgrims arrive at Canterbury and

⁴⁹ Benson, Larry, *The Riverside Chaucer* (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987), p. 1118.

⁵⁰ Carolyn Collette in "Fifteenth Century Chaucer", an essay published in the book *A Companion to Chaucer* ISBN 0-631-23590-6

their activities there are described. While the rest of the pilgrims disperse throughout the town, the Pardoner seeks the affections of Kate the barmaid, but faces problems dealing with the man in her life and the innkeeper Harry Bailey. As the pilgrims turn back home, the Merchant restarts the storytelling with Tale of Beryn. In this tale, a young man named Beryn travels from Rome to Egypt to seek his fortune only to be cheated by other businessmen there. He is then aided by a local man in getting his revenge. The tale comes from the French tale *Bérinus* and exists in a single early manuscript of the tales, although it was printed along with the tales in a 1721 edition by John Urry.⁵¹

John Lydgate wrote *The Siege of Thebes* in about 1420. Like the *Tale of Beryn*, it is preceded by a prologue in which the pilgrims arrive in Canterbury. Lydgate places himself among the pilgrims as one of them and describes how he was a part of Chaucer's trip and heard the stories. He characterises himself as a monk and tells a long story about the history of Thebes before the events of the *Knight's Tale*. John Lydgate's tale was popular early on and exists in old manuscripts both on its own and as part of the tales. It was first printed as early as 1561 by John Stow and several editions for centuries after followed suit.

There are actually two versions of *The Plowman's Tale*, both of which are influenced by the story *Piers Plowman*, a work written during Chaucer's lifetime. Chaucer describes a Plowman in the General Prologue of his tales, but never gives him his own tale. One tale, written by Thomas Occleve, describes the miracle of the Virgin and the Sleeveless Garment. Another tale features a pelican and a griffin debating church corruption, with the pelican taking a position of protest akin to John Wycliffe's ideas.⁵²

The *Tale of Gamelyn* was included in an early manuscript version of the tales, Harley 7334, which is notorious for being one of the lower-quality early manuscripts in terms of editor error and alteration. It is now widely rejected by scholars as an authentic Chaucerian tale, although some scholars think he may

⁵¹ Rossignol, Rosalyn. *Chaucer A to Z: the essential reference to his life and works*. New York: 1999. 72-73, 75-77

⁵² Skeat, W. W., ed. *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899; Vol. I p. ix.

have intended to rewrite the story as a tale for the Yeoman. Dates for its authorship vary from 1340 to 1370.

Many literary works (both fiction and non-fiction alike) have used a similar frame narrative to *The Canterbury Tales* as an homage. Science fiction writer Dan Simmons wrote his Hugo Award winning novel *Hyperion* based on an extra-planetary group of pilgrims. Evolutionary biologist Richard Dawkins used *The Canterbury Tales* as a structure for his 2004 non-fiction book about evolution titled *The Ancestor's Tale: A Pilgrimage to the Dawn of Evolution*. His animal pilgrims are on their way to find the common ancestor, each telling a tale about evolution.

Henry Dudeney's book *The Canterbury Puzzles* contains a part reputedly lost from what modern readers know as Chaucer's tales.

Historical mystery novelist P.C. Doherty wrote a series of novels based on *The Canterbury Tales*, making use of the story frame and of Chaucer's characters.

Canadian author Angie Abdou translates *The Canterbury Tales* to a cross section of people, all snow sports enthusiasts but from different social backgrounds, converging on a remote backcountry ski cabin in British Columbia in the 2011 novel *The Canterbury Trail*.

