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# Chaucer's Literary Road from Romance to Reality

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Chaucer's Literary Road from  
Romance to Reality

by

Kendal E. Mitchell

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment  
of the requirements for the degree of  
Master of Arts in English at  
Longwood College

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## Table of Contents

Chapter I: Introduction	Page 1
Chapter II: Phase One	Page 9
Chapter III: Phase Two	Page 25
Chapter IV: Phase Three	Page 44
Chapter V: Conclusion	Page 74
Notes	Page 77
Bibliography	Page 87

## Chapter I: Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer is a great poet. Bertrand H. Bronson writes, "No one doubts today that Chaucer is one of the half-dozen greatest poets who have written in English, and many would be willing to lower the figure. (Manly puts him second.)"<sup>1</sup> John Masefield names him "the first of the three great English poets."<sup>2</sup> Derek S. Brewer calls Chaucer the "father of English poetry."<sup>3</sup> No one doubts Chaucer's greatness, yet no one knows exactly what single factor or combination of factors actually made him master in English literature. Biographical information is available to give some clues, yet even that is sketchy because Chaucer never wrote about himself or his family, with one possible exception: ". . . in the Hous of Fame he alludes to a voice--supposed to be his wife's--bidding him Awake of a morning in ungodly tones. . . ." <sup>4</sup> The clues to his life are suppositions based on medieval customs and records that scholars have revealed and woven with his works to create the fabric of Chaucer. F. N. Robinson cautions, however,

An eminent French critic of the last generation, complaining that the biographers of men and letters had given more attention to their correspondence, diaries, and other intimate records than to their literary productions, expressed the fear that his period in criticism might be remembered as 'l'âge des petits papiers' [sic]. The writer of the life of Chaucer is at least in no danger of going to the

extreme described. He resorts too freely to conjecture, as scholars have occasionally done in the attempt to use every scrap of evidence for the reconstruction of Chaucer's life and times.<sup>5</sup>

Geoffrey Chaucer was born in the 1340's. The exact year remains a mystery because no birth record has been discovered:

. . . It is known for certain only that Geoffrey Chaucer first bore arms in 1359, and that in 1386 he testified in court to being 'forty years and more,' one of those vague statements that make life so dark for subsequent biographers.

A date somewhere between 1340 and 1344 is the one usually agreed upon, but it is equally possible that Geoffrey Chaucer was born as late as 1345. . . .<sup>6</sup>

John and Agnes de Copton Chaucer were Geoffrey's parents. John, who inherited the family business, was a prosperous vintner or wholesaler, not a taverner or retailer.<sup>7</sup> "Chaucer's immediate ancestors--his father, grandfather, and step-grandfather--were vintners or wine merchants. They appear to have been prosperous people with rising fortunes and some standing at court."<sup>8</sup> John served Edward III in Flanders in 1338, was appointed port customs collector on cloth in 1348, and later acted as deputy to the King's Butler in Southampton.<sup>9</sup> Agnes, too, had court connections. "She was related to the Baron of the Exchequer and Keeper of the King's Wardrobe by her first marriage."<sup>10</sup>

Chaucer was born and spent most of his life in London, which ". . . though much smaller than Paris was one of the richest and greatest cities of Europe. What made it so was

commerce. . . ."11 However, John Gardner describes Chaucer's London as a place of madness:

One need not talk of such blood-curdling horrors as public hangings, beheadings, burnings-at-the-stake, drawings-and-quarterings, public whippings, blindings, and castrations; or of imprisonments in chains and darkness without hope of deliverance; or of trials by combat, or torturings (the rack, the snipping off of the adulteress's nipples or the repeated branding of her forehead, by Edward II's Ordinances)—all these were common, the unavoidable experience of any man who had eyes to see or ears not deaf to the victim's shrieks. . . .12

John Masefield also gives a rather graphic description of the England and London of Chaucer's youth:

I must say a few words about the England of his time. It was a sparsely populated country with much marsh and waste and forest. When he was a little boy the great pestilence of bubonic plague, the Black Death, came here, and destroyed as some think, one person in every four or five. This was an exceptional Death, but pestilence was here in every year of his life, and thrice in his life was very mortal. The cities were walled and dicht [sic] about: they contained a few churches and palaces of delicate beauty and many rat-ridden lousy hovels. Men carried weapons and often used them: streets were dangerous with brawls: fires were very destructive, water being so scarce. There was much squalor, dirt, degradation, and ignorance, out of which life grew turbulently upon a sturdy stock.<sup>13</sup>

When Chaucer was seven, or thereabouts, he attended school in Southampton where he and his family had moved to live for two years before returning to London. He studied many things at school, but, above all, Latin. John Gardner writes that Chaucer

. . . began study with whatever rector served as schoolmaster in the Chaucers' district, giving lessons in the vestry of the church, in a room above it, or in his own home. The school may have been a song-school of the kind we read in the Prioress's Tale, a small school attached to some church or cathedral, where children were taught manners, prayers, and hymns, and introduced to the rudiments of reading and writing Latin.<sup>14</sup>

Some of the Latin that Chaucer would have studied were the basics from the primer and the Donat, then on to writers such as Cato, Priscian, and finally Ovid.<sup>15</sup> Interestingly enough, Latin studies were translated into French rather than English:

But French was no problem for the children of gentlemen and well-to-do merchants in Chaucer's day, though it was by no means the language of the London streets. Children of the better families, we're told, were taught French 'from the time they are rocked in their cradles and can speak and play with a child's brooch.'<sup>16</sup>

Marchette Chute elaborates on the idea that French was taught to some English children:

In his own home Geoffrey Chaucer probably heard French at least as often as English. French was the language spoken at court, as it had been since the Norman Conquest. . . .

When Geoffrey Chaucer went to school it was in French, not English, that he would learn his lessons. . . . when young Chaucer set himself to translate a line in the schoolroom it was into French that he was expected to translate it, and the system at least had the advantage of giving him a thorough knowledge of the most influential modern language of his day.<sup>17</sup>

From his formal studies Chaucer moved into another phase of education, serving at Court and traveling for King Edward III.



The earliest known documents about Chaucer himself deal with clothing issued him as a page at Hatfield "the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster, and wife of Lionel, third son of Edward III."<sup>18</sup> The accounts are dated in 1357--April, May, and December.<sup>19</sup> Two years later Chaucer went to France to participate in one of the many battles of the Hundred Years War, was captured, and ransomed by the King.<sup>20</sup> During that year, 1360, he returned to Calais carrying letters for the King.<sup>21</sup> For the next seven years little is known of his life, although it is believed that Chaucer, during that time, married Phillippa de Roet who was "one of the damoiselles of the Queen's chamber."<sup>22</sup> Donaldson surmises, "From 1367, the year that Chaucer is first mentioned as a member of the royal household, to 1386, the poet seems to have prospered greatly. He was frequently called upon to make trips abroad in the service of the King."<sup>23</sup> These trips took him first to France and then to Italy.

However, in 1387, Chaucer's prosperity diminished as did his courtly favors:

In 1387 his wife's annuities ceased, presumably because of her death. This may have been a double disaster. In any case the records suggest that in the following year Chaucer was badly in debt, and in May the same year his royal annuity was transferred to another person.<sup>24</sup>

In 1399, his financial troubles seem to have ended but this resurgence of prosperity was short lived:

On December 4, 1399, Chaucer took a long lease, for fifty-three years, of a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey. But his actual occupation of it was brief. The last recorded payment of his pension was June 5, 1400, and according to the generally accepted date inscribed on his tomb in Westminster Abbey, he died on October 25, 1400.<sup>25</sup>

From Chaucer's biography, one can easily speculate on the reasons for his success. Perhaps it was the combination of his ancestral genes, an influence from his Latin studies, observations of the bustling London inhabitants, exposure to the Court, or experiences from abroad. It may have been all of these timed to perfection as Nevill Coghill suggests:

It might be said that of all his gifts except that of an original genius the greatest was luck. Born in an age when our language was in solution but at a temperature to crystallize, Fortune chose him as a nucleus. Fortune disposed his birth in the right kind of family in the right part of England. Fortune sent him at the right moments to France and Italy, having elevated him to Court circles. And when other than poetical talents in him combined with this to ensure his position of royal trust, and might have threatened his poetry with affluence and business, Fortune cast him down from favour a step or two (but not too far or for too long), leaving him with nothing to do but write The Canterbury Tales.<sup>26</sup>

Chaucer wrote many poems, the best of which are The Book of the Duchess, The Parliament of the Fowles, The House of Fame, Anelida and Arcite, The Legend of a Good Woman, Troilus and Criseyde, and The Canterbury Tales. Each of these is very English like the poet: ". . . Chaucer wrote of English men and women and wrote in the English tongue."<sup>27</sup> Yet the poet depended

heavily on foreigners. It was not in vain that Chaucer struggled with Latin in elementary school, for he became familiar with Ovid; it was not in vain that Chaucer traveled for the King to France and Italy, for he borrowed heavily from the literature that he found in each country. His French sources were several: "Apart from the Roman, he had other models out of France, especially in the poems of Guillaume de Machault and Guillaume de Deguilleville, and Jean Froissart."<sup>28</sup> as were his Italian sources: ". . . he visited the great cultural center of Florence, and it is often supposed that his Italian travels first brought him into acquaintance with the works of the Italian writers Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante. . . ." <sup>29</sup> Brewer concludes, "The truth is that Chaucer inherited a particular English style, which he enriched by his borrowings from French, Italian and Latin."<sup>30</sup>

The purpose of this thesis is to trace Chaucer's poetic growth through his "borrowings." Certainly, Chaucer always borrowed heavily from foreign sources, but, with each successive work, more of the poet's genius becomes apparent through his discriminating use of the sources and his unique additions. Chaucer's poetic growth can be separated into three phases: the early, romantic stage of the French influence; the middle, transitional, romantic-realistic stage of the added Italian influence; the latter, realistic stage of the assimilation of all the influences. Selected for this study are the works in which Chaucer's three major women appear: Blanche of Lancaster in The

Book of the Duchess, Criseyde of Troy in Troilus and Criseyde, and the Wife of Bath in The Canterbury Tales. Each of these works demonstrates, respectively, the poetic growth of Chaucer. In addition, the character of each of the women correlates with the poet's growing self-assurance and independence. In essence, the thesis travels down Chaucer's literary road from romance to reality.

