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English Faculty III

Course Paper

Theme: Geoffrey Chaucer`s "Canterbury Tales" as Panorama of English Society

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Contents

Introduction

The English literature is one of the richest sources of world literature. It has contributed much to the entire body of literature in the world. It has so much to discuss. However, we, first of all, should know who the creator of the English language as a literary language was, who brought it to the stage of it, and who put it in higher status than French. As would-be English philologists we should be certainly aware that it was Geoffrey Chaucer who lived in the 14th century and wrote his masterpiece "The Canterbury Tales" in the English language.

Chaucer's contribution to English literature is usually explained by the following:

1.   The Canterbury tales sum up all types of stories that existed in the middle ages.

2.   He managed to show different types of people that lived during his time and through these people he showed a true picture of the life of the 14th century. The pilgrims range in rank from a knight to poor plowman. Only the very highest and lowest rank – the nobility and the serfs – are missing.

3.   In Chaucer's age the English language was still divided by dialects, though London was rapidly making east midland into a standard language. Chaucer was the creator of a new literary language. He chose to write in English, the popular language of common people, though aristocracy of his time read and spoke French. Chaucer was the true founder of English literature.

4.   Chaucer was by learning a man of the middle age, but his attitude towards mankind was so broad-minded that his work is timeless. He is the earliest English poet who may still be read for pleasure today.[1]

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[1] M. Bakoeva, E. Muratova. M. Ochilova. English Literature. Tashkent. 2010 (p25)

The aim of this course paper is to analyze Geoffrey Chaucer's contribution to English literature, his masterpiece "Canterbury Tales", the problems which are raised in it, the life in the 14ᵗʰ century in England.

In this work we put the following *tasks*:

1. To analyze Geoffrey Chaucer's position in English literature and his contribution to it.
2. To get acquainted with demonstration of irony in Geoffrey Chaucer's work – Canterbury Tales
3. To summarize the Canterbury Tales and to analyze the General Prologue
4. To study The General Prologue as a depicter of the whole work
5. To analyze Themes, Motifs and Symbols in Canterbury Tales.

The subject of the work is analysis of Geoffrey Chaucer`s work Canterbury Tales.

The object of the work is the work "Canterbury Tales". We will analyze stories in the story, major themes, motifs, symbols.

The method of this course work is analytical.

The theoretical value of this work is that analyses can be used in further researches in this field.

The practical value is this work can be useful for seminars.

The structure of this course paper is standard. It contains introduction, two chapters, conclusion, and list of used literature.

Introduction part is intended to introduce to readers general information of the full theme of the work. Furthermore, it deals with the aim of the course paper as well. Also, it raises the problems that are supposed to be solved in the next two chapters.

-The first chapter gives full information about Chaucer as the founder of English literature, the creator of English as a new literary language.

-The second chapter is devoted to analyze specific features and functions of general prologue, major themes, motifs, and symbols. Moreover, it contains the analysis of general prologue as well.

Conclusion summarizes all analyses, which are made in the body part of course paper. Furthermore, there is some information about what we have done, and what we have learnt.

List of used literature are available at the end of the course paper.

Chapter I. Geoffrey Chaucer's life and works

1.1. Geoffrey Chaucer was the creator of English Language

It is a habit of modern criticism to praise writers for their originality, and Chaucer is often so praised. Dryden called him "the father of English literature" – for he was, if anyone, the initiator of an English literary tradition, and was the inventor of the English rhyming decasyllabic couplet. From the historical studies of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries` we know now that Chaucer's style reflects many of the conventions of medieval poetry and rhetoric and that his tales are based on folk tales or on narratives borrowed from Boccaccio, Petrarch, Nicholas Trivet, and so on. When we think about this "background," with its enormous element of convention and stereotype, it becomes harder to see what is original in him. Perhaps very little. Originality was not the virtue for medieval poets that it is for us; where we may scorn what is "derivative" in an author, the medieval would have praised his taste in choosing well. Nor did they romanticize their poet's "development" and did not seek out in his work clues to his personality or his private life. Moreover, writers themselves did not see the act of composition in quite the romantic way a modern writer might. "Poets were called "makers" and were viewed more often as craftsmen than as creators or artists. In his earlier works, Chaucer often presents himself humorously as a bookish scholar and naïve pedant hovering over "old books" and citing "authorities" – a mere scribe copying and adapting with myopic diligence."[2] What is missing in this image of the poet, and what must therefore remove from our minds, is the printing press; fro it was only that technological improvement – a century after Chaucer's time – which let writers imagine themselves initiating an unpredictable process of reproduction and addressing a "public" of unseen readers.

In these respects Chaucer was somewhat ahead of his time. More than other English writers of his age he saw himself as an originator and creator,

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[2] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales: A Selection, edited and with an introduction by Donald R. Howard, The United States of America, The John Hopkins University, 1969 (p28)

expecting a reputation and a measure of fame; in this he was more like his Italian contemporary Petrarch, whom he names with honor in the Clerk's Prologue. It has never been fashionable to call Chaucer a humanist, and it is true that he was untouched by many of the fads which characterized the early humanism of Italy in the fourteenth century. Yet he knew about Petrarch and Boccaccio and knew some of their works. Like them, he was interested in the ancient world and in ancient writers. Like them, he was concerned about the accurate preservation of texts (but especially those of his own works): in one of his short poems he scolds his copyist for making mistakes, and at the end of "Troilus and Criseyde" begs copyists to take care. Like them, too, he showed an interest in fame. In his earlier "House of Fame", though it shows fame as mere unpredictable noise not given justly, he demonstrates this interest; at the end of the "Troilus", though he modestly hopes that his work will be "subject to all poesy," he wishes it a place in literary tradition; in the Prologue to "The Legend of Good Women" and again in the Man of Law's Prologue he puts into the mouths of characters lists of his own works; and he gives a similar list in his "Retraction," though rejecting all such as "sounen into sin."[3]

He was perhaps also ahead of his time in the way he visualized his audience. Medieval writers sometimes used the phrase "readers and hearers"- by which they meant, probably, that their work would more often than not be read aloud. Chaucer himself evidently read his works to the court of Richard II – there is a manuscript drawing of him doing so, executed a few years after his death. Much has been made of the notion that he wrote his poems for oral delivery and thus conceived of them as performances before a court audience. Nevertheless, Chaucer seems to have imagined readers unknown to himself poring over his works. At the close of the "Troilus" he worries about the "diversity of our tongue" – that is, about whether speakers of other dialects would understand him and copy him correctly. And before the Miller's Tale he warns those who might be offended by its roughness to "turn over the leaf and choose another tale." In this last he

[3] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales: A Selection, edited and with an introduction by Donald R. Howard, The United States of America, The John Hopkins University, 1969 (p46)

seems to have in mind the more characteristically modern reader – a solitary person with book in hand. But literacy was not in the least common, the possession of books was rare, and a "reading public" in the modern sense scarcely existed at all. Chaucer himself says he owned sixty books (an enormous private library for those days) and read in bed (a luxurious use of expensive candles) ; when he envisages other readers like himself, solitary men who own their own books, he has in mind something new and still unusual.