The Two Noble Kinsmen, by William Shakespeare and John Fletcher, a retelling of "The Knight's Tale", was first performed in 1613 or 1614 and published in 1634. In 1961, Erik Chisholm completed his opera, *The Canterbury Tales*. The opera is in three acts: *The Wyf of Bath's Tale*, *The Pardoner's Tale* and *The Nun's Priest's Tale*. Nevill Coghill's modern English version formed the basis of a musical version – first staged in 1964.⁵³

A Canterbury Tale, a 1944 film jointly written and directed by Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, is loosely based on the narrative frame of Chaucer's tales. The movie opens with a group of medieval pilgrims journeying

⁵³ Edwin Winfield Bowen, *Questions at Issue in our English Speech*, NY: Broadway Publishing, 1909, p. 147.

through the Kentish countryside as a narrator speaks the opening lines of the General Prologue. The scene then makes a now-famous transition to the time of World War II. From that point on, the film follows a group of strangers, each with his or her own story and in need of some kind of redemption, who are making their way to Canterbury together. The film's main story takes place in an imaginary town in Kent and ends with the main characters arriving at Canterbury Cathedral, bells pealing and Chaucer's words again resounding. A Canterbury Tale is recognised as one of the Powell-Pressburger team's most poetic and artful films. It was produced as wartime propaganda, using Chaucer's poetry, referring to the famous pilgrimage, and offering photography of Kent to remind the public of what made Britain worth fighting for. In one scene a local historian lectures an audience of British soldiers about the pilgrims of Chaucer's time and the vibrant history of England.⁵⁴

Pier Paolo Pasolini's 1972 film *The Canterbury Tales* features several of the tales, some of which keep close to the original tale and some of which are embellished. The Cook's Tale, for instance, which is incomplete in the original version, is expanded into a full story, and the Friar's Tale extends the scene in which the Summoner is dragged down to hell. The film includes these two tales as well as the Miller's Tale, the Summoner's Tale, the Wife of Bath's Tale, and the Merchant's Tale.

On April 26, 1986, American radio personality Garrison Keillor opened "The News from Lake Wobegon" portion of the first live TV broadcast of his *A Prairie Home Companion* radio show with a reading of the original Middle English text of the General Prologue. He commented, "Although those words were written more than 600 years ago, they still describe spring."

English rock musician Sting paid tribute to Chaucer and the book with his 1993 concept album *Ten Summoner's Tales*, which he described as ten songs (plus an epilogue number) with no theme or subject tying them together. Sting's real

⁵⁴ Chawcer undoubtedly did excellently in his Troilus and Creseid: of whome trulie I knowe not whether to mervaille more, either that hee in that mistie time could see so clearly, or that wee in this cleare age, goe so stumblingly after him." The text can be found at uoregon.edu

name is Gordon Sumner, hence the reference to the "Summoner" character in the record's title. In essence, the collection of songs was composed as "a musical Canterbury Tales".

Several more recent films, while they are not based on the tales, do have references to them. For example, in the 1995 film *Se7en*, the Parson's Tale is an important clue to the methods of a serial killer who chooses his victims based on the seven deadly sins.⁵⁵ The 2001 film *A Knight's Tale* took its name from "The Knight's Tale". Although it bears little resemblance to the tale, it does feature what Martha Driver and Sid Ray call an "MTV-generation" Chaucer who is a gambling addict with a way with words. Scattered references to the Tales include Chaucer's declaration that he will use his verse to vilify a summoner and a pardoner who have cheated him.

Television adaptations include Alan Plater's 1975 re-telling of the stories in a series of plays for BBC2: *Trinity Tales*. In 2003, BBC again featured modern re-tellings of selected tales.

⁵⁵ Rossignol, Rosalyn. *Chaucer A to Z: the essential reference to his life and works*. New York: 1999. 72-73

3.2. An Analysis of the Characters of The Canterbury Tales

The Canterbury Tales is at once one of the most famous and most frustrating works of literature ever written. Since its composition in late 1300s, critics have continued to mine new riches from its complex ground, and started new arguments about the text and its interpretation. Chaucer's richly detailed text, so Dryden said, was "God's plenty", and the rich variety of the Tales is partly perhaps the reason for its success. It is both one long narrative (of the pilgrims and their pilgrimage) and an encyclopedia of shorter narratives; it is both one large drama, and a compilation of most literary forms known to medieval literature: romance, fabliau, Breton lay, moral fable, verse romance, beast fable, prayer to the Virgin... and so the list goes on. No single literary genre dominates the Tales. The tales include romantic adventures, fabliaux, saint's biographies, animal fables, religious allegories and even a sermon, and range in tone from pious, moralistic tales to lewd and vulgar sexual farces. More often than not, moreover, the specific tone of the tale is extremely difficult to firmly pin down.⁵⁶