## Chapter II: Phase One

The first stop on Chaucer's literary road from romance to reality is France. He grew up knowing and using the French language as fluently as his native English:

Chaucer's relationship to the French language, of course, was quite different from his relationship to other languages he knew. To him Latin was the great language of learning and Italian a foreign vernacular of large cultural importance. But French was a second native tongue. Year after year he listened to French gossip at the Court; as a customs official he transacted much business in French; he wooed his wife in French; and he read and discussed French literature with French-speaking courtiers such as Jean Froissart and Oton de Granson.<sup>31</sup>

He was an English soldier who fought in France and was captured in Reims, a city of two famous French poets whom he conceivably could have met during his brief captivity:

Among the beseiged citizens of Reims were two distinguished poets to match the future poet on the opposite side. The cannon of Reims was Guillaume de Machaut, now an old man of about sixty-five and the most honored and influential poet in France in the fourteenth century. Among the armed defenders was his disciple, a black-haired, snub-nosed young man named Eustache Deschamps who ultimately became the most prolific versifier of the century.<sup>32</sup>

Neville Coghill adds this insight about Chaucer's captivity:

There is, then, no need to imagine chains and dungeons in Chaucer's case. It may even be reasonably conjectured that his captors were cultivated and friendly men, who, finding a lively and inquiring spirit in him, took pleasure in fascinating him with nice and romantic speculations on courtly love and by loan of poems, such as the Romance de la Rose. . . .<sup>33</sup>

The same year of his capture by the French and ransom by the English, Chaucer returned to France to aid in the peace negotiations which gave him even more exposure to the French and perhaps to their literature as well.

Many French poets influenced Chaucer's writing. "Sometimes he is thought to have been so much influenced by the French writing that it is almost an accident that he wrote in English."<sup>34</sup> Among them are Guillaume de Lorris, Jean de Meun, Nicolas Trivet, Guillaume de Deguilleville, Guillaume de Machaut, Eustache Deschamps, Jean Froissart, and Sir Otes de Granson. "At a time when Englishmen were still writing verse in French the intercourse between the poets and the two nations must have been considerable, despite the constant wars. . . ."<sup>35</sup> However, scholars such as Neville Coghill, J. S. P. Tatlock, D. W. Robertson, Jr., and John Masefield agree with Alfred W. Pollard that the greatest French influence on Chaucer, not only during his "French period," but throughout his literary career was the Roman de la Rose:

. . .the French poem [Roman] is essential to a right understanding of Chaucer's development, for it exercised on him an influence greater than that of any other single work, supplying him with poetic forms and machinery which he was slow to outgrow, and with reminiscences of particular passages which leave their trace on some of his best and latest work.<sup>36</sup>

The Roman de la Rose was written by two Frenchmen, Guillaume de Lorris, who began the work in 1237, and Jean de Meun, who completed the unfinished poem forty years later. J. I. Wimsatt writes that "The combined poem was to be one of the most influential writings in history. It integrally affected all the literatures of Western Europe, and well into the Renaissance it was the best known work of French literature."<sup>37</sup> However, much credit for the immense popularity of the Roman goes to a rather revolutionary French woman of the twelfth century, Eleanor of Aquitaine, without whom "There would have been no medieval French or English poetry."<sup>38</sup> Successively Queen of France and England, she defied the authority of both her royal husbands, respectively, and returned to her beloved France to establish a "court of love." "The successive courts Eleanor gathered around her were forcing-houses of a courtly way of life, a civilization that hinged on the superiority of women through the civilizing force of love."<sup>39</sup> Also instrumental in the promotion of courtly love was Eleanor's daughter Marie de Champagne who joined her mother in France. She directed Chrétien de Troyes who fashioned the story of King Arthur and his knights defending ladies'

honor, saving damsels in distress, and, in the case of Lancelot and Guenevere, committing adultery.<sup>40</sup> Perhaps Marie's greatest contribution, however, was bringing to Aquitaine Andreas Capallanus [Andrew the Chaplain] whom she "encouraged" to write down the rules of the much discussed courtly love. His book, based on Ovid's Art of Love, is entitled The Art of Polite Love-making. The basic idea is that "'Nothing in the world is done that is good and courtly unless it springs from the fountain of love.'"<sup>41</sup> The establishment of Eleanor's court with its actual and literary emphasis on the superiority of women paved the way for the Roman de la Rose.

Alfred W. Pollard writes a comprehensive précis of the Roman that began as a romance and ended as a satire:

In his poem he [Lorris] feigns that in his twentieth year he had fallen asleep, and dreamed that on a beautiful morning in May he had come to a garden surrounded by a high wall, on the outer side of which were painted all the disagreeable vices and troubles of life--Hatred, Covetousness, Sadness, Old Age, Hypocrisy, Poverty and the like. . . . Attracted by the song of the birds he searched for an entrance, and at length found a little gate guarded by a fair maiden named Idleness, who told him that the garden belonged to Sir Mirth, and allowed him to enter. Soon he espies Mirth accompanied by Dame Gladness and the God of Love himself, attended by a bachelor, Sweet-Looking, who carried bows and arrows. With them were many fair ladies--Beauty, Riches, Largess, Fraunchise, and Courtesy--all of whom are elaborately described. Then he surveys all the garden, and comes to the well where Narcissus perished, and at last approaches a rose-bush, and essays to pull one of the buds. As he hesitates, Love pierces him with his arrows, and henceforth all his thoughts are set on obtaining the rosebud. He becomes Love's vassal and receives his commandments. . . . 'Bel Accueil' (Good



Reception) then helps him, but he is hindered by 'Danger' (Guardianship), Slander, Shame, and Fear. He attempts too hastily to kiss the Rose, and is repulsed, and Reason then essays to argue him out of his passion. Fraunchise (Generosity), Pity, and Venus herself befriend him, but Slander and Jealousy are now aroused, and Bel Accueil, without whose help he cannot obtain the Rose, is imprisoned in a tower. The Lover then begins to lament. . . .<sup>42</sup>

Lorris's untimely death left the lover lamenting for forty years until Meun completed the poem. Jean de Meun used the same meter and many of the same characters. What he changed was the spirit:

Guillaume de Lorris had set out to write an allegory of Love as the fair ladies of his day imagined it; his continuator wrote on every topic of mediaeval [sic] life, and his standpoint was not that of the fair ladies but that of a bitter satirist. When the lover ceases lamenting, Reason argues with him once more. . . . After which. . . Ami, the Friend, details to him all the tricks of mediaeval intrigue. False-Seeming, who is wont to attire himself as a Dominican friar, entraps and murders Slander, one of the four guardians of the castle, and the Duenna, 'la Vieille,' a very hateful person, is gained over to the Lover's side. But still the Rose cannot be won. A set battle ensues, in which the allegorical personages show their prowess, but though helped by Venus herself, the Lover is again repulsed. Art and Nature are called to aid, and at the bidding of Nature Genius disarms all opposition; so at last the beautiful Rose is won, and the sleeper awakes. But in the second part the story has become a mere thread on which to string endless discourses, in which questions of life and conduct, of destiny and free will, of religion and morals, of marriage and celibacy, are unsparingly handled. Against women and against the clergy, especially the Dominicans, the satire is merciless and unceasing, and the poem was severely condemned, not to the diminution of its popularity. To Chaucer it was a storehouse from which he was

never tired of drawing, and his own intellectual life may be represented, not unjustly, as a progress from the standpoint of Guillaume de Lorris to that of Jean de Meung [Meun].<sup>43</sup>

In addition to the story line, pertinent details are necessary for a fuller understanding of the courtly love work. All the girls have golden hair; soft, smooth skin; grey eyes set widely under arching brows; small, neat features; small, soft mouths; cloven chins; and shapely noses. The men, too, have grey eyes, broad shoulders, slender waists, no beards, and shining hair. The garden is filled with music, dance, birds, sunlight, fruit, and flowers. The rules of this illicit love game are as follows: cupid shoots the arrow into the eyes of the beholder, who loves instantly, but hides it; he laments in solitude, refuses food, and spends sleepless, weeping nights; he is faithful and furtive to protect his lady's honor although he may have one trusted confidant. When he can stand his agony no more he asks for his lady's mercy. She, on the other hand, is in full control of herself and the situation: she guards her movements, but after an accepted period of the lover's servitude, she yields and remains faithful to her lover.<sup>44</sup> In essence, courtly love, although opposed to Christian morals, is similar to Christian reverence of the Blessed Virgin. Nevill Coghill draws a parallel between the religion of cupid and the religion of Christ through the common characteristics of "conversion, penance, service, prayer, fasting, martyrdom, sanctity, faith,

works, hope in lover; in lady, grace, pity, mercy, stableness, and so forth."<sup>45</sup>

Chaucer incorporates these courtly love conventions found in the French poetry, especially the Roman, in The Book of the Duchess, "Chaucer's first datable poem (1369-70)."<sup>46</sup> The work was written as a eulogy for Blanche of Lancaster who died of plague in 1369 and as a consolation to her husband Duke of Lancaster, also known as John of Gaunt, son of King Edward III. "Besides statements by Chaucer and others to the same effect, we know from the poem itself that this lady 'is,' or symbolizes, John of Gaunt's first wife, Blanche of Lancaster, and the lover equally 'is' John himself. . . ."<sup>47</sup> Critics agree that it was appropriate for Chaucer to write a poem about and for John, for their lives were strangely linked. They were born about the same time;<sup>48</sup> very likely Chaucer saw John when he was a page at Hatfield, home of John's brother Lionel, and later when he was a soldier in Lionel's division of King Edward's army;<sup>49</sup> Chaucer and his wife received an annuity from John in 1374;<sup>50</sup> his sister-in-law Kathryn Swynford became John's mistress for twenty-five years and later his wife;<sup>51</sup> Chaucer held court appointed civil service jobs as long as John was in royal favor, but when John fell from favor during the regime of his nephew Richard II, so did Chaucer; once Henry IV, John and Blanche's son, came to power Chaucer was reinstated at Court with an annuity and pension just as John was welcomed back into the royal fold.<sup>52</sup> However, critics disagree as to the exact impetus

that motivated Chaucer. Some think he was commanded by John to write the poem while others are sure that Chaucer wrote the poem out of love for John and Blanche. For whatever reason, Chaucer left posterity a romantic, sensitive poem based on his French connection.