All of this is the Chaucer we know from his works – Chaucer the writer and man of letters. What kind of private person he was is entirely a matter of guesswork. The intimate sense of his personality which we get from his writings – the "Chaucerian" irony and wit, the close observation of detail, his tolerant interest in people – is possibly our best and worthiest knowledge of the man himself. Bits and scraps of documents give us some facts about his whereabouts and employment as a civil servant, although none of them state that this Geoffrey Chaucer was the poet. But it is safe to assume that poet and civil servant were the same. Had there been two men of the same name at court, it would have occasioned comment; and there is one passage (The House of Fame, lines 652-60) where he describes finishing his "rekenynges" and coming home only to sit at another book, like a hermit, until bleary-eyed. We can build up a picture of a young man from an upper-middle-class home, sent to a noble house and then abroad to be trained in the niceties of high-born conduct, for a time possibly a student at the Inns of Court, where he would have had training in law and finance. (There is a report from the sixteenth century that the old records of the Inner Temple showed he was fined two shillings fro beating a Franciscan friar in Fleet Street.) He was employed by the Crown on various ambassadorial missions to France, Spain, Flanders, and Italy, and held various civil service posts – Clerk of the Customs, Clerk of the King's Works – to which he was appointed by the King. He was especially under the patronage of John of Gaunt. His marriage to Philippa Roet was apparently arranged through these alliances in a businesslike manner; he had two sons and possibly two daughters. He jokingly refers to himself in his early

poems as an outsider to love; but he probably means by this – if he means anything serious – that his social position, that of an "esquire," made the aristocratic conventions of love inappropriate for him. It is true that as an important functionary and as court poet he mixed freely with titled aristocrats of the greatest importance; but it is also true that he was not fully their equal. His ironic detachment and self-humor probably spring in part from this relationship with an aristocratic audience.

Medieval social theory held that society was made up of three "estates": the nobility, composed of a small hereditary aristocracy, whose mission on earth was to rule over and defend the body politic; the church, whose duty was to look after the spiritual welfare of that body; and everyone else, the large mass of commoners who were supposed to do the work that provided for its physical needs. By the late fourteenth century, however, there basic categories were layered into complex, interrelated, and unstable social strata among which birth, wealth, profession, and personal ability all played a part in determining one's status in a world that was rapidly changing economically, politically, and socially. Chaucer's life and his works, especially "The Canterbury Tales", were profoundly influenced by these forces a growing and prosperous middle class was beginning to play increasingly important roles in church and state, blurring the traditional class boundaries, and it was into this middle class that Chaucer was born.

Chaucer was the son of a prosperous wine merchant and probably spent his boyhood in the mercantile atmosphere of London's Vintry, where ships docked with wines from France and Spain. Here he would have mixed daily with people of all sorts, heard several languages spoken, become fluent in French, and received schooling in Latin. Instead of apprenticing Chaucer to the family business, however, his father was apparently able to place him, in his early teens, as a page in one of the great aristocratic households of England, which of the countess of Ulster who was married to Prince Lionel, the second son of Edward III. There Chaucer would have acquired the manners and skills required for a career in the

service of the ruling class, not only in the role of personal attendant in royal households but in a series of administrative posts.

We can trace Chaucer's official and personal life in a considerable number of surviving historical documents, beginning with a reference, in Elizabeth of Ulster's household accounts, to an outfit he received as a page (1357). He was captured by the French and ransomed in one of Edward III's campaigns during the Hundred Years War (1359). He was a member of King Edward's personal household and took part in several diplomatic missions to Spain, France, and Italy.

1.2. Demonstration of irony in Geoffrey Chaucer's work – Canterbury Tales

Irony is the general name given to literary techniques that involve surprising, interesting, or amusing contradictions. Two stories that serve as excellent demonstrations of irony are "The Pardoners Tale" and "The Nun's Priest's Tale," both from Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. Although these two stories are very different, they both use irony to teach a lesson. Of the stories, "The Pardoners Tale" displays the most irony. First and foremost, the entire telling of the story is ironic, considering just who is the teller. The Pardoner uses this story to speak out against many social problems, all of which he himself is guilty of. He preaches about drunkenness, while he is drunk, blasphemy, as he attempts to sell fake religious relics, and greed, when he himself is amazingly greedy. Yet there are also many ironic situations in the story itself. The irony starts when, in the beginning of the story, the three rioters make a pact to "be brothers" and "each defend the others" and "to live and die for one another" in protection from Death, (lines 37-43) and then in going out to fulfill their vow, they end up finding money, and killing each other over it.

Even more ironic, is how they end up killing each other. After finding the money, the men plan to stay with it until it becomes dark and they can safely take it away. To tide themselves over until then, they send the youngest one out to get food and wine, and while he is away they plan to kill for his share of the money. Ironically, the youngest one is planning the same thing so he slips poison into the drinks of his companions. When he returns, he is attacked and stabbed to death by the other men. Then, in probably the most ironic action in the whole story, the murderers, to congratulate themselves, drink from the poisoned cup and die. "The Nun's Priest's Tale" is also laden with irony, the most obvious of which is the characters themselves. The story begins by telling of an old woman who owns several farm animals, but while the woman is described as "a poor old widow," who "led a patient, simple life," while the animals are described as royalty. For example, the animals had regal names and titles, yet the woman had none at all. The first concrete example of irony occurs after Chanticleer has told Pertelote of

his dream, and she makes fun of him. Chanticleer says "Mulier est hominis confusio," which he tells her means "Woman is man's delight and all his bliss," but in reality means that woman leads to the destruction of man. Although Chanticleer means to tease her, it becomes ironic when Pertelote's advice for Chanticleer to ignore his dream ends up leading to his downfall. His downfall occurs when Chanticleer is tricked by the fox into his trap, but what is ironic is the downfall of the fox. When the fox has caught Chanticleer he says to him, that misfortune will come to those who talk when they should be quiet, but this lack of silence from the fox leads to his loss. The fox had captured Chanticleer by flattering him until he did something foolish enabling the fox to capture him. Later, Chanticleer flatters the fox until he does something foolish, enabling Chanticleer to escape. Both of their foolish acts involved their vanity making them brag and speak when they should have been silent. Also ironic about this whole situation, was the fact that in the fox flattering Chanticleer he mocked his wisdom and reason and in defense Chanticleer acts by displaying neither of these qualities.