This, indeed, is down to one of the key problems of interpreting the Tales themselves - voice: how do we ever know who is speaking? Because Chaucer, early in the Tales, promises to repeat the exact words and style of each speaker as best he can remember it, there is always a tension between Chaucer and the pilgrim's voice he ventriloquises as he re-tells his tale: even the "Chaucer" who is a character on the pilgrim has a distinct and deliberately unChaucerian voice. Is it the Merchant's voice – and the Merchant's opinion – or Chaucer's? Is it Chaucer the character or Chaucer the writer? If it is Chaucer's, are we supposed to take it at face value, or view it ironically? It is for this reason that, throughout this ClassicNote, a conscious effort has been made to refer to the speaker of each tale (the Merchant, in the Merchant's Tale, for example) as the "narrator", a catch-all term which represents both of, or either one of, Chaucer and the speaker in question.

⁵⁶ A Leaf from The Canterbury Tales. Westminster, England: William Caxton, [1478]

No-one knows for certain when Chaucer began to write the Tales – the pilgrimage is usually dated 1387, but that date is subject to much scholarly argument – but it is certain that Chaucer wrote some parts of the Tales at different times, and went back and added Tales to the melting pot. The Knight's Tale, for example, was almost certainly written earlier than the Canterbury project as a separate work, and then adapted into the voice of the Knight; and the Second Nun's Tale, as well as probably the Monk's, probably have a similar compositional history.

Chaucer drew from a rich variety of literary sources to create the Tales, though his principal debt is likely to Boccaccio's Decameron, in which ten nobles from Florence, to escape the plague, stay in a country villa and amuse each other by each telling tales. Boccaccio likely had a significant influence on Chaucer. The Knight's Tale was an English version of a tale by Boccaccio, while six of Chaucer's tales have possible sources in the Decameron: the Miller's Tale, the Reeve's, the Clerk's, the Merchant's, the Franklin's, and the Shipman's. However, Chaucer's pilgrims to Canterbury form a wider range of society compared to Boccaccio's elite storytellers, allowing for greater differences in tone and substance.⁵⁷

The text of the Tales itself does not survive complete, but in ten fragments (see 'The texts of the Tales' for further information and specific orders). Due to the fact that there are no links made between these ten fragments in most cases, it is extremely difficult to ascertain precisely in which order Chaucer wanted the tales to be read. This Classic Note corresponds to the order followed in Larry D. Benson's "Riverside Chaucer", which is undoubtedly the best edition of Chaucer currently available.

An interesting aspect of the famous literary work, "The Canterbury Tales," is the contrast of realistic and exaggerated qualities that Chaucer entitles to each of his characters. When viewed more closely, one can determine whether each of the characters is convincing or questionable based on their personalities. This essay

⁵⁷ Brewer, Derek, ed. (1978). Chaucer: The Critical Heritage. Volume 1: 1385-1837. London: Routledge & Kegan Paul. p. 230. ISBN 0710084978. Retrieved 18 May 2014.

will analyze the characteristics and personalities of the Knight, Squire, Monk, Plowman, Miller, and Parson of Chaucer's tale.