The Book of the Duchess contains the courtly love elements of the narrator-lover, the dream-vision, the May morning, the garden scene, the courtly lover, and above all the grand lady.

The entire poem is written within the sleep, dream-vision framework. "The dream-setting was an acceptable way of passing out of the actual life into an irresponsible world where fancy was free to find anything whatever."<sup>53</sup> Chaucer leads into the vision by assuming the character of the grieving, unsuccessful courtly lover who cannot sleep:

I have a gret wonder, be this lyght,  
How that I lyve, for day ne nyght  
I may nat slepe wel nygh noght; (ll. 1-3)<sup>54</sup>

This problem has lasted eight years:

I holde hit be a sicknesse  
That I have suffred this eight yeer,  
And yet my boote is never the ner;  
For there is phisicien but oon  
That may me hele; but that is don. (ll. 36-40)

Because of his insomnia the narrator reads a story. "To Chaucer, reading seems to be a natural gateway from the active life to the contemplative, from waking to dreaming. . . ."<sup>55</sup> The book is

Ovid's Metamorphoses about another sleepless, grieving character, Alcyone whose husband has died at sea. She prays to Juno, receives sleep, and dreams:

"A! mercy! swete lady dere!"  
 Quod she to Juno, hir godesse,  
 "Helpe me out of thys distresse,  
 And yeve me grace my lord to se  
 Soone, or wite wher-so he be,  
 Or how he fareth, or in what wise,  
 And I shal make you sacrificise,  
 And hooly youres become I shal  
 With good wille, body, herte, and al;  
 And but thow wolt this, lady swete,  
 Send me grace to slepe, and mete  
 In my slep som certeyn sweven  
 Wherthourgh that I may knowen even  
 Whether my lord be quyk or ded." (ll. 108-121)

Chaucer wishes for the same result and also receives it:

I hadde unneth that word ysayd  
 Ryght thus as I have told hyt yow,  
 That sodeynly, I nyste how,  
 Such a lust anoon me took  
 To slepe, that ryght upon my book  
 Y fil aslepe, and therwith even  
 Me mette so ynly swete a sweven,  
 So wonderful. . . . (ll. 270-77)

He is off, fancy-free, into the dream world only to wake at the end of the poem:

Ryght thus me meete, as I yow telle,  
 That in the castell ther was a belle,  
 As hyt had smyten hours twelve.  
 Therwyth I awook myselve  
 And fond me lyinge in my bed; (ll. 1320-25).

The dream world, which concerns the major part of the poem, begins with the typical description of nature and romance.

Naturally, the season is May: ". . . hyt was May,/And in the dawyngye I lay/(Me mette thus) in my bed al naked/And looked forth. . ." (ll. 291-94). Birds are singing in harmony:

. . . for som of hem song lowe,  
Som high, and al of oon acord.  
To telle shortly, att oo word.  
Was never herd so swete a steven,--  
But hyt had be a thyng of heven,--(ll. 304-8).

The walls of his bedchamber are painted with pictures and texts from the Romance of the Rose, and the windows depict the popular romantic tale of Troy. Outside the window conditions are perfect: the sky is blue and bright; the air is neither too hot nor too cold. All is right in this perfect world. Sounds of the hunting horn and huntsmen force the dreamer to participate in this world. He joins by riding his horse out of the bedchamber, but the hunt is foiled by the coy deer. Suddenly left alone, the narrator-dreamer spies a puppy who leads him into a beautiful garden. ". . . ther cam by mee/A whelp, that fauned me as I stood,/ That hadde yfolowed, and koude no good./ . . .And I hym folwed. . ." (ll. 388-97).

The garden is typically beautiful and perfect. It is filled with flowers:

Doun by a floury grene wente  
Ful thikke of gras, ful softe and swete,  
With floures fele, faire under fete,  
And litel used, hyt semed thus;  
For both Flora and Zephirus,  
They two that make floures growe,

Had mad her dwellynge ther, I trowe;  
 For hit was, on to beholde,  
 As though the erthe envy wolde  
 To be gayer than the heven. . . (ll. 398-407).

In addition to flowers, great trees shelter many animals:

Or thikke of trees, so ful of leves;  
 And every tree stood by hymselfe  
 Fro other wel ten foot or twelve.  
 So grete trees, so huge of strength,  
 Of forty or fifty fadme lengthe,  
 . . . . .  
 And many an hert and many an hynde  
 Was both before me and behynde.  
 Of founes, sowres, bukkes, does  
 Was ful the woode, and many roes,  
 Any many sqwirelles, that sete  
 Ful high upon the trees and ete, (ll. 419-432).

However, sight of the grieving Black Knight sitting in the garden disturbs the perfect world created by nature: "But forth they romed ryght wonder faste/Doun the woode; so at the laste/I was war of a man in blak," (ll. 443-5).

The Black Knight is definitely a courtly lover. At once the dreamer realizes that the Knight is young and handsome.

A wonder wel-farynge knyght--  
 By the maner me thoghte so--  
 Of good mochel, and ryght yong therto,  
 Of the age of foure and twenty yer,  
 Upon hys berd but lytel her,  
 And he was clothed al in blak. (ll. 452-57)

The knight laments like one who is love sick:

For-why he heng hys hed adoun,  
 And with a dedly sorwful soun  
 He made a rym ten vers or twelve

Of a compleynte to hymselfe,  
 The most pitee, the most rowthe,  
 That ever I herde; for, by my trowthe  
 Hit was gret wonder that Nature  
 Myght suffre any creature  
 To have such sorwe, and be not ded. (ll. 461-69)

So absorbed in grief that his hue becomes "grene and pale," the knight finally acknowledges the dreamer and displays courtesy and gentleness befitting his station: "He sayde, 'I prey the, be not wroth./I herde the not, to seyn the soth,/Ne I sawgh the not, syr, trewely' (ll. 519-521). Permitting himself no comfort, the knight wails on about his topsy-turvey world created by the turn of the wheel of Fortune:

My song ys turned to pleyenynge,  
 And al my laughtre to wepynge,  
 My glade thoghtes to hevynesse;  
 In travayle ys myn ydelnesse  
 And eke my reste; my wele is woo,  
 My good ys harm; and evermoo  
 In wrathe ys turned my pleynge  
 And my delyt into sorwyng.  
 My hele ys turned into seknesse,  
 In drede ys al my sykernesse;  
 To derke ys turned al my lyght,  
 My wyt ys foly, my day ys nyght,  
 My loveys hate, my sleep wakyng,  
 My myrthe and meles ys fastyng,  
 My countenaunce ys nycete,  
 And al abaved, where so I be;  
 My pees, in pledyng and in werre. (ll. 599-615)

At last the dreamer convinces him to tell of his lady and how they met. First the knight fell in love with Love and promised complete devotion ". . . and given rente/To Love, hooly with good entente,/And through plesaunce become his thral/With good wille,



body, hert, and al" (ll. 765-68). A year passed during which time the knight remained devoted to Love before he saw his lady who with one look caused him to fall in love.

The lady is perfect as is any courtly love woman. Her beauty rivals that of Heaven:

For I dar swere, without doute,  
That as the someres sonne bryght  
Ys fairer, clerer, and hath more lyght  
Than any other planete in heven,  
The moone, or the sterres seven,  
For al the world so hadde she  
Surmounted hem alle of beaute, (ll. 820-26)

Typically, her hair is golden, her manner is debonaire, her temperament is even, her speech is soft, and her body is well proportioned with only one imperfection.

And goode faire White she het;  
That my lady name ryght.  
She was bothe fair and bryght;  
She hadde not hir name wrong.  
Ryght faire shuldres and body long  
She had, and armes, every lyth  
Fattyssh, flesshy, not gret therwith;  
Ryght white handes, and nayles rede,  
Rounde brestes; and of good brede  
Hyr hippes were, a streight flat bak  
I knew on hir noon other lak  
That al hir lymmes nere pure sewynge  
In as fer as I had knowynge. (ll. 948-60)

To her the Black Knight paid the usual service. It was his desire "To love hir in my beste wyse,/To do her worship and service" (ll. 1097-8). He suffered in silence and made up songs about and for her. Finally, expecting that she would grant

mercy, the Knight steeled himself to ask her to be his lady:

With sorweful herte, and woundes dede,  
 Softe and quakyng for pure drede  
 And shame, and styntyng in my tale  
 For ferde, and myn hewe al pale,  
 Ful ofte I wex bothe pale and red.  
 Bowyng to hir, I heng the hed;  
 I durste nat ones loke hir on,  
 For wit, maner, and al was goon.  
 I seyde 'mercy!' and no more.  
 Hyt nas no game, hyt sat me sore. (ll. 1211-1220)

She says "nay" (l. 1243). Consequently, he spent another year suffering before he asked again:

So hit befel, another yere,  
 I thoughte ones I wolde fonde  
 To do hir knowe and understonde  
 My woo; and she wel understod  
 That I ne wilned thyng but god,  
 And worship, and to kepe hir name  
 Over alle thyng, and drede hir shame,  
 And was so besy hyr to serve;  
 And pitee were I shulde sterve;  
 Syth that I wilned noon harm, ywis. (ll. 1258-67)

When she understood his good intentions, White accepted him by giving "The noble yifte of hir mercy," (l. 1270) and a ring.