Both "The Pardoner's Tale" and "The Nun's Priest's Tale" utilize the tool of irony to teach two similar lessons. The moral of "The Pardoner's Tale" is "Money is the root of all evil". Similarly, the moral of the "Nun's Priest's Tale" is that vanity will eventually lead to destruction. By teaching this in two very different stories Chaucer makes it very clear that irony is an extremely effective method of teaching a lesson.

One of the great characteristics of this story is the unique diversity of the characters illustrated by the author: "Chaucer's pilgrim narrators represent a wide spectrum of ranks and occupations. The great variety of tales is matched by the diversity of their tellers".[4] Characters are well described.

Though he is paid to bring sinners to court, he quickly accepts bribes to look the other way. He enjoys women of "questionable reputation" and lots of wine, occasionally spouting off some Latin after indulging himself.

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[4] The Norton Anthology of English Literature, seventh edition, volume 1, M.H. Abrams. The United States of America, 2000 (p118)

How can a man exact vengeance on God if there is nothing a mortal can do to hurt Him? The Pardoner was born sterile, which resulted in abnormal physical development. He blames God for his deformities and attempts to attack God by attacking the link between God and mankind – the Church.

In The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer indirectly depicts the characters through the stories they tell. The tale is a window upon the person that tells it. However, the Pardoner's tale seems to contradict this situation. The Pardoner, an immoral man, tells a moral story because he believes that doing this will further his ultimate objective – revenge upon God for his anomalous physical attributes. "He had the same small voice a goat has got. / His chin no beard had harboured, nor would harbour, / smoother than ever chin was left by barber. / I judge he was a gelding, or a mare".[5]

The most corrupt of the churchmen, the Pardoner sells pardons for sins to the highest bidder. Beardless with a high-pitched voice, he is referred to by Chaucer as "a gelding or a mare."

According to the Norton Anthology, "the composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life, although a few were probably written earlier and inserted into The Canterbury Tales"[6]

Chaucer's original plan for *The Canterbury Tales* – if we assume it to be the same as that which the fictional Host proposes at the end of *The General Prologue* – projected about one hundred twenty stories, two for each pilgrim to tell on the way to Canterbury and two more on the way back. Chaucer actually completed only twenty-two and the beginnings of two others. He wrote an ending, for the Host says to the Parson, who tells the last tale, that everyone except him has told "his tale." Indeed, the pilgrims never even get to Canterbury. The work was probably first conceived in 1386, when Chaucer was living in Greenwich, some

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[5] Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales: A Selection, edited and with an introduction by Donald R. Howard, The United States of America, 1969 (p165)

[6] The Norton Anthology of English Literature, seventh edition, volume 1, M.H. Abrams. The United States of America, 2000 (p170)

miles east of London. From his house he might have been able to see the pilgrim road that led toward the shrine of the famous English saint, Thomas à Becket, the archbishop of Canterbury who was murdered in his cathedral in 1170. Medieval pilgrims were notorious tale tellers, and the sight and sound of bands riding toward Canterbury may well have suggested to Chaucer the idea of using a fictitious pilgrimage as a framing device for a number of stories. Collections of stories linked by such a device were common in the later Middle Ages. Chaucer's contemporary John Gower had used one in his *Confessio Amantis*. The most famous medieval framing tale besides Chaucer's is Boccaccio's *Decameron*, in which ten different narrators each tell a tale a day for ten days. Chaucer could have known the Decameron, which contains a tale with plots analogous to plots found also in The Canterbury Tales, but these stories were widespread, and there is no proof that Chaucer got them from Boccacio.

Chaucer's artistic exploitation of the device is, in any case, altogether his own. Whereas in Gower a single speaker relates all the stories, and in Boccacio the ten speakers – three young gentlemen and seven young ladies – all belong to the same sophisticated social elite, Chaucer's pilgrim narrators represent a wide spectrum of ranks and occupations. This device, however, should not be mistaken for realism. It is highly unlikely that a group like Chaucer's pilgrims would ever have joined together and communicated on such seemingly equal terms. That is part of the fiction, as is the unspoken assumption that a group so large could have ridden along listening to one another tell tales in verse. The variety of tellers is matched by the diversity of their tales: tales are assigned to appropriate narrators and juxtaposed to bring out contrasts in genre, style, tone, and values. Thus the Knight's courtly romance about the rivalry of two noble lovers for a lady is followed by the Miller's fabliau of the seduction of an old carpenter's young wife by a student. In several of The Canterbury Tales there is a fascinating accord between the narrators and their stories, so that the story takes on rich overtones from what we have learned of its teller in The General prologue and elsewhere, and the character itself grows and is revealed by the story. Chaucer conducts two

fictions simultaneously – that of the individual tale and that of the pilgrim to whom he has assigned it. He develops the second fiction not only through The General Prologue but also through the "links," the interchanges among pilgrims connecting the stories. These interchanges sometimes lead to quarrels. Thus The Miller's Tale offends the Reeve, who takes the figure of the Miller's foolish, cuckolded carpenter as directed personally at himself, and he retaliates with a story satirizing an arrogant miller very much like the pilgrim Miller. "The antagonism of the two tellers provides comedy in the links and enhances the comedy of their tales. The links also offer interesting literary commentary on the tales by members of the pilgrim audience, especially the Host, whom the pilgrims have declared "governour" and "juge" of the storytelling."[7] Further dramatic interest is created by the fact that several tales respond to topics taken up by previous tellers. The Wife of Bath's thesis that women should have sovereignty over men in marriage gets a reply from the Clerk, which in turn elicits responses from the Merchant and the Franklin. The tales have their own logic and interest quite apart from the framing fiction; no other medieval framing fiction, however, has such varied and lively interaction between the frame and the individual stories.

The composition of none of the tales can be accurately dated; most of them were written during the last fourteen years of Chaucer's life, although a few were probably written earlier and inserted into The Canterbury Tales. The popularity of the poem in late medieval England is attested by the number of surviving manuscripts: more than eighty, none from Chaucer's lifetime. It was also twice printed by William Caxton, who introduced printing to England in 1476, and often reprinted by Caxton's early successors. The manuscripts reflect the unfinished state of the poem – the fact that when he died Chaucer had not made up his mind about a number of details and hence left many inconsistencies. The poem appears in the manuscripts as nine or ten "fragments" or blocks of tales; the order of the poems within each fragment is generally the same, but the order of the fragments

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[7] The Norton Anthology of English Literature, seventh edition, volume 1, M.H. Abrams. The United States of America, 2000 (p184)

themselves varies widely. The fragment containing The General Prologue; the Knight's, Miller's, and Reeve's tales; and the Cook's unfinished tale, always comes first, and the fragment consisting of The Parson's Tale and The Retraction always comes last. But the others, such as that containing the Wife of Bath, the Friar, and the Summoner or that consisting of the Physician and Pardoner or the longest fragment, consisting of six tales concluding with the Nun's Priest's, are by no means stable in relation to one another. The order followed here, that of the Ellesmere manuscript, has been adopted as the most nearly satisfactory.