One of Geoffrey's less believable main characters is the Knight, for reasons of chivalry. The knight displays many traits which make him seem almost too good to be true, and a true gentleman that rarely exists in reality. The narrator sums up the knight's character by stating that "Though he were worthy, he was wys,/And of his port as meeke as is a mayde." (pg. 5, *The Canterbury Tales*) The knight holds four main admirable traits, making him the most liked traveler in "*The Canterbury Tales*," and also amplifying the doubt of his realism. The reader is prepared to learn of each of his noble accomplishments and importance when the narrator remarks that "A knight ther was, and that a worthy man,/That fro the tyme that he first bigan/To ryden out, he loved chivalrye,/Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisye." (pg. 4, *The Canterbury Tales*) From the character's impressive introduction, it is clear that this man is the most valued and honorable traveler among the group. This perfect gentleman holds a love of ideals that are often not displayed by people. First and foremost, he believes in the ideals of chivalry, and always stays true to its principles. He also feels that one should be honest, truthful and faithful, which many people are not all of these ideals. The knight thinks one should only do what is right, and what will gain him honor and reputation. This character also believes in freedom and generosity towards all, and displays this ideal repeatedly throughout the novel. And lastly, the knight also strongly feels that any proper person should display courtesy and elegance at all times. Another aspect of this character's life which makes him seem too prestigious to be truthful is his impressive military career. He fought in the holy war, known as the Crusades and was involved in 15 "mortal battles." In the prologue, the narrator informs the reader that "Ful worthy was he in his lordes werre,/And therto hadde he riden, no man ferre,/As wel in Cristendom as hethenesse,/And ever honoured for his worthinesse." (pg. 4, *The Canterbury Tales*) The knight obviously held a very respectable reputation, and was treated with much honor and respect. He was a perfect gentleman, showing kindness and understanding to everyone he came in

contact with. The knight was extremely well-mannered, always being on his best behavior. His appearance was the "finishing touch," adding honor and integrity to his courageous and gentle spirit. This main character was clothed still in his armor, wearing a tunic of harsh cloth and his coat of mail is rust-stained, clearly showing remaining signs of past battles. "Of fustian he wored a gipoun/Al bismotered with his habergeoun;/For he was late y-come from his viage." (pg. 4, The Canterbury Tales) The qualities of the knight resemble those of very few people in modern society, giving a quality of exaggeration to the perfectness found in the knight. He represents the embodiment of the ideal man as seen by Chaucer.

The knight's son however, the Squire, does not display the degree of falseness the knight does. The vivacious personality of this young man closely resembles that of a modern man. He is a "lusty bachelor" of twenty, who is ultimately concerned with his appearance. He places more importance on fighting for his lady's honor, unlike his father who fought for abstract ideals or God. He also wore stylish, but very "daring" garments. The squire was dressed in a very short gown, equal in extremity to today's modern mini-skirt, which was looked down upon by the Church. The vain squire made every effort to ensure that he had perfectly curled hair. "With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse." (pg. 6, The Canterbury Tales) It seems as though it appeared that this young man purposely curled his hair, just as a woman would do. He is described as being as fresh as the month of May, showing his cleanless and delightful appearance to which he took so much pride. "He was as fresh as is the month of May." (pg. 6, The Canterbury Tales) This young man is slowly but surely aspiring to knighthood just as his father did, therefore he's courteous, humble, and respects his father because he is an apprentice to his father. The young man did however, hold many social talents, which were important to have when becoming a knight. He has the abilities to sing, dance, write songs and poems, and joust, which were all important social accomplishments. The vain attitude of the Squire, and his selfish outlook, relate closely to the shallow demeanor of people today. However, due to the acuteness of the squire's perfection in the sense of manlihood, he can also be viewed as a sort of

a fairytale "Prince Charming." Fairy tale heroes relate very well to the squire, because both are willing to do whatever they can for the love of a lady. The squire seems to possess all that a lady might dream of: agility, strength, courtesy, a nice family, manners, and good looks. Prince Charming would also possess these ideal traits and follow these lines almost exactly. Both the squire and Prince Charming are meant to be "good guys," and they both are in many aspects. They are well bred and chivalrous, fight well for honor, and have the flaw of falling in love for beauty and passion. This comparison and likeness to the fairytale prince also gives this young squire his own degree of falseness and exaggeration. In certain aspects, the Monk also displays the impression of realism through his personality and actions.⁵⁸