They lived happily from that point on:

Oure hertes wern so evene a payre,  
 That never nas that oon contrayre  
 To that other, for no woo.  
 . . . Al was us oon, without were.  
 And thus we lyved ful many a yere  
 So wel, I kan not telle how. (ll. 1289-91; 1295-7)

But now, "She ys ded!" (l. 1309).

Chaucer was true to the French courtly love theme in The Book of the Duchess. All the conventions are included; but there is something else: a glint of the genius-poet shining through the cloud of convention. The first signs of the narrative skill that is so well developed in later poems appear in The Book of the Duchess. The "plot" is closely woven because of Chaucer's choice of King Seys and Queen Alcyone to introduce the poem. Not only are they royal like the Black Knight and White, but also their grief is parallel. Alcyone and John are grieving over dead spouses whom each loves "alderbeste" (l. 87 and l. 1279). Neither finds comfort until the "presentation of the body" in a dream: Alcyone through her own dream when Morpheus comes in the disguise or body of Seys and tells her that he is dead, and John in Chaucer's dream when the dreamer leads him into presenting his wife's bodily form to himself so that he admits in the end that she is dead. Bertrand H. Bronson confirms the parallel:

Of the four vision-poems, The Book of the Duchess provides the nearest approach to a parallel between book and dream. Both are concerned with lovers separated by death, and the emotional attitudes of the bereaved exhibit the same hopelessness and intensity of grief.<sup>56</sup>

The greatest of the narrative skills, however, is the poet's pose as the naive narrator which becomes "one of Chaucer's permanent traits."<sup>57</sup> The pose frees Chaucer to be, at once, detached and sympathetic, serious and comic, courtly and individual. He is

the juxtaposition of all these characteristics: sleepless like Alcyone; agonizing like John; bewildered, warm, and guiding like the puppy.

Chaucer's first work, although not rated on the grand scale of his future poems, is "the first and best of his longer poems in the French kind. . . ."58 The Book of the Duchess is the assimilation of Chaucer's knowledge up to the time of its writing: he knew the French poets and emulated them; he knew English royalty and pleased them; he knew human nature and portrayed it. Chaucer's poetic development to this point is personified in Blanche. Just as she is a product of the romantic courtly love descriptions, so Chaucer is a product of the romantic courtly love poets. But, just as Blanche, though dead, was once a breathing individual, so Chaucer, coming alive as a poet, breathes a little life into his poetry through his individual genius. Although Chaucer always used sources for his poetry, as his literary career developed there is more breadth between him and the sources: in short, more of the genius of Chaucer emerges as his poetry matures.

### Chapter III: Phase Two

The second stage of Chaucer's literary journey from romance to realism is Italy. Just as the poet literally travelled to France and was exposed to French literature which in turn influenced his early poetry, he repeated the procedure in Italy. Chaucer went to Italy twice, although John Gardner suggests three trips,<sup>59</sup> first in 1372 and again in 1379 on business for the King.<sup>60</sup> Nevill Coghill writes of the first trip:

On 12 November 1372 Chaucer was appointed to a Commission, in company with two citizens of Genoa, to treat with their Duke in the matter of the choice of a port in England for Genoese trade. It was his first journey to Italy. Just as his journeys to France thirteen years before had baptized him into poetry, so now this business trip to Genoa, Florence, and perhaps Padua, confirmed and strengthened him [as] a poet. A new language and a new culture opened their enormous treasure to him, once again just when he was ripe for it. A master of the French manner, he was ready to master the Italian. It was a second wind to him, more sustaining than the first.<sup>61</sup>

That Chaucer actually took these trips and that he was influenced by the writings of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio is generally accepted by scholars; what is disputed is how much Italian Chaucer knew prior to his going and whose literature influenced him when. Howard Schless argues that Chaucer had to have been familiar with the Italian language and certainly had heard of, if not read, Dante long before he went to Italy. For

over a hundred years, the English Court had borrowed heavily from an internationally known Florentine banking family, the Bardi, who formed "undoubtedly the most important Italian, or indeed foreign, company in England during the fourteenth century. They, above all bankers of Florence, would have know full well the writings of their compatriot, Dante Allighieri. . .", for some critics believed (Boccaccio, in particular) that Dante's Beatrice was actually Beatrice Portinari who was married to Simone de Bardi.<sup>62</sup> Schless reinforces his argument in regard to Chaucer:

From his early days in the household of Lionel and Edward III, through his years on diplomatic missions and in the customs, Chaucer would have had ample motive and opportunity for learning Italian from the 'Lombards' living in England. Nor must one forget, in considering when he might have come upon Trecentisti poetry, the number of English people who travelled to Italy, not just the pardoner and wandering friars, but also those who, like the Wife of Bath, journeyed to Rome on pilgrimage, or those who like the clerk, had studied in Bologna. . . or those who had stayed for years in Italy, like the English mercenaries under Hawkeswood, or those who had been in the entourage of Lionel at the cultivated Visconti court. The fame of the Italian poets read by Chaucer was such that any one of these Englishmen might have been the means by which texts arrived in England--if indeed Italians resident in London and at Court had not already brought in the first renowned flowering of their native vernacular literature.<sup>63</sup>

Manly is in agreement with Schless that Chaucer would certainly have known Italians and Italian writing before his first trip.<sup>64</sup> Nevill Coghill, on the other hand, insists that it was during the first trip that Chaucer encountered Dante's The Divine Comedy and

Petrarch's Latin versions of some of the tales from Boccaccio's Decameron; on the second trip he became familiar with Boccaccio's works in the original: "This time his chief loot was also from Boccaccio, but on a larger scale and intrinsically finer. . . Il Teseide and Il Filostrato."<sup>65</sup> John Masefield concurs.<sup>66</sup> Pollard does not dispute the findings of Coghill and Masefield, but he does maintain, contrary to Ten Brink's theory that Chaucer's first visit to Italy is the dividing line of his work, that the second trip had the greater impact on Chaucer's writing and, therefore, marks the division in Chaucer's poetry:

Chaucer may have read Dante and Boccaccio on his first visit to Italy, and even have made extracts from them. . . but it seems at least possible that Chaucer's intimate use of Italian literature should be dated from 1379 rather than 1372. . . .<sup>67</sup>

The greatest poem of Chaucer's "Italian Period," and one of his best, is Troilus and Criseyde:

In the Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer reached the height of his powers. The later Canterbury Tales, to be sure, reveal new qualities--a wider range of interest, greater variety of style, perhaps a more modern tone, more independence of what we regard as mediaeval [sic] sentiments and conventions. But there is no advance in narrative skill, or in characterization, or in the mastery of verse form. The Troilus is Chaucer's supreme example of sustained narration, the Knight's Tale alone being in any way comparable. And it remains unsurpassed in its kind in later English poetry.<sup>68</sup>

The exact date of the poem is unknown, but scholars estimate that

Chaucer began it soon after his return from the second trip to Italy.<sup>69</sup>

The source of the story has ancient roots. Chaucer in his House of Fame credits the following for the story of Troy: "Homer, Dares, Dictys, Lollius, Guido, Geoffrey of Monmouth, and Virgil."<sup>70</sup> However, many medievalists have established another hierarchy. The first reliable accounts according to most medieval readers, who judged Homer's account unreliable, were "two small books of Latin prose: De Excidio Trojae Historia by Dares Phrygius, who gave the Trojan side, and Ephemeris Belli Trojani by Dictys Cretensis, who spoke for the Greeks."<sup>71</sup> The most popular account was Dares' who had three unlinked major characters: Troilum, Diomedem, and Briseidam. Six centuries later, c. 1160, a French poet, Benoit de Sainte-Maure, based his Roman de Troie on Dares and Dictys and linked the three characters, thus creating the story. From Saint-Maure's story Guido della Columna wrote his Historia Trojana, completed in 1287. Guido's account is a Latin prose version of the Trojan war that is more history than literature.<sup>72</sup> Gretchen Mieszkowski's The Reputation of Criseyde: 1155-1500 verifies Gordon's list and adds that Guido's Latin work was far more popular than Sainte-Maure's: "But Latin made the story accessible to a large number of readers, and Latin also made it seem more scholarly and authoritative."<sup>73</sup> Boccaccio's Il Filostrato ("The One Prostrated by Love"); dated 1336, came from both Benoit and Guido. His chief contribution



to the story is the addition of Pandarus to the list of major characters.<sup>74</sup>

When Chaucer wrote Troilus and Criseyde several versions were available to him: Benoit's French Roman de Troie, Guido's Latin Historica, Boccaccio's Italian Il Filostrato, and supposedly a fourth, Livre de Troilus. The last is a literal French prose translation of Il Filostrato done by Beaveau in the 1380's. According to R. A. Pratt's recent discovery, Chaucer himself used this work while writing Troilus and Criseyde. Beaveau did make one exceptional change in the story which gives some validity to Pratt's "findings." He switched the emphasis from Troilus to Criseyde.<sup>75</sup> However, most scholars agree that Chaucer used Boccaccio's Il Filostrato as his primary source. Pollard cites Mr. W. M. Rosett's somewhat tedious study that serves as some proof:

The exact number of lines in the Troilus is 8246. . . . 5663 of these are due to Chaucer alone (save in so far that he took something over a hundred of them from Petrarch, Boethius, and Dante). The remaining 2582 lines are condensed from 2730 of Boccaccio's Filostrato, a poem which contains in all 5704.<sup>76</sup>

In addition Lumiansky writes,

For this story Chaucer was indebted primarily to Boccaccio's Filostrato, itself a poem of considerable distinction; yet the Troilus is by no means merely a retelling of Boccaccio's story.<sup>77</sup>

And Schless confirms,

Chaucer's most extensive debt to any Italian poem is Boccaccio's Filostrato, the primary source for his profound, tender and witty investigation of Love's growth in Troilus and Criseyde.<sup>78</sup>

Yet Chaucer never mentions Boccaccio as a source. Pollard explains,

Far more important than that of Dante was the influence upon Chaucer of his contemporary, Boccaccio, and, if we may believe him, of 'Fraunceys Petrark, the laureat poete,' whom he even speaks of in one place as 'my master.' Yet of Petrarch Chaucer's works only prove an acquaintance with his Latin version of Boccaccio's tale of Grisilde, and with a single sonnet (the eighty-eighth). To Boccaccio's Teseide and Filostrato, on the other hand, he was indebted for something more than the groundwork of two of his most important poems; and he was also acquainted with three of his works in Latin prose. . . . Yet he never mentions his name, and it has been contended that he was himself unaware of the authorship of the poems and treatises to which he was so greatly indebted. Strange as it seems to us, it is by no means incredible; for it was the exception rather than the rule for a fourteenth-century manuscript to mention the name of its author unless posthumous fame had made it important; and there is some good ground for believing that Chaucer imagined himself indebted to Petrarch for the works which were really Boccaccio's.<sup>79</sup>

Chaucer borrowed extensively from Boccaccio, but he altered and refined his "borrowings" so that Troilus and Criseyde has only a surface resemblance to Il Filostrato. The most obvious debt to Boccaccio is the story told within the framework of the courtly love tradition. In April and Book I, Troilus, a handsome, noble

warrior and son of King Priam, scoffs at love, thereby irritating Cupid who consequently shoots an arrow into Troilus's eyes when he looks at the beautiful-beyond-all-measure widow, Criseyde, who is standing in the temple for the feast of Palladium. Keeping the composure that befits his rank, Troilus finishes his duty at the temple and furtively goes home to weep and wail, to refuse food and sleep, and to write poems of love. His friend Pandarus casually drops by one day to find Troilus in this state. Pragmatic by nature, Pandarus advises him that action is the only cure and proceeds to plan the action. Rejuvenated by the prospect of winning Criseyde, Troilus returns to life as usual: showing valour second only to his brother Hector in the endless battles with the Greeks. In May and Book II Pandarus, Troilus's confidante and Criseyde's relative, executes his plan in stages: first, by arousing Criseyde's interest in Troilus through charming and witty conversations, and by positioning her in pre-planned stations in her house so that she can see brave Troilus return from battle; then, once she is interested, by suggesting the exchange of letters, directing how each should be written, and posting them between palaces; and, finally, by cleverly arranging their first meeting. Criseyde yields to Troilus gradually just as any courtly lady would do, but in Book III she yields completely. Through Pandarus's planning, the love of Criseyde and Troilus is consummated at Pandarus's house. They exchange vows of love and tokens of affection: a ring to him and

a brooch to her. They meet many times the following three years during which time their happiness is supreme.

However, in Book IV, Fortune's wheel turns and the lovers are no longer happy. Criseyde has to be exchanged for Antenor, a Trojan warrior captured by the Greeks. Both Troilus and Criseyde weep throughout Book IV and can reach no honorable decision to save her, although Pandarus makes, in vain, a few not-so-honorable suggestions. In Book V the exchange is made. Criseyde has promised to remain faithful and to return in ten days. During the ten days and more when Criseyde doesn't return, Pandarus's attempts to comfort and cheer Troilus meet with no success. She stays with Diomedes who escorts her from Troy and woos her in the Greek camp. Troilus and Criseyde exchange letters: his are of love and longing; hers are full of empty promises and false hope. Troilus becomes embittered and returns to fighting, this time not for valour, but for revenge. His earnest desire is to kill Diomedes who, as he knows from Cassandra's interpretation of his dream, is his personal enemy. They do fight, but neither kills the other. During one of their encounters, however, Troilus sees on Diomedes's sleeve the brooch that he gave Criseyde. At last he realizes that she has been unfaithful and is never coming back. Soon afterward Troilus is killed by Achilles and goes to heaven.

Although both Boccaccio and Chaucer utilize the courtly love convention, Chaucer's poem is more closely aligned with the French

Roman. Sharrock's comment, "To be sure he [Chaucer] developed the etiquette of the love-affair according to the canons of the Roman as he had learnt [sic] from his French masters. . ."80 agrees with Coghill's idea: "Troilus and Criseyde are "'medievalized"' [according to C. S. Lewis] in the sense that they are made exactly to conform to character and rules for the behavior of ideal lovers as laid down in the Roman de la Rose."81 On the surface both poets did pay homage to the courtly code, but Chaucer extends that tradition so that it adds a much deeper meaning to his characters, whereas Boccaccio's use of it is artificial. In Il Filostrato Troilo is very much like Diomede: he is neither humble nor bashful. Not only is he aware of what is happening at all times, but he also instigates with Pandaro much of the action toward Criseida. Criseida is all that is demanded of her on the surface, but basically she is a sensual, coy, and plotting young lady who speaks of honor, but is almost careless with it. Coghill says she is "one who makes a show of modesty for form's sake, but has no real reluctance to being loved."82 As a result, Pandaro, characterized as a young noble Troilo's age and a cousin to Criseida, is nearly useless. He is a "shoulder to cry on," a messenger boy, and a companion. Schless writes that Boccaccio's characters remain the same at the beginning and end of the poem:

Boccaccio faces his characters with a relatively simple tension between the private world of personal (principally sexual) satisfaction and the social world of courtly strictures, propriety and reputation. And, while their full and fascinating responses delineate for us the many shifting stages in between, the characters themselves never basically change under the onslaught of emotions and events.<sup>83</sup>

In essence, the emphasis in Il Filostrato is on loving and betraying, and the characters remain bold, direct, and uncomplicated.

Chaucer's are courtly love characters, but at the same time they become breathing individuals who think and feel, act and react. Troilus is a courtly lover Poliatur ad unguem—"polished to the toenail."<sup>84</sup> His actions are ideal, but they are also genuine. He really believes in fidelity and discretion; he is truly concerned about Criseyde's honor; he genuinely suffers because of his love for her and later when he loses it; he is aware of Pandarus as a "go between," but he does not instruct him. G. T. Shepherd writes of Troilus's ideal conduct and genuine feelings:

If we read his character from the action in which he is involved we see him as a prince, as a hopeful, successful, then despairing lover, and a bitter fighter. We are told he is handsome, young, fresh, strong, resolute in action and successful in war. We watch him behave in love as a pattern of amorous gallantry should behave. He suffers 'this wondrous maladie' to perfection. He swoons, he weeps, he languishes. He is properly passionate, both masterful and humble in the consummation of his love. He becomes jealous and desperate and angry. He is indeed the ideal young male character, quick, proud, active, passionate, easily cast down,

resolute when his course is clear, delighted  
by success, impatient of delay--psycho-biolo-  
gically, the perfect specimen or as Chaucer puts  
it,

Oon of the beste entrecched creature  
That is, or shal, whil that the world may dure.<sup>85</sup>  
(V 832-3)

Further, Chaucer adds depth to Troilus's character with two passages from sources other than Boccaccio: Boethius and Dante. In Book IV (946-1085) Chaucer places Troilus in the temple where he contemplates losing Criseyde. Here, he debates with himself the idea of free will versus destiny, much as Boethius debates with Dame Philosophy in his Consolation of Philosophy. Although some critics view this passage as an intrusion on Troilus's character, others believe that since Troilus is a "medievalized" character the debate is very true to Troilus. Boethius's Consolation was known to intellectuals of the Chaucerian era, and Troilus is a medieval nobleman of intellect. This is Troilus's one attempt in the poem to use logic or reason over emotion. However, nothing comes of it; he returns for the remainder of his life to his original emphasis of emotion over reason. It is only at the end of the poem when he is dead that he can reverse his thinking. In Book V at the end of the poem Troilus, killed by Achilles, goes to heaven where he looks down and laughs at his earthly love:

And whan that he was slayn in this manere,  
His light goost ful blisfully is went.  
Up to the holughnesse of the eighthe spere,

In convers letyng everich element;  
 And ther he saugh, with full avysement,  
 The erratik sterres, herkenyng armonye  
 With sownes ful of hevenyssh melodie.

And down from thennes faste he gan avyse  
 This litel spot of erthe, that with the se  
 Embraced is, and fully gan despise  
 This wrecched world, and held al vanite  
 To respect of the pleyne felicitye  
 That is in hevne above; and at the laste,  
 Ther he was slayn, his lokyng down he caste.

And in hymself he lough right at the wo  
 Of hem that wepten for his deth so faste;  
 And dampned aloure werk that foloweth so  
 The blynde lust, the which that may nat laste,  
 And sholden aloure herte on heven caste.