In Canterbury tales Chaucer introduced a rhythmic pattern called iambic pentameter into English poetry. His pattern, or meter, consists of 10 syllables alternately unaccented and accented in each line. The lines may or may not rhyme. Iambic pentameter became a widely used meter in English poetry.

Chapter II. Analysis of Canterbury Tales and General Prologue

2.1. Canterbury Tales summary and analysis of general prologue

"When April comes with his sweet, fragrant showers, which pierce the dry ground of March, and bathe every root of every plant in sweet liquid, then people desire to go on pilgrimages." Thus begins the famous opening to *The Canterbury Tales*. The narrator (a constructed version of Chaucer himself) is first discovered staying at the Tabard Inn in Southwark (in London), when a company of twenty-nine people descend on the inn, preparing to go on a pilgrimage to Canterbury. After talking to them, he agrees to join them on their pilgrimage. Yet before the narrator goes any further in the tale, he describes the circumstances and the social rank of each pilgrim. He describes each one in turn, starting with the highest status individuals. *The Knight* is described first, as befits a 'worthy man' of high status. The Knight has fought in the Crusades in numerous countries, and always been honored for his worthiness and courtesy. Everywhere he went, the narrator tells, he had a 'sovereyn prys' (which could mean either an 'outstanding reputation' or a price on his head for the fighting he has done). The Knight brings with him his son, *The Squire*, a lover and a lusty bachelor, only twenty years old. The Squire cuts a rather effeminate figure, his clothes embroidered with red and white flowers, and he is constantly singing or playing the flute. He is the only pilgrim (other than, of course, Chaucer himself) who explicitly has literary ambitions: he 'koude songes make and wel endite' (line 95). **The Yeoman** (a freeborn servant) also travels along with the Knight's entourage, and is clad in coat and hood of green. The Yeoman is excellent at caring for arrows, and travels armed with a huge amount of weaponry: arrows, a bracer (arm guard), a sword, a buckler, and a dagger as sharp as a spear. Having now introduced the Knight (the highest ranking pilgrim socially), the narrator now moves on to the clergy, beginning with *The Prioress*, called 'Madame Eglantine' (or, in modern parlance, Mrs. Sweetbriar). She could sweetly sing religious services, speaks fluent French and has excellent table manners. She is so charitable and piteous, that she would weep if she saw a mouse caught in a trap, and she has two small dogs with her. She wears a brooch with the

inscription 'Amor vincit omnia' ('Love conquers all'). The Prioress brings with her her 'chapeleyne' (secretary), **the Second Nun**. *The Monk* is next, an extremely fine and handsome man who loves to hunt, and who follows modern customs rather than old traditions. This is no bookish monk, studying in a cloister, but a man who keeps greyhounds to hunt the hare. *The Monk* is well-fed, fat, and his eyes are bright, gleaming like a furnace in his head. *The Friar* who follows him is also wanton and merry, and he is a 'lymytour' by trade (a friar licensed to beg in certain districts). He is extremely well beloved of franklins (landowners) and worthy woman all over the town. He hears confession and gives absolution, and is an excellent beggar, able to earn himself a farthing wherever he went. His name is Huberd. *The Merchan*t wears a forked beard, motley clothes and sat high upon his horse. He gives his opinion very solemnly, and does excellent business as a merchant, never being in any debt. But, the narrator ominously remarks, 'I noot how men hym calle' (I don't know how men call him, or think of him). *The Clerk* follows the Merchant. A student of Oxford University, he would rather have twenty books by Aristotle than rich clothes or musical instruments. He only has a little gold, which he tends to spend on books and learning, and takes huge care and attention of his studies. He never speaks a word more than is needed, and that is short, quick and full of *sentence* (the Middle-English word for 'meaningfulness' is a close relation of 'sententiousness'). *The Man of Law* (referred to here as 'A Sergeant of the Lawe') is a judicious and dignified man, or, at least, he seems so because of his wise words. He is a judge in the court of assizes, by letter of appointment from the king, and because of his high standing receives many grants. He can draw up a legal document, the narrator tells us, and no-one can find a flaw in his legal writings. Yet, despite all this money and social worth, the Man of Law rides only in a homely, multi-colored coat. **A Franklin** travels with the Man of Law. He is a big eater, loving a piece of bread dipped in wine, and is described (though not literally!) as Epicurus' son: the Franklin lives for culinary delight. His house is always full of meat pie, fish and meat, so much so that it 'snewed in his hous of mete and drynke'. He changes his meats and drinks according to what

foods are in season. **A Cook** had been brought along to boil the chicken up with marrow bones and spices, but this particular Cook knows a draught of ale very well indeed, according to the narrator. **A Doctor of Medicine** is the next pilgrim described, clad in red and blue, and no-one in the world can match him in speaking about medicine and surgery. He knows the cause of every illness, what humor engenders them, and how to cure them. He is well-read in the standard medical authorities. The Doctor, however, has not studied the Bible. *The Wife of Bath* was 'somdel deef' (a little deaf, as her tale will later expand upon) and that was a shame. She is so adept at making cloth that she surpasses even the cloth-making capitals of Chaucer's world, Ypres and Ghent, and she wears coverchiefs (linen coverings for the head) which must (the narrator assumes) have 'weyeden ten pound'. She is also described as 'Gat-tothed' (traditionally denoting lasciviousness), and as keeping good company, she knows all the answers about love: 'for she koude of that art the olde daunce' (she knew the whole dance as far as love is concerned!). A good religious man, **A Parson of a Town**, is next described, who, although poor in goods, is rich in holy thought and work. He's a learned man, who truly preaches Christ's gospel, and devoutly teaches his parishioners. He travels across his big parish to visit all of his parishioners, on his feet, carrying a staff in his hand. He is a noble example to his parishioners ('his sheep', as they are described) because he acts first, and preaches second. The narrator believes that there is no better priest to be found anywhere. With the Parson travels a **Plowman** (who does not tell a tale), who is a good, hard-working man, who lives in peace and charity, and treats his neighbor as he would be treated. He rides on a mare, and wears a tabard (a workman's loose garment). **A Miller** comes next, in this final group of pilgrims (now at the bottom of the class scale!). He is big-boned and has big muscles. There's not a door that he couldn't lift off its hinges, or break it by running at it head-first. He has black, wide nostrils, carries a sword and a buckler (shield) by his side, and has a mouth like a great furnace. But then, Chaucer implies, there are no honest millers. **A noble Manciple** (a business agent, purchaser of religious provisions) is the next pilgrim to be described, and a savvy