The Monk is not an ordinary holy man, but yet a worldly man who holds dear his means of personal enjoyment. He holds a very cocky, sarcastic attitude, not normally found in men of the church, which is the biggest sign of his realistic vitality. Monks usually stay apart from the outside world, not go out for "venery," a word that carries sexual connotations, or in other words hunts for pleasure, which definitely sets this Monk apart from his other church officials. The narrator states that "This ilke Monk leet olde thinges pace, And held after the newe world the space." (pg. 10, *The Canterbury Tales*) This statement indicates to the reader that this Monk finds joy and happiness in modern privileges, differing him from conventional church officials. He is introduced as "An out-rydere, that lovede venerye;/ A manly man, to been an abbot able." (pg. 8, *The Canterbury Tales*) The author describes him as being a "manly man," providing the reader with the assumption that the monk took his hunting and other "manly" activities very seriously. The author also makes it a point however, to state that he was a "fat and personable priest." So in essence, this particular monk has an unusual appearance, such explained by the Host, that he appears as though he's in charge of food and drink, or like a rooster with plenty of hens. This description confirms the

⁵⁸ Hopper, Vincent Foster, *Chaucer's Canterbury Tales (Selected): An Interlinear Translation*, Barron's Educational Series, 1970, ISBN 0-8120-0039-0

impression that this Monk appears quite different from other religious figures, but yet is realistic due to his actions and appreciation of worldly pleasures. In order to explain his love of the hunt, the narrator states: "Of prikyng and of huntynge for the hare/Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare." (pg. 34, *The Canterbury Tales, A Literary Pilgrimage*) He differs greatly from other church officials in that he appears to believe it's pointless to follow his monastic duties. His rejection of the life of one's mind is explicit, and the narrator agrees: "And I seyde his opinion was good./What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood." (Pg. 35, *The Canterbury Tales, A Literary Pilgrimage*) This Monk particularly enjoys hunting, a pastime of the nobility, which proves that the Monk cares about enjoyment rather than concerning himself with his religious duties all the time. The monk often "hunted a hare" or any other type of game that suited him. His values and attitude resemble the selfish corrupt ideals of people, who partake in actions without considering the consequences or benefit of others. This character seems to have a mix of both realistic aspects and exaggerated ones. The Monk's selfishness and desire for recreation gives him the realistic feature. However, the author's stress of his sarcasm and selfishness also applies an angle of exaggeration to his character. An emphasis of a certain trait can also be examined in the Plowman.

The Plowman is stressed as the example of an ideal middle class citizen. "A trewe swinker and a good was he,/Livinge in pees and parfit charite;" (pg. 26, *The Canterbury Tales*) This character is a very chivalrous workman, just as the knight was. By looking closely at this character's actions and dialogue, it can be inferred that he is the type of individual who would gladly work for a person without pay. He pays all his Church taxes on time, and is a devoted churchgoer. This citizen treats his neighbor as he would want to be treated, making him well-liked, much as the knight was. Also, he is certainly not as rowdy as the other characters. He is a decent human being, and portrays a hard-working, devoted citizen, giving him much in common with the chivalrous knight. The plowman's personality can be related to the common working class citizen of today, with the exception of a

slight exaggerated flawlessness. Another character portraying an actual individual would be in the case of the Miller.

The Miller is an obnoxious character who represents the modern day bully in a sense. He is a large man with imposing figure, making him seem more powerful than the other characters. This intimidation is developed by the physical description of the miller. The workman is brawny, big-boned and muscular, and is also a good wrestler. This character is said to have a red beard and hair. He also has a rude and corrupt attitude treating his fellow travelers with contempt. His character matches the medieval conception that millers were the most important but dishonest tenants on a manor farm. He is shameless and selfish, and has a bad temper and is easily angered. In one instance, this character stole corn and proceeded to charge three times the price, thinking nothing of the person he stole from. This man shows his vulgar and rude temperament when he becomes irritated upon hearing the Knight's tale of kings and queens and knights and ladies. He drunkly shouts, "I wol now quyte the Knyghtes tale." (pg. 146, *The Canterbury Tales*) The Host interrupts the drunken man and pleads with him to wait to tell his tale, but he refuses and the Host criticizes him for his stubbornness. "Thou art a fool; thy wit is overcome." (pg. 146, *The Canterbury Tales*) He continues to entertain his fellow travelers by telling a tale about a devious student who plans to have an affair with the wife of a dimwitted carpenter, showing his immaturity and delight in other people's misery. He also is said to have developed a "Hell mouth," or speaks "in Pilates voys." The miller's character can be viewed as realistic, because his personality matches that of a modern day bully, in that he is very intimidating, rude and uncaring. However, his characteristic anger is slightly overstressed.⁵⁹