(V 1807-1825)

The passage is a reflection of the influence of Dante's Divine Comedy, Canto xxii, where Dante is told by Beatrice to prepare himself for salvation by taking one last look at earth:

I turned my eyes down through all the seven spheres,  
 And I saw this globe of ours such  
 that I smiled at its mean appearance;

And I approve that opinion as best which esteems it  
 of least account; so that those who think  
 of something else can truly be called righteous.<sup>85a</sup>  
 (ll. 133-38)

Because Troilus is an ideal lover, his action at the end is intensified through the contrast. Here, Chaucer makes the shift from the omniscient narrator to the moralist to show his readers through Troilus, as Dante did in the Divine Comedy, that earthly pleasures are insignificant next to heavenly bliss.<sup>85b</sup>



Critics view the importance of Troilus as a character in Troilus and Criseyde in different degrees, however. Bronson says that Troilus "essentialized the meaning of his [Chaucer's] poem" because his exemplary conduct "tested most profoundly the tragic implications of human existence."<sup>86</sup> To the contrary, Shepherd writes that because he is ideal,

. . . readers find him the least satisfying of the major characters of the poem, somewhat flat and characterless; and properly so. He refuses to come out of the poem. . . . His function is obvious, simple, and directly comprehensible.<sup>87</sup>

However, Schless insists that Troilus is by no means the simplest character in the poem and is anything but static. There is physical advancement through time and space:

[Troilus] begins as an ardent young male struck [awed] by. . . a beautiful woman across a crowded room, . . . who ends, disdainful all the world's 'vanitee' in the eighth sphere of Heaven, the realm of the fixed stars and of that fascinatingly enigmatic group, the virtuous pagans. . . . The poem's setting has steadily widened from Troilus solitary in his chamber, to the lover's chamber, to the parliament, to increasing distance separating Troy from the Greek camp, to Troilus' dissociation from 'real' time and space, and finally to a whole new universal perception that encompasses at once both the Christian and the perfected (albeit pagan) ideal of Love.<sup>88</sup>

Emotional advancement appears as well from love-struck in Book I, to emotional revolution in Book II, to emotional center in Book III, to Boethian philosophical additions in Book IV, and finally to emotional withdrawal and death in Book V.<sup>89</sup> Schless maintains

that Troilus's character development is superior to that of the others in the poem.

Criseyde, too, is extremely complex. She is a wealthy widow whose father has betrayed Troy and has left her behind. Naturally she is frightened, but she is not foolish: she seeks protection from the king's eldest son and Troy's mightiest warrior, Hector, and she is not so naive that she does not perceive the extra protection furnished her through the love of Troilus, also the king's son and mighty second to Hector. She does fall in love, but not too easily, with Troilus: Chaucer takes pains to show the reader the stages of her "yielding." Criseyde spars with Pandarus with charming wit and does permit herself to be "taken in" by Pandarus, but not without suspecting his full intent. When necessary she uses reason to supersede emotions. F. N. Robinson writes, "In spite of her tenderness and passion, as is not seldom the case with women, she is less sentimental and more practical than either Pandarus or Troilus."<sup>90</sup> Critics are fond of saying that Chaucer was in love with his Criseyde, whom he refused to portray as fickle as his predecessors had done,<sup>91</sup> for he made her as perfect as he could within the bounds of the story: she is beautiful, witty, gentle, subtle, and smart. The poet seems to suffer as much as Troilus when she becomes unfaithful:

Ne me ne list this sely womman chyde  
 Forther than the stoyre wol devyse.  
 Hire name, allas! is punysshed so wide,  
 That for hire gilt it oughte ynough suffise.  
 And if I myghte excuse hire any wise,  
 For she so sory was for hire untrouthe,  
 Iwis, I wolde excuse hire yet for routhe.  
 (V 1093-99)

Schless maintains that

Chaucer. . . uses every device at his command (word-play, narrator intrusions, circumlocution, etc.) to avoid defining her motives and to sustain a creative ambiguity that makes her one of the most charmingly enigmatic women in English literature.<sup>92</sup>

Because of her ambiguity, Criseyde's character is one of endless debate. Coghill excuses her action and blames the system:

She only had the qualities appropriate to a secluded garden, for life and love in a protected world. Now she was outside the walls of Troy, outside the garden of the rose. She had been all she ought to have been by the standards of Guillaume de Lorris, but that was not enough in the actual world where there is such a thing as Chance.<sup>93</sup>

Shepherd, too, says she is a "victim," but of the war setting:

Troilus and Criseyde reflects and accepts this tedious insistence [of war]. The background of war is much more prominent in Chaucer's telling of the story than in Boccaccio's. The confrontation of the nations, the everlasting state of the seige, the daily skirmishes and the truces, the counsels of state and the debates on policy, these constitute a great stable pattern to the life imagined in the story. . . . There is no real and lasting escape possible for the lovers out of this grim world to some soft paradise of love.<sup>94</sup>

He goes on to say, "Again and again in the last book the Narrator tells us that these things fall and can fall no otherwise than as 'the story telleth us'. Criseyde, like Troilus, is a function of the plot."<sup>95</sup> Kittredge counters Shepherd's statements:

Cressida [sic], though soft-hearted and of a pliant disposition, is an uncommonly clever woman, and she is mistress of her actions. Certainly she is in no sense the victim of the plot.<sup>96</sup>

He hastens to add, however, that neither is she a "scheming adultress." She is instead a thinking woman who looks at a situation from all the angles. Sharrock sees in Criseyde a sense of responsibility:

Her degradation is not, as Lewis and other modern critics see it, the consequence of a special flaw in character ('slydenge of courage') meeting in the selective world of tragedy its special penalty, but the common human degradation of being responsible for one's worst moments as well as one's best.<sup>97</sup>

Schless writes that her potential is limited and, as a result, she took the "short view" solution.

. . . what Troilus is inadvertently demanding of her is more than she has to offer; and in the end she falls back to the stasis of character when, in a kind of reaction of relief, she accepts, in place of the immense responsibility that Troilus had demanded of her, a resignation to the love of the 'sudden Diomedes', one who is close to being Troilus's equal and opposite.<sup>98</sup>

Ian Robison shares a similar view of Criseyde:

She knows Troilus's fatal magic, so to speak, in reverse, for Troilus physical desire naturally takes the form of the love he feels for Criseyde, but after she has left him Criseyde's frail love turns into the lust of the flesh. She succumbs to Diomedes.<sup>99</sup>

Because Chaucer altered Troilus and Criseyde, he was forced to change Pandarus, the third major character. An uncle and supposed protector to Criseyde, a nobleman and close friend to Troilus, Pandarus represents humor and realism. Chesterton comments, ". . . and Pandarus really is a character. With him we have the first full appreciation of Chaucer as a humorist; that is, of Chaucer at his broadest and best as a benefactor of humanity."<sup>100</sup> Some critics believe that this invented character is Chaucer himself:

He is a joker, full of proverbial conversation, a most dexterous manager of dinner-parties, a man of resource and invention. . . . In all this he seems to offer a speaking portrait of his own creator, Geoffrey Chaucer, who was in the middle forties at the time of his creation, a man of proverbs, a diplomat de carrière, 'a popet in an arm t'enbrace for any womman, small and fair of face,' a considerable astronomer, a man of sophistication and humour, and, above all, of kindly feeling.<sup>101</sup>

Pandarus feels genuine sympathy for Troilus in his misery; he desires, with unselfish motives, to bring the two lovers discreetly together; when the "chips are down," he uses reason and rhetoric, often mixed with humor, to persuade Troilus and Criseyde to act. He enjoys promoting action and happiness for

others while at the same time he can laugh about his own loveless life. However, not all critics agree with this analogy. Schless writes that Chaucer is closer to Boccaccio in Pandarus than in the other characters because he does not change throughout the poem: "His is a world of words and when one moves beyond a realm where words can manoeuvre [sic], he can only disappear. . . in silence."<sup>102</sup> Ian Robinson, who seems to be judging the poem by modern psychology, insists that ". . . what looks like friendliness might be a rather unattractive frivolity, and what looks like sympathy an indecent curiosity."<sup>103</sup> He accuses Pandarus of being "sexually interested in both Criseyde and Troilus"<sup>104</sup> and cites examples of purposeful physical contact between Pandarus and the other two characters. Pollard continues the attack on Pandarus by maintaining that in Chaucer's hands

. . . the character of Pandarus is deepened and worsened. He is no longer a passionate youth, but a man of the world, using at times the language of 'Cupid's Saints', but knowing exactly what he is about in helping his friend. His humour is endless, but it is not always pleasant, and he is only redeemed by his capacity for friendship.<sup>105</sup>

Kittredge denies the battered man of the world theory established by William Rossetti: "Man of the world he is, assuredly, but the world has not 'battered' him. . . . There is nothing cynical about him, except at times the turn of his epigrams."<sup>106</sup> Shepherd sees Pandarus as an essential instrument in the poem: "Chaucer

uses him as a trigger mechanism to the action, as a support to the main figures, and is as merciless in dispatching him when he is superfluous to the action. . . ."107

Chaucer borrowed and changed Boccaccio's characters. The result is life. Each character comes alive under the craft of Chaucer, for they are real and complex people who experience love and hate, laughter and tears, and all the emotions in between. That there are so many interpretations of each character attests to their reality.

Troilus and Criseyde is the transitional work in Chaucer's poetic development, for it is a blend of romance and realism: it looks back to his French influence best illustrated in The Book of the Duchess and looks forward to his most realistic work, The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer borrowed extensively from the Italian Boccaccio's Il Filostrato to write Troilus and Criseyde, and yet he created dramatic changes that not only made his poem different, but better: He intensified Boccaccio's courtly love theme by drawing on the earlier French influence of the romantic Roman; he breathed life into Boccaccio's stock characters; and he added the philosophical touches of realism from Boethius and Dante. ". . . we may say that in the Troilus we find that Chaucer, who was already a good poet, is beginning to be a great poet."108 As was true in his "French Period," Chaucer's heroine most nearly epitomizes the poetic growth during his "Italian Period." Troilus symbolizes the poet's past romances, Pandarus his future realism, but Criseyde is the best blend of both.