financial operator. Though a common man, the Manciple can run rings round even a 'heep of lerned men'. His description ominously ends, 'sette hir aller cappe': deceived them all. The **Reeve**, a slender, choleric man, long-legged and lean ("ylyk a staf"). He knows exactly how much grain he has, and is excellent at keeping his granary and his grain bin. There is no bailiff, herdsman or servant about whom the Reeve does not know something secret or treacherous; as a result, they are afraid of him 'as of the deeth'. *The Summoner* is next, his face fire-red and pimpled, with narrow eyes. He has a skin disease across his black brows, and his beard and he is extremely lecherous. There is, the narrator tells us, no ointment or cure, or help him to remove his pimples. He loves drinking wine which is as 'reed as blood', and eating leeks, onions and garlic. He knows how to trick someone. Travelling with the Summoner is a noble **Pardoner**, his friend and his companion (in what sense Chaucer intends the word 'compeer', meaning companion, nobody knows) and the last pilgrim-teller to be described. He sings loudly 'Come hither, love to me'.He carries a wallet full of pardons in his lap, brimful of pardons come from Rome. *The Pardoner* is sexually ambiguous - he has a thin, boyish voice, and the narrator wonders whether he is a 'geldyng or a mare' (a eunuch or a homosexual). The **Host** is the last member of the company described, a large man with bright, large eyes - and an extremely fair man. He welcomes everyone to the inn, and announces the pilgrimage to Canterbury, and decides that, on the way there, the company shall 'talen and pleye' (to tell stories and amuse themselves). Everyone consents to the Host's plan for the game, and he then goes on to set it out. What the Host describes is a tale-telling game, in which each pilgrim shall tell two tales on the way to Canterbury, and two more on the way home; whoever tells the tale 'of best sentence and moost solas' shall have supper at the cost of all of the other pilgrims, back at the Inn, once the pilgrimage returns from Canterbury. The pilgrims agree to the Host's suggestion, and agree to accord to the Host's judgment as master of the tale-telling game. Everyone then goes to bed. The next morning, the Host awakes, raises everyone up, and 'in a flok' the pilgrimage rides towards 'the Wateryng of Seint *Thomas*', a brook about two miles from London. The Host

asks the pilgrims to draw lots to see who shall tell the first tale, the Knight being asked to 'draw cut' first and, whether by 'aventure, or sort, or cas', the Knight draws the straw to tell the first tale. The pilgrims ride forward, and the Knight begins to tell his tale.

Analysis

The General Prologue was probably written early in the composition of the Canterbury Tales, and offers an interesting comparison point to many of the individual tales itself. Of course, it does not match up to the tales as we have them in a number of ways: the Nun's Priest and the Second Nun are not described, and, most significantly, the work as we have it does not reflect the Host's plan. For starters, the pilgrimage only seems to go as far as Canterbury (for the *Parson's Tale*) and only the narrator tells two tales on the way there, with all the other pilgrims telling only a single tale (and some who are described in the General Prologue not telling a tale at all). We must, therefore, view the General Prologue with some hesitation as a comparison point to the tales themselves: it offers useful or enlightening suggestions, but they are no means a complete, reliable guide to the tales and what they mean. What the General Prologue offers is a brief, often very visual description of each pilgrim, focusing on details of their background, as well as key details of their clothing, their food likes and dislikes, and their physical features. These descriptions fall within a common medieval tradition of portraits in words. Chaucer's influence is most likely coming from *The Romaunt de la Rose*. Immediately, narrator insists that his pilgrims are to be described by 'degree'. By the fact that the Knight, the highest-ranking of the pilgrims, is selected as the first teller, we see the obvious social considerations of the tale. Still, all human life is here: characters of both sexes, and from walks of life from lordly knight, or godly parson down to oft-divorced wife or grimy cook. Each pilgrim portrait within the prologue might be considered as an archetypal description. Many of the 'types' of characters featured would have been familiar stock characters to a medieval audience: the hypocritical friar, the rotund, food-loving monk, the rapacious miller

are all familiar types from medieval estates satire. What is key about the information provided in the General Prologue about these characters, many of whom *do* appear to be archetypes, is that it is among the few pieces of objective information - that is, information spoken by narrator that we are given throughout the Tales. The tales themselves are largely told in the words of the tellers: as our narrator himself insists in the passage. The words stand for themselves: and we interpret them as if they come from the pilgrims' mouths. What this does - and this is a key thought for interpreting the tales as a whole - is to apparently strip them of writerly license, blurring the line between Chaucer and his characters. Chaucer's voice, in re-telling the tales as accurately as he can, entirely disappears into that of his characters, and thus the Tales operates almost like a drama. Since the *Canterbury Tales* prologue presents a cross-section of medieval society, we can learn much about the daily lives of the people, the various classes, and social issues. We learn, first of all, about the three divisions of medieval society-feudal, town, and church--and the characters associated with each. We learn about the ways various characters dress--the short tunic of the young squire, which attracts the ladies; the fur-lined coat of the monk, which indicates his wealth and his secular hobby hunting; the red stockings of the Wife of Bath, revealing her wealth (Dye was expensive). We learn also that overweight bodies (such as the Nun's and the Monk's) were a sign of wealth and privilege. We learn more about various occupations. The Pardoner, for instance, sold fake relics to those searching for a place in heaven. The Summoner's job was to bring sinners to answer to the Church. We learn that medieval society was plagued by hypocritical church officials (for example, the Monk, Friar, Pardoner) who enriched themselves by preying on the poor and vulnerable. We learn that not all who worked for the church were truly pious, and that many were quite corrupt and heedless of their vows of poverty, chastity, and devotion. But we learn that those outside the church could also be corrupt. A street-smart Manciple could outsmart book-learned lawyers. A Miller can easily increase his profit by putting a heavy thumb on the scale. A Merchant could dress in finery but actually be in debt up to his eyeballs. An unsavory

Skipper might execute his prisoners. An otherwise skillful Cook might have an oozing sore. But then we learn also that virtue could be found in Medieval society. Some scholars, such as the Oxford Cleric, loved to learn and teach; some preachers led by example, such as the Parson; decent farmers, such as the Plowman, might lead humble and compassionate lives; hospitable Franklins might offer guests fine food and drink.