The Parson on the other hand, was a very religious, devoted, decent man. He is described as being very principled and intelligent. The parson is very noble and sets a good example towards his fellow parishioners. It is stated by the author that he is "also a lerned man, a clerk, That Cristes gospel trewely wolde preche" (pg. 480, *The Canterbury Tales*) He even hates collecting income taxes from his

⁵⁹ A Leaf from *The Canterbury Tales*. Westminster, England: William Caxton, [1478] pg. 146,

citizens. He is known to practice what he preaches, and his values and hard work sets a good example for the common people. He worked very hard to better the lives of others around him, and therefore worked in the absence of the comforts that tend to come along with fame and glory. The Parson is in many ways the ideal traveler on the journey to Canterbury. He is learned, but unlike the other men, possess much virtue. He realizes that if the priest that the people put their trust and faith in is machiavellian, then no one can ever expect the people to be virtuous. "For if a preest be foul, on whom we truste,/No wonder is a lewed man to ruste;/" (pg. 24, *The Canterbury Tales*) This Parson is favorable over many other church officials, because unlike them he does not run off to bigger and better places and rent his parish to someone else. These ideal qualities make him more approved than many of the other travelers, especially spiritually. He worked hard to spread goodness, act charitably, and was never hypocritical. These commendable qualities makes him a suitable parallel to what the world might view now as a model human being. Such virtue and qualities seem too good to be true, and in a way represent what every person should be like instead of how they really are.

In essence, the plot development is also based on the development of the characters and the contrast of reality and exaggeration. Chaucer purposely chose to give his characters certain aspects of reality and exaggerated traits to help develop each of the characters' tales. It is noticeable in the novel that each character's tale matches his or her personality in one way or another. For example, the knight's heroic tale of chivalry and kings and queens obviously coincides with his traits and lifestyle. The Miller's tale of dishonesty and cheating also matches his personality of anger and rudeness. Chaucer's use of characterization helps to establish the plot and motives of the tale. Of course, the tales told by each of Chaucer's characters reciprocates the personality traits displayed by them. The knight spoke a tale of chivalry and virtue and of ladies in waiting, while the Squire spoke of love and intrigue in his story. The differences in their personalities leads to the conflicts and balance of reality and exaggeration. The knight for example, shows a great degree of embellishment because he is so well mannered and holds such virtuous ideals,

which are not commonly displayed by normal beings, because of the selfish nature of humans. The knight seems to represent what Chaucer believes everyone should be like, and holds the values that people seem to overlook. The Squire, on the other hand, shows a more realistic display of characteristics, and adds variety to the story line. He displays a sense of reality in that he isn't as concerned with honor and values as his father, but rather with his own enjoyment and vanity. Chaucer's novel would be incomplete without the continuing budding of his characters. ⁶⁰

⁶⁰ Skeat, W.W., *The Complete Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1899

CONCLUSION

The term Middle English literature refers to the literature written in the form of the English language known as Middle English, from the 12th century until the 1470s. During this time the Chancery Standard, a form of London-based English became widespread and the printing press regularized the language. Between the 1470s and the middle of the following century there was a transition to early Modern English. In literary terms, the characteristics of the literary works written did not change radically until the effects of the Renaissance and Reformed Christianity became more apparent in the reign of King Henry VIII. There are three main categories of Middle English Literature: Religious, Courtly love, and Arthurian, though much of Geoffrey Chaucer's work stands outside these. Among the many religious works are those in the Katherine Group and the writings of Julian of Norwich and Richard Rolle.