## Chapter IV: Phase Three

The final stage of Chaucer's literary journey from romance to reality is England. After his second trip to Italy, Chaucer was home to stay: ". . . Chaucer's public services after 1378, so far as is known, were performed in England."<sup>109</sup> Chaucer had been appointed Comptroller of the Customs and Subsidies on Wool for the London port in 1374; added to that position were his appointments to Controller of Petty Customs on wine and other merchandise in 1382 and to Justice of Peace in Kent in 1385.<sup>110</sup> However, between 1386 and 1389, Chaucer's life changed drastically. Nevill Coghill writes that "Fortune's wheel had turned with sudden fury for the poet in December 1386."<sup>111</sup> Chaucer's change in fortune parallels that of England: he lost his prestigious customs jobs, his rent-free home in Aldgate, and his wife. England experienced the usurpation of power by the Duke of Gloucester from his brother John of Gaunt who, temporarily out of the country, had been regent for his nephew Richard II; there were also constant threats of French invasions, and finally the bloody coup d'etat of Richard II at the age of twenty-three. With the rightful rule of Richard II came Chaucer's reinstatement in the civil service and rewards from royalty:

In 1393 he received ten pounds for good service to the King during that year; in 1394, a pension of twenty pounds for life; in 1395, a scarlet robe,



trimmed with fur, from Bolingbrook, son of John of Gaunt, and later Henry IV. It was the poet's second story of success.<sup>112</sup>

In 1399, Henry IV overthrew his cousin Richard II, and the new King "almost at once granted Chaucer an annuity of forty marks, as well as confirming the existent royal pension of twenty pounds a year and the poet's right to the annual butt of wine."<sup>113</sup> That same year Chaucer leased a small house on the grounds of Westminster Abbey where he died in 1400. The decline of fortune, literally and figuratively, in 1386 was undoubtedly a harsh blow to Chaucer personally, but it was equally a hardy boon to Chaucer poetically. For it was during that time that he moved to the County of Kent in Greenwich "on the pilgrim road to Canterbury"<sup>114</sup> where he had more time to write The Canterbury Tales which "were begun as such towards 1386-7, and remained his 'work in progress' until the end of his life, never completed."<sup>115</sup>

The Canterbury Tales is the crown of Chaucer's poetic career, and for this masterpiece he had been collecting gems all his life. The work is the culmination and assimilation of everything that Chaucer observed, read, and felt during his active life as courtier, soldier, diplomat, civil servant, and man of letters. Marchette Chute writes, ". . . never was a work of art more unmistakably the product of the whole man."<sup>116</sup> The Canterbury Tales which marks the height of Chaucer's craftsmanship is Chaucer's past dovetailed so cleverly as to form his most original work that abounds in realism.

The framework for The Canterbury Tales is tales-told-within-a-tale. There are many precedents for this kind of story. Kittredge writes, "The plan of attaching stories together so as to make a collection is very old, very widespread, and very obvious."<sup>117</sup> Pratt and Young's chapter "The Literary Framework of the Canterbury Tales" in Bryan and Dempster's Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales is perhaps the most comprehensive study of the framing tales. According to them, the earliest known use was in Egypt where a fragment of a manuscript antedating Christianity "by some sixteen to eighteen centuries" has been discovered. The collection of Indian tales is better known, however: Panchatantra (third or fourth century), The Seven Sages (fifth century), Arabian Nights and One Thousand and One Nights (tenth century). Ovid used the framing tale in his Metamorphoses as later did John Gower in his Confessio amantis completed in 1390. Boccaccio, a fourteenth century Italian writer, used the framing-device for three of his works: Ameto (1341), Filocalo (1336-41), and Decameron (1348-53). The last to use the framing-tale prior to Chaucer was Sercambi in his Novelle (1374).<sup>118</sup>

Chaucer was an avid reader. Because of his many experiences and contacts with well-read people, he could have been exposed to most if not all of these works except perhaps the Egyptian manuscript. Certainly he knew Ovid's Metamorphoses and through his Italian travels may have encountered the works of the Italians.

It is known that Chaucer himself made two attempts at the framing-tale before his final triumph: Tragedies and The Legend of Good Women; the first is from Boccaccio's De Casibus and Lorriss's Roman de la Rose and the second is from Legenda Aurea and Ovid's Heroides.<sup>119</sup>

However, the source of The Canterbury Tales is controversial. Marchete Chute gives Chaucer full credit for the idea of the framing tale:

It is as difficult to find a source for The Canterbury Tales as it is to find a source for Chaucer's original decision to base his whole literary career on the vernacular. The source was evidently within himself, born of his own independent way of thinking. Books were a great help to Chaucer and he acknowledged their help eagerly, sometimes giving his fellow authors more credit than they deserved. Books, however, did not help him here. The idea for The Canterbury Tales was entirely his own, and not only had nothing like it ever been done before but nothing like it was ever done again.<sup>120</sup>

Pollard agrees with Chute that Chaucer deserves credit for the idea of the framing tale, but he does concede that, even though the Clerk's Tale of Grisilde is found in both Boccaccio's and Chaucer's works, Chaucer got his from the Latin version of Petrarch which he acknowledges, and that the only argument in favor of Boccaccio as a source is the "needless magnitude of his plan."<sup>121</sup> Kittredge allows that, although "The most tantalizing of all the parallels. . . is Sercambi's Novelle, for which the frame is likewise a pilgrimage," there is no single source.<sup>122</sup>

Tatlock writes that Sercambi's Novelle, a poor imitation of the Decameron, is the closest possible source, but also allows room for Boccaccio:

As to proof of Chaucer's knowledge of it, undeniable direct borrowings there are none; but there are passages so similar as to suggest reminiscence, and both works contain some four times a similar or identical story, but in most cases the story is elsewhere in a form more like Chaucer's.<sup>123</sup>

The four cases are The Clerk's Tale which, as Pollard noted, is the last story in the Decameron, but also in Petrarch's Latin version; The Shipman's Tale which may have come from the Decameron VIII, 1; The Merchant's Tale and The Franklin's Tale which may have been remembered from reading the Decameron in Italy, for there is no proof that he owned a copy.<sup>124</sup> Donaldson comments that the Decameron provides a closer analogy to The Canterbury Tales than any other work, although he acknowledges the pilgrimage idea in Sercambi's Novelle, too. However, he concedes that

Chaucer's scheme might have been a modification of any of these (though there is no evidence that he knew Sercambi's work or Boccaccio's Decameron), but he may have thought of it independently; pilgrims were, after all, known to be prodigious storytellers, and Chaucer had lived a time in Greenwich, along the pilgrimage route from London to Canterbury.<sup>125</sup>

Pratt and Young do not deny that Chaucer could have "transformed the polished orderliness and elegance of the Decameron into the varied realism and humanity of The Canterbury Tales,"<sup>126</sup> if he

had known the collection. However, there is no evidence of his knowledge of it: "Chaucer does not mention the Decameron, he borrows no stories directly from it, and no copy or translation of it can be traced in England during the period of his life."<sup>127</sup> Pratt and Young do acknowledge, though, that he could have heard of it during his Italian trips, but again there is no proof. They credit Sercambi's Novelle as having the closest resemblance: "The essential of the two narrative schemes is a journey made by a miscellaneous group of persons under a leader, in the course of which the stories are told."<sup>128</sup> F. N. Robinson agrees that there are many forerunners of the framing tale, but that there is no evidence of Chaucer's knowledge or use of the Decameron and that if Chaucer used the Novelle, the only possible resemblance is in the use of the pilgrimage.<sup>129</sup>

Because of the absence of proof and the overwhelming concern that the genius of Chaucer and the realism of The Canterbury Tales might be diminished if full credit is not granted the poet, scholars are reticent to acknowledge whole-heartedly a source. However, there is every likelihood that Chaucer had read most of the works mentioned and that he truly had not one source but many to help him arrive at his choice of the framing tale of a pilgrimage. If he had one source, Chaucer blended it so well with his own ideas that the identity is well hidden from even the most scrutinizing scholars.

Although it is obvious that Chaucer had no direct source, there are some striking parallels between his The Canterbury Tales and Boccaccio's Decameron which should be noted. Chaucer's work shares a common flavor with Boccaccio's much as parts of his Troilus and Criseyde shared something with Dante's Divine Comedy. Where the parallels cease, Boccaccio's work serves as a foil against which Chaucer's realism is more than evident.