To put in a nutshell, we learn much about medieval society and much about our own with the assistance of Canterbury Tales.

2.2. General Prologue as a depicter of the whole work

The General Prologue fulfills two functions: it tells the story of how the tales came to be told, and it introduces the tellers. There are about thirty pilgrims travelling to Canterbury to pray to the holy blissful martyr- St. Thomas of Becket. These characters can be considered the portrait of the whole Middle English society. All the pilgrims can be divided into particular hierarchic structure of classes. The simplest division of society was into three estates: those who fight, those who pray, and those who labor, typified by the Knight, the Parson and the Plowman. Women were often treated as an estate to themselves. The basic tripartite division of society, for instance, is reflected in Chaucer's making his Knight, Parson and Plowman the three ideal characters on the pilgrimage- along with the Clerk to stand for those who learn and teach. However, we have to admit that this division is not so obvious, which we explained below. Chaucer starts the introduction of pilgrims with the highest-ranking layman, the Knight, with his support, and continues with the highest-ranking ecclesiastics, the Prioress and the Monk. The Merchant, Clerk, Sergeant of Law, and Franklin who follow were regarded more or less as social equals, and various other representatives of the middle classes, most of them keen to push themselves up the social ladder, follow in somewhat haphazard order. The Summoner and Pardoner are social and moral misfits in almost every sense, with no obvious place either in a class hierarchy or in the "common weal, society as a system of mutual support".[8]According to Helen Cooper, the basic organization then is by rank, but with some telling exceptions and some haphazardness: society is not an ordered hierarchy, not least because the people who compose it are reluctant to stay in their places.

Chaucer did not need to make a pilgrimage himself to meet the types of people that his fictitious pilgrimage includes, because most of them had long inhabited literature as well as life: the ideal Knight, who had taken part in all the major expeditions and battles of the crusades during the last half-century; his fashionably dressed son, the Squire, a typical young lover; the lady Prioress, the

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[8] Helen Cooper, Oxford Guides to Chaucer: The Canterbury Tales, Oxford University Press, 1996 (p56)

hunting Monk, and the flattering Friar, who practice the little vanities and larger vices for which such ecclesiastics were conventionally attacked; the prosperous Franklin; the fraudulent Doctor; the lusty and domineering Wife of bath; the austere Parson; and so on down through the lower orders to that spellbinding preacher and mercenary, the Pardoner, peddling his paper indulgences and phony relics. One meets all these types throughout medieval literature, but particularly in a genre called estates satire, which sets out to expose and pillory typical examples of corruption at all levels of society.

A remarkable number of details in The General Prologue could have been taken straight out of books as well as drawn from life. Although it has been argued that some of the pilgrims are portraits of actual people, the impression that they are drawn from life is more likely to be a function of Chaucer's art, which is able to endow types with a realty we generally associate only with people we know. This imitation of the way our minds actually perceive reality may make us fail to notice the care with which Chaucer has selected his details to give an integrated sketch of the person being described. Most of these details give something more than mere verisimilitude to the description. The pilgrims' facial features, the clothes they wear, the foods they like to eat, the things they say, the work they do are all clues not only to their social rank but to their moral and spiritual condition and, through the accumulation of detail, to the condition of late-medieval society, of which, collectively, they are representative.

What uniquely distinguishes Chaucer's prologue from more conventional estates satire, such as the Prologue to Piers Plowman, is the suppression in all but a few flagrant instances of overt moral judgment. The narrator, in fact, seems to be expressing chiefly admiration and praise at the superlative skills and accomplishments of this particular group. The reader is left free to draw out the ironic implications of details presented with such seeming artlessness, even while falling in with the easygoing mood of "felaweship" that pervades Chaucer's prologue to the pilgrimage.

2.3. Analysis of Themes, Motifs and Symbols in Canterbury Tales

Themes

Themes are the fundamental and often universal ideas explored in a literary work.

Feminism and anti-feminism

Chaucer was extremely interested in the role of women in society, and how they reacted to it. In the Wife of Bath's Tale, for example, Chaucer foregrounds the issue of female "maistrie", and in the series of Tales often called "the Marriage group" by critics, Chaucer actively explores the potential dynamics of a male-female marriage. In the Middle Ages, feminism had obviously not been invented; but one sees very clearly in the mouth of the Wife of Bath that ideas of female equality were by no means unusual.

Words and language

"What nedeth wordes mo?" ("What more needs to be said?") is a question that is constantly voiced, from the Knight's Tale all the way through the silencing theme of the final tale, the Manciple's. The nature of language, the value of words, whether words can ever have a true "meaning", or whether you can ever really "own" words are all themes which Chaucer scrutinizes at various points during the Tales.

Tellers as dramatic voices

The key structural complication of the Tales is the way that Chaucer situates himself within the fictional pilgrimage, claiming that he is simply recording what other people have said. Thus we are never sure whether any statement is the opinion of the teller (say, the Wife of Bath), of the fictional Chaucer ("Geffrey", as he is referred to in criticism) or of Chaucer himself. It is extremely difficult, due to the dramatic, "ventriloquised" nature of the tale-telling project, to actually ascertain who we are listening to at any one stage.

Quitting, vengeance and paying debts

There are several instances both within tales and across the structure of the work itself where one character resolves to "quit" another. The Miller, for example,

quits the Knight's Tale, only to have his tale quit by the Reeve - and later, the Summoner furiously quits the Friar's Tale with his own venemous anti-Friar narrative. Quitting often provides smaller internal structures within the larger structure of the Tales as a whole, and invites the comparison of one thing to another.

Sex and adultery

Many of Chaucer's Tales are interested in the way a marriage might work or fail to work. Look at any of the tales which dramatize adultery or cuckolding (the Miller's, the Reeve's, the Merchant's, the Wife of Bath's, etc.), focusing particularly on the way that sexual activity is depicted. Chaucer's presentation of sex varies wildly, sometimes present only through pointed euphemism (like the Wife's bele chose) and sometimes, like in the Reeve's or the Merchant's tales, vividly described.

Justice and judgment

The Franklin's Tale end with an explicit question to its audience, asking them to consider each of its characters and then decide which they think is the most generous. It is not the only tale to pose questions and invite comparisons of its characters: the Knight's Tale, for example, asks at the end of its first part whether Arcite or Palamon is better off, and the Merchant's Tale opens with a lively debate between Placebo and Justinus about whether January should marry. Chaucer often puts two things together (this could also be interestingly related to the idea of quitting) and invites the evaluation, the judgment, of one versus the other. Note too the moments in Tales when "justice", be it legal (in, say, the Wife of Bath's Tale) or comic (in, say, the Miller's Tale) is ultimately done: it's clear that justice, in Chaucer's world at least, is not always just.