It is commonly assumed that medieval chivalric literature, with its estimate of the values of romantic love and knightly prowess, is secular in orientation and sharply distinct from clerical literature, which espouses contempt for the world, suspicion of the flesh, and a rejection of prideful self-advancement. Discuss major chivalric works to test the validity of this distinction. Include at least three of the following: Chaucer's Knight's Tale, Chaucer's Troilus, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Chretien's Lancelot, and Malory's Le Morte D'Arthur.

Geoffrey Chaucer known as the Father of English literature, is widely considered the greatest English poet of the Middle Ages and was the first poet to be buried in Poets' Corner of Westminster Abbey.

While he achieved fame during his lifetime as an author, philosopher, alchemist and astronomer, composing a scientific treatise on the astrolabe for his ten-year-old son Lewis, Chaucer also maintained an active career in the civil service as a bureaucrat, courtier and diplomat. Among his many works, which include The Book of the Duchess, the House of Fame, the Legend of Good Women and Troilus and Criseyde, he is best known today for The Canterbury Tales.

Chaucer was a crucial figure in developing the legitimacy of the vernacular, Middle English, at a time when the dominant literary languages in England were French and Latin.

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in London sometime around 1343, though the precise date and location of his birth remain unknown. His father and grandfather were both London vintners; several previous generations had been merchants in Ipswich. In 1324 John Chaucer, Geoffrey's father, was kidnapped by an aunt in the hope of marrying the twelve-year-old boy to her daughter in an attempt to keep property in Ipswich. The aunt was imprisoned and the £250 fine levied suggests that the family was financially secure—bourgeois, if not elite. John Chaucer married Agnes Copton, who, in 1349, inherited properties including 24 shops in London from her uncle, Hamo de Copton, who is described in a will dated 3 April 1354 and listed in the City Hustings Roll as "moneyer"; he was said to be moneyer at the Tower of London. In the City Hustings Roll 110, 5, Ric II, dated June 1380, Geoffrey Chaucer refers to himself as *me Galfridum Chaucer, filium Johannis Chaucer, Vinetarii, Londonie'* .

Chaucer's age-like most historical ages—was an age of transition. This transition implies a shift from the medieval to the modern times, the emergence of the English nation from the "dark ages" to the age of enlightenment. Though some elements associated with modernity were coming into prominence,—yet mostly and essentially the age was medieval—unscientific, superstitious, chivalrous, religious-minded, and "backward" in most respects. The fourteenth century, as J. M. Manly puts it in *The Cambridge History of English Literature*, was "a dark epoch in the history of England". However, the silver lining of modernity did "succeed in piercing, here and there, the thick darkness of ignorance and superstition. In fact, the age of Chaucer was not stagnant: it was inching its way steadily and surely to the dawn of the Renaissance and the Reformation, which were yet a couple of centuries ahead. We cannot agree with Kitteredge who calls Chaucer's age "a singularly modern time". For that matter, not to speak of the fourteenth, even the eighteenth century was not "modern" in numerous respects. What we notice in

the fourteenth century is the start of the movement towards the modern times, and not the accomplishment of that movement, which was going to be a march of marathon nature. Robert Dudley French observes: "It was an age of restlessness, amid the ferment" of new life, that Chaucer lived and wrote. Old things and new appear side by side upon his pages, and in his poetry we can study the essential spirit, both of the age that was passing and of the age that was to come." What are these "old things and new:" and what made the age restless? The answer will be provided if we discuss the chief events and features of the age.

Chaucer's contribution to English versification is no less striking than to the English language. Again, it is an instance of a happy choice. He sounded the death-knell of the old Saxon alliterative measure and firmly established the modern one. Even in the fourteenth century the old alliterative measure had been employed by such a considerable poet as Langland for his *Piers the Plowman*, and the writer of *Sir Gawayne and the Green Knight*. Let us give the important features of the old measure which Chaucer so categorically disowned:

- There is no regularity in the number of syllables in each line. One line may have as few as six syllables and another as many as fourteen.
- The use of alliteration as the chief ornamental device and as the lone structural principle. All the alliterative syllables are stressed.
- The absence of end-rimes; and
- Frequent repetition to express vehemence and intensity of emotion.
- Chaucer had no patience with the "rum, ram, ruf" of the alliterative measure.