The Decameron and The Canterbury Tales represent each poet's final triumph in literature. As a result, Boccaccio is credited with showing "the way to modern literature"<sup>130</sup> and Chaucer with "the creation of English literature."<sup>131</sup> Each man reflects the medieval world in which he lived: "In this powerful and multi-form narrative work, Boccaccio depicted the 'human comedy' of the communal society, in the autumn of its medieval civilization,"<sup>132</sup> and "Chaucer carries the life of his times imaginatively into The Canterbury Tales: to read them well is the same as being acquainted with Chaucer's world."<sup>133</sup> Both men write descriptive passages which set appropriate scenes for their stories. Boccaccio contrasts the chaos in the city of Florence where Black Death is running rampant with the solitude of the healthy, sunny countryside where his characters have gone to escape plague:

In this sore affliction and misery of our city, the reverend authority of the laws, both human and divine, was all in a manner dissolved and fallen in decay, for [lack of] the ministers and executors thereof, who, like other men, were all either dead

or sick or else left so destitute of followers that they were unable to exercise any office, whereof everyone had license to do whatever pleased him.<sup>134</sup>

and

. . . depart this city . . . betake ourselves quietly to our places in the country. . . . There may we hear the small birds sing, there may we see the hills and plains clad all in green, and the fields full of corn wave as doth the sea; there may be trees, a thousand sorts, and there is the face of heaven more open to view. . . .<sup>135</sup>

Chaucer is perhaps best known for his scene at the beginning of the Prologue:

Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote  
The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,  
And bathed every veyne in swich licour  
Of which vertu engendered is the flour;  
Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth  
Inspired hath in every halt and heeth  
The tendre croppes, and the yonge sonne  
Hath in the Ram his halve cours yronne,  
And smale foweles maken melodye,  
That slepen al the nyght with open ye  
(So priketh hem nature in hir corages);  
Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages,  
And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes,  
To ferne halwes, kowthe in sondry londes;  
And specially from every shires ende  
Of Engelond to Caunterbury they wende,  
The hooly blisful martir for to seke,  
That hem hath holpen whan that they were seeke. (ll. 1-18)

In these eighteen lines Chaucer basically says that "in spring, when all nature begins to revive, people want to go on pilgrimages,"<sup>136</sup> but there is more depth to the lines than this simple explanation. Ultimately, "What the complete sentence has

succeeded in saying is that the spring, which engenders thoughts of love, makes people want to go on pilgrimages, during which they will see the world, in order to perform an act of piety."<sup>137</sup> Chaucer's opening lines set the scene for the mixture of motivations found among the pilgrims which, of course, is a great part of Chaucer's grand plan.<sup>138</sup> Both Chaucer and Boccaccio include varied types of stories within their framework. Sir Walter Raleigh classifies Boccaccio's:

About a third of them are found among the fableaux of the lower kind of minstrels in northern France. Another group contains moral apologues, Oriental in origin and essence, but scattered throughout many countries. Last and most important, there are the stories founded on real incidents of Italian life, some of them belonging to his own time.<sup>139</sup>

F. N. Robinson writes about Chaucer's stories:

In keeping with the miscellaneous character of the company is a wide range of tastes and interests represented by the stories they relate. The romance of chivalry, the courtly lay, the coarse realistic fabliau, the beast-epic, the legend or saint's life, the mock sermon with its illustrative exemplum--all are included, along with the moral allegory and the ethical treatise, which only by a stretch of terminology can be called a tale at all. Nearly every type of medieval fiction appears, and appears at its best.<sup>140</sup>

The final comparison is that both men wrote from experience. Sir Walter Raleigh tells of Boccaccio: "In 1348 the great plague, or Black Death, desolated Italy. Fiammetta [Boccaccio's long lost love] died of it in Naples; at the same time Boccaccio's father died [of plague] in Florence. . . ." <sup>141</sup> F. N. Robinson speculates



that Chaucer may actually have gone on one or more pilgrimages. Although Tatlock does not believe he ever made one, he believes Chaucer saw many while living in Greenwich.<sup>142</sup> Donaldson's comments substantiate Tatlock's belief that Chaucer could certainly have seen many pilgrims going to Canterbury:

The shrine which Canterbury Cathedral contained was the most popular of the many hallowed sites of fourteenth-century-England. It was here, in the year 1170, that Archbishop Thomas à Becket had been brutally murdered by retainers of King Henry II. The blood that flowed from the wounds of the martyr was preserved by his associates who had witnessed his death, and this blood soon revealed its miracle-working power by healing the sick and injured to whom it was applied. The victim of so dramatic an end was canonized within three years and the scene of his murder became at once an object of pilgrimage. Every spring, as the roads of England became once more passable, pilgrims from all over the country descended upon his shrine in throngs.<sup>143</sup>

Pilgrims congregated in London or just across the Thames at Southwark and journeyed together to the County of Kent where Canterbury is located.

There are several similarities between the two works, but they are superficial in regard to the craftsmanship of the narrative poems. Boccaccio had talent, but Chaucer was a genius. Both poets employed the framework of a tale within a tale, but the real difference is the poet's purpose within the framework. Boccaccio was concerned with the end result. To understand and appreciate his Decameron it is necessary to read the entire work. His purpose was to show mankind experiencing problems and joys

against the outside force of providence. Branca describes Boccaccio's purpose as an "ideal itinerary, which goes from the harsh reprehension of vice (Day I) to a carefully planned eulogy of virtue (Day X)."<sup>144</sup> His characters are not complex individuals but symbols of humanity. The ten storytellers are Boccaccio's vehicles who lend methodical purpose to the tales. In brief, the Decameron, which means in Greek "of the ten days,"<sup>145</sup> is a story set during the plague in Florence where ten survivors, all of the noble class, accidentally wind up at a church. At the suggestion of a woman named Pampinea, the seven women and three men quickly decide to abandon the plagued city for the pleasurable countryside. Their purpose is to wander from castle to castle where there is comfort, plenty, and health. The first day, Pampinea, the self-appointed leader, establishes the ground rules: every day for ten days each of the ten members will tell a story according to the theme established by the daily elected "king" or "queen." There is no individuality in the storytelling, nor is there much of a conversational interchange before, during, or after the stories. Everything is prescribed and orderly: no one disagrees, no one shows distress, no one argues. A typical day is as follows:

The sun had already everywhere brought on the new day with its light and the birds, carolling blithely among the green branches, bore witness thereof unto the ear with their merry songs when the ladies and the three men, arising all, entered the garden and pressing the dewy grass with slow steps, went wandering

hither and thither weaving goodly garlands and disporting themselves, a great while. And like they had done the day foregone, even so did they at present; to wit, having eaten in the cool and danced awhile, they betook them to repose and arising thence after none, came all, by command of their queen, into the fresh meadows, where they seated themselves round about her. Then she, who was fair of favour and exceeding pleasant of aspect, having sat awhile, crowned with her laurel wreath, and looked all her company in the face and bade Neifile give beginning to the day's stories by telling one of her fashion; whereupon the latter, without making any excuse, blithely began to speak thus.<sup>146</sup>

Boccaccio's Decameron is a fairytale world of "kings and queens for a day" who temporarily reside contentedly in the country castles and amuse each other daily by methodically telling ten stories for each of ten days. Their tales deal with the wicked and the virtuous ways of the rest of the world while, realistically, a few miles down the road, their families and friends are dying of plague. Boccaccio's Decameron is as realistic as Nero who fiddled while Rome burned.

Chaucer is at the opposite pole, for The Canterbury Tales is individual from beginning to end. His pilgrims, representative of all classes except for royalty and the very poor, neither of whom would be making a pilgrimage of this nature, are presented both as groups and as individuals, and the stories they tell are characteristic of themselves both in style and language. Within this group, there is not always concord, but often the discord that one might expect from twenty-nine people of different backgrounds gathered together for a not-too-comfortable journey.

Bronson comments:

The overall tone among the pilgrims is on the cold rather than the warm side of the spectrum of human relations. Since Chaucer makes constant use of their mutual reactions, it is to be observed, therefore, that he depends on hostility for the dynamics of his 'drama'.<sup>147</sup>

The tales told by the pilgrims deal with people, not merely ideas; they are not symbols, but breathing individuals. Lumiansky writes that

. . . the pilgrims are not just storytellers but perform like actors in a play, while the road from Southwark to Canterbury becomes a moveable stage for their performances. Thus the particular tale a pilgrim tells is not only a story; it also represents lines spoken by this particular actor-pilgrim, fitting and supplementing the attributes earlier assigned to him, and serving his particular dramatic purpose in the progress of the pilgrimage.<sup>148</sup>

Donaldson supports Lumiansky's remarks:

Chaucer's is perhaps the best of the framing devices in conception and certainly the best in execution. He exploits to the full scope [that] it affords for dramatic action and dramatic development of character-- in the portraits of the Prologue, in the links between the tales, and in the self-revelation of the narrators.<sup>149</sup>

Chaucer's pilgrims meet for the common purpose of the Canterbury pilgrimage at the Tabard Inn in Southwark. Donaldson writes that there actually existed an inn called the Tabard in Southwark during Chaucer's life.<sup>150</sup> Chaucer, who, unlike Boccaccio, is one of the travelers, becomes a quasi-omniscient narrator. He manages to speak with all the travelers in one evening and to reveal their

appearances from head to heel (or for variety, vice versa), their idiosyncrasies, their thoughts, and even the thoughts of some people absent from the group (the wives of the Guildsmen). The manly host, Harry Bailey, sets the ground rules: he decides that each traveler will tell two stories on the way to Canterbury and two coming back. [That would be one hundred sixteen stories in all, which is quite an order for an older man to write. Donaldson comments that "It was characteristic for medieval man to entertain aspirations which assumed that he would live forever."] <sup>151</sup> In return, the pilgrim telling the most enjoyable and the most morally instructive story would win a free dinner at Harry's Tabard Inn at the expense of the remaining pilgrims. The criteria of the tales, entertaining and instructive, correlates directly with the mixed motivations of the pilgrims. The trip begins and so do the stories. To eliminate monotony Chaucer, the poet, establishes two concepts: the intermingling of story types which range in length and the interplay of the pilgrims which is brought about by excessive drinking, long-term class grudges, or discontent over disagreeable stories. Variety and knowledge of human nature combine in Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales to form one of the greatest works in English literature.

Of all Chaucer's pilgrims, the charming and disarming Wife of Bath is the most colorful and well-developed (literally and figuratively!). Coghill comments, "She is in every way remarkable . . . there was no one with such a force of life in all the

cavalcade."<sup>152</sup> She above all the rest can be singled out to represent the past and the present of the poet Chaucer. From the description of her in the Prologue, her own prologue, her reaction to the verbal interruptions of the Pardoner, Friar, and Summoner and her tale she is obviously the embodiment of the essence not only of The Canterbury Tales, but also of Chaucer. She is the best of the best.

Like all the pilgrims the Wife is a type in the medieval society. F. N. Robinson writes,

Individual as the pilgrims are, they are also representative. Many of them exhibit types of character or of professional conduct--the gentle Knight, the venal Friar