Seriousness and silliness
or "Ernest" and "game", as Chaucer himself calls the duality in the Tales. Many of the comic tales have an undoubtedly serious side or incur serious consequences (the broken arm that John the carpenter suffers during his fall from grace, for example, in the Miller's Tale) and serious tales can often similarly have comic or ironic moments. The whole tale-telling project

remember, is, in the General Prologue, supposed to be "game", but instructive game - namely fun with a moral purpose. Whether the tales fulfill this definition is ultimately up to the reader.

The Pervasiveness of Courtly Love

The phrase "courtly love" refers to a set of ideas about love that was enormously influential on the literature and culture of the Middle Ages. Beginning with the Troubadour poets of southern France in the eleventh century, poets throughout Europe promoted the notions that true love only exists outside of marriage; that true love may be idealized and spiritual, and may exist without ever being physically consummated; and that a man becomes the servant of the lady he loves. Together with these basic premises, courtly love encompassed a number of minor motifs. One of these is the idea that love is a torment or a disease, and that when a man is in love he cannot sleep or eat, and therefore he undergoes physical changes, sometimes to the point of becoming unrecognizable. Although very few people's lives resembled the courtly love ideal in any way, these themes and motifs were extremely popular and widespread in medieval and Renaissance literature and culture. They were particularly popular in the literature and culture that were part of royal and noble courts.

Courtly love motifs first appear in The Canterbury Tales with the description of the Squire in the General Prologue. The Squire's role in society is exactly that of his father the Knight, except for his lower status, but the Squire is very different from his father in that he incorporates the ideals of courtly love into his interpretation of his own role. Indeed, the Squire is practically a parody of the traditional courtly lover. The description of the Squire establishes a pattern that runs throughout the General Prologue, and The Canterbury Tales: characters whose roles are defined by their religious or economic functions integrate the cultural ideals of courtly love into their dress, their behavior, and the tales they tell, in order to give a slightly different twist to their roles. Another such character is the Prioress, a nun who sports a "Love Conquers All" brooch.

The Importance of Company

Many of Chaucer's characters end their stories by wishing the rest of the "compaignye," or company, well. The Knight ends with "God save al this faire compaignye" (3108), and the Reeve with "God, that sitteth heighe in magestee, / Save al this compaignye, grete and smale!" (4322–4323). Company literally signifies the entire group of people, but Chaucer's deliberate choice of this word over other words for describing masses of people, like the Middle English words for party, mixture, or group, points us to another major theme that runs throughout The Canterbury Tales. Company derives from two Latin words, com, or "with," and pane, or "bread." Quite literally, a company is a group of people with whom one eats, or breaks bread. The word for good friend, or "companion," also comes from these words. But, in a more abstract sense, company had an economic connotation. It was the term designated to connote a group of people engaged in a particular business, as it is used today.

The functioning and well-being of medieval communities, not to mention their overall happiness, depended upon groups of socially bonded workers in towns and guilds, known informally as companies. If workers in a guild or on a feudal manor were not getting along well, they would not produce good work, and the economy would suffer. They would be unable to bargain, as a modern union does, for better working conditions and life benefits. Eating together was a way for guild members to cement friendships, creating a support structure for their working community. Guilds had their own special dining halls, where social groups got together to bond, be merry, and form supportive alliances. When the peasants revolted against their feudal lords in 1381, they were able to organize themselves well precisely because they had formed these strong social ties through their companies.

Company was a leveling concept—an idea created by the working classes that gave them more power and took away some of the nobility's power and tyranny. The company of pilgrims on the way to Canterbury is not a typical example of a tightly networked company, although the five Guildsmen do

represent this kind of fraternal union. The pilgrims come from different parts of society—the court, the Church, villages, the feudal manor system. To prevent discord, the pilgrims create an informal company, united by their jobs as storytellers, and by the food and drink the host provides. As far as class distinctions are concerned, they do form a company in the sense that none of them belongs to the nobility, and most have working professions, whether that work be sewing and marriage (the Wife of Bath), entertaining visitors with gourmet food (the Franklin), or tilling the earth (the Plowman).

The Corruption of the Church

By the late fourteenth century, the Catholic Church, which governed England, Ireland, and the entire continent of Europe, had become extremely wealthy. The cathedrals that grew up around shrines to saints' relics were incredibly expensive to build, and the amount of gold that went into decorating them and equipping them with candlesticks and reliquaries (boxes to hold relics that were more jewel-encrusted than kings' crowns) surpassed the riches in the nobles' coffers. In a century of disease, plague, famine, and scarce labor, the sight of a church ornamented with unused gold seemed unfair to some people, and the Church's preaching against greed suddenly seemed hypocritical, considering its great displays of material wealth. Distaste for the excesses of the Church triggered stories and anecdotes about greedy, irreligious churchmen who accepted bribes, bribed others, and indulged themselves sensually and gastronomically, while ignoring the poor famished peasants begging at their doors.

The religious figures Chaucer represents in The Canterbury Tales all deviate in one way or another from what was traditionally expected of them. Generally, their conduct corresponds to common medieval stereotypes, but it is difficult to make any overall statement about Chaucer's position because his narrator is so clearly biased toward some characters—the Monk, for example—and so clearly biased against others, such as the Pardoner. Additionally, the characters are not simply satirical versions of their roles; they are individuals and cannot simply be taken as typical of their professions.

The Monk, Prioress, and Friar were all members of the clerical estate. The Monk and the Prioress live in a monastery and a convent, respectively. Both are characterized as figures that seem to prefer the aristocratic to the devotional life. The Prioress's bejeweled rosary seems more like a love token than something expressing her devotion to Christ, and her dainty mannerisms echo the advice given by Guillaume de Loris in the French romance Roman de la Rose, about how women could make themselves attractive to men. The Monk enjoys hunting, a pastime of the nobility, while he disdains study and confinement. The Friar was a member of an order of mendicants, who made their living by traveling around and begging, and accepting money to hear confession. Friars were often seen as threatening and had the reputation of being lecherous, as the Wife of Bath describes in the opening of her tale. The Summoner and the Friar are at each other's throats so frequently in The Canterbury Tales because they were in fierce competition in Chaucer's time—summoners, too, extorted money from people.