So does he maintain in the *Parson's Tale*:

- But trusteth wel, I am a southern man,
- I cannot geste-rum, ram, ruf,-by lettere,
- Ne, God wot, rym holde I but litel bettere.
- For that old-fashioned measure he substituted the regular line with end-rime, which he borrowed from France. The new measure has the following characteristics:

- All lines have the same number of syllables,

- End-rime,
- Absence of alliteration and frequent repetition.

After Chaucer, no important poet ever thought of reverting to the old measure. Thus, Chaucer may be designated "the father of modern English versification." Chaucer employs three principal metres in his works. In *The Canterbury Tales* he mostly uses lines of ten syllables each (with generally five accents); and the lines run into couplets; that is, each couple of lines has its end-syllables rhyming with each other.

The Canterbury Tales (Middle English: *Tales of Caunterbury*) is a collection of over 20 stories written in Middle English by Geoffrey Chaucer at the end of the 14th century, during the time of the Hundred Years' War. The tales (mostly written in verse, although some are in prose) are presented as part of a story-telling contest by a group of pilgrims as they travel together on a journey from Southwark to the shrine of Saint Thomas Becket at Canterbury Cathedral. The prize for this contest is a free meal at the Tabard Inn at Southwark on their return.

With *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's aim and practice as a poet underwent a sea change. He descended from the ethereal regions of romance and allegory and the dream-world of conventional literature, and planted his feet firmly on the ground. Here, to quote an opinion, "the fantastic world of romance and allegory melts away; Troy and Thebes, palaces made of glass and temples of brass,, allegorical gardens and marvellous fountains evaporate, and in their place we see the whole stream of English society in the fourteenth century." In *The Canterbury Tales* Nature herself became Chaucer's model. He saw what was, and painted that he saw.

Chaucer could have claimed like Fielding that he gave "the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth." He was decidedly the first realist in English literature. Much of his realism is indebted to his tendency towards self-effacement which is necessary for a dramatist and very desirable for a novelist. The dramatist himself does not appear on the stage. He reveals his characters through what they say and do and does not offer to interpret for the reader or the spectator their words

and deeds. The novelist does likewise, though he is much freer than the dramatist. Chaucer has well been called the first novelist even before the appearance of the novel, as also the first dramatist before the appearance of the drama in England.

Nevertheless, it must be emphasized that so far as *The Canterbury Tales* is concerned, Chaucer does not efface himself completely, though he does see what is and does paint it as he sees it. It is particularly true of the Prologue where he himself seems to be very much present like the guide in a picture gallery, nudging the spectator with his elbow and directing his attention to this or that feature of one portrait or the other. In the tales proper, however, the writer disappears completely and presents himself only as a reporter of the words and -deeds of the pilgrims on the road, who go jostling and story-telling and raising a cloud of dust behind them. Thus, whereas in the Prologue Chaucer adopts the static mode of characterization, in the tales he adopts the dramatic mode. In the Prologue it is he who is supposed to be enlightening us about the dress, appearance, habits, and salient traits of the pilgrims; in the tales he lets them do it for themselves.

Whether or not Chaucer was as unobtrusive a man as he presents himself in *The Canterbury Tales*, it is true that as an artist he followed the principle of least interference with his material. The degree of his self-effacement is really surprising. He does not project the tint of his likes and dislikes, fads and fetishes, views and prejudices on what he paints. He is no moralist either. "Like Shakespeare", says Compton-Rickett, "he makes it his business, in *The Canterbury Tales*, to paint life as he sees it, and leaves others to draw the moral." Thus, to conclude, "Chaucer sees what is and paints it as he sees it." And what is more, "he effaces himself in order to look at it better."

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