Overall, the narrator seems to harbor much more hostility for the ecclesiastical officials (the Summoner and the Pardoner) than he does for the clerics. For example, the Monk and the Pardoner possess several traits in common, but the narrator presents them in very different ways. The narrator remembers the shiny baldness of the Monk's head, which suggests that the Monk may have ridden without a hood, but the narrator uses the fact that the Pardoner rides without a hood as proof of his shallow character. The Monk and the Pardoner both give their own opinions of themselves to the narrator—the narrator affirms the Monk's words by repeating them, and his own response, but the narrator mocks the Pardoner for his opinion of himself.

Motifs

Motifs are recurring structures, contrasts, and literary devices that can help to develop and inform the text's major themes.

Romance

The romance, a tale about knights and ladies incorporating courtly love themes, was a popular literary genre in fourteenth-century literature. The genre

included tales of knights rescuing maidens, embarking on quests, and forming bonds with other knights and rulers (kings and queens). In particular, the romances about King Arthur, his queen, Guinevere, and his society of "knights of the round table" were very popular in England. In The Canterbury Tales, the Knight's Tale incorporates romantic elements in an ancient classical setting, which is a somewhat unusual time and place to set a romance. The Wife of Bath's Tale is framed by Arthurian romance, with an unnamed knight of the round table as its unlikely hero, but the tale itself becomes a proto-feminist's moral instruction for domestic behavior. The Miller's Tale ridicules the traditional elements of romance by transforming the love between a young wooer and a willing maiden into a boisterous and violent romp.

Fabliaux

Fabliaux were comical and often grotesque stories in which the characters most often succeed by means of their sharp wits. Such stories were popular in France and Italy in the fourteenth century. Frequently, the plot turns or climaxes around the most grotesque feature in the story, usually a bodily noise or function. The Miller's Tale is a prime experiment with this motif: Nicholas cleverly tricks the carpenter into spending the night in his barn so that Nicholas can sleep with the carpenter's wife; the finale occurs when Nicholas farts in Absolon's face, only to be burned with a hot poker on his rear end. In the Summoner's Tale, a wealthy man bequeaths a corrupt friar an enormous fart, which the friar divides twelve ways among his brethren. This demonstrates another invention around this motif— that of wittily expanding a grotesque image in an unconventional way. In the case of the Summoner's Tale, the image is of flatulence, but the tale excels in discussing the division of the fart in a highly intellectual (and quite hilarious) manner.

Symbols

Symbols are objects, characters, figures, and colors used to represent abstract ideas or concepts.

Springtime

The Canterbury Tales opens in April, at the height of spring. The birds are chirping, the flowers blossoming, and people long in their hearts to go on pilgrimages, which combine travel, vacation, and spiritual renewal. The springtime symbolizes rebirth and fresh beginnings, and is thus appropriate for the beginning of Chaucer's text. Springtime also evokes erotic love, as evidenced by the moment when Palamon first sees Emelye gathering fresh flowers to make garlands in honor of May. The Squire, too, participates in this symbolism. His devotion to courtly love is compared to the freshness of the month of May.

Clothing

In the General Prologue, the description of garments, in addition to the narrator's own shaky recollections, helps to define each character. In a sense, the clothes symbolize what lies beneath the surface of each personality. The Physician's love of wealth reveals itself most clearly to us in the rich silk and fur of his gown. The Squire's youthful vanity is symbolized by the excessive floral brocade on his tunic. The Merchant's forked beard could symbolize his duplicity, at which Chaucer only hints.

Physiognomy

Physiognomy was a science that judged a person's temperament and character based on his or her anatomy. Physiognomy plays a significant role in Chaucer's descriptions of the pilgrims in the General Prologue. The most exaggerated facial features are those of the peasants. The Miller represents the stereotypical peasant physiognomy most clearly: round and ruddy, with a wart on his nose, the Miller appears rough and therefore suited to rough, simple work. The Pardoner's glaring eyes and limp hair illustrate his fraudulence.

Conclusion

The observer or narrator of the Canterbury Tales has joined a group of twenty-nine other pilgrims at the Tabard Inn in Southwark and has spoken to all of them. Thus he is an observer, just one of a group – accurate, interested, reporting in close detail what he has seen and learned. As he proceeds in this role, we get an idea of his character, and it is that of an exceedingly naïve fellow. He thinks the pilgrims are all perfect people and describes each with enormous enthusiasm, admiring them, in bourgeois fashion, for their appearance and their success – even when that success is in duplicity or thievery.

This unduly accepting observer is telling about the beginning of a pilgrimage from which he has now returned. No doubt he learned much more in a week or so than he would have seen at first glance in the inn. Like any returned traveler he must have picked up some guesses or surmises. But as we get further into his descriptions of his fellow pilgrims, we realize that he is reporting many more details than the average observer would normally see or guess. He knows how the Friar goes about his daily rounds, what he keeps concealed in his hood, how he hears confessions. He knows how the Prioress behaved in her convent and how the Summoner abused his office. He even knows what the Monk thinks (it seems unlikely that the Monk would have told all this) and hints broadly that the Monk's "outriding" and hunting was in fact a hunt for women. In short, though we started with a pilgrim-observer returned from his travels and reporting what he remembers, we end up with an almost omniscient observer and reporter who knows their thoughts and secrets.

Obviously behind this observer stands the poet himself, who can imagine and write down what he pleases. Indeed the first voice we hear, in the opening sentence of the General Prologue, is the poet's. The familiar lines, "Whan that April with his showres soote/The drought of March hath perced to the roote," are not "realistic observation," though often so described, but rely on learning and poetic convention. We are not told that the flowers have blossomed, but that "the a

showers of April have penetrated March's dryness, bathing the veins in such liquid as engenders flowers."

"Pilgrimage" was a perfect metaphor for human life conceived in this way, and Chaucer was aware of this when he chose a pilgrimage as the setting for the tales. Pilgrimages were often condemned by churchmen because of the self-indulgent holiday conduct of pilgrims; the Wife of Bath herself is a great joiner of pilgrimages, and knew, we find out, much about "wandering by the way."

Analyzing the Canterbury Tales, we found very interesting information. When we covered it during the lesson, we just got the main idea, but now we know the whole work. It is really interesting and useful. It can teach us many life lessons. That's why it is timeless. Furthermore, it shows the reader the condition of society, common people. However, its language is difficult for the readers of the 21th century since it was written in Middle English. While doing course paper and analyzing the work, we used new normalized spelling system for easier reading and pronunciation, extensive footnotes, complete listing of The Canterbury Tales recordings, glossary of basic Middle English words.

In addition, we improved our critical thinking, researching skills, analyzing skills, comparing and contrasting skills, obtained writing course paper knowledge in practice. We learned new words as well.

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- The Norton Anthology of English Literature, seventh edition, volume 1, M.H. Abrams. The United States of America, 2000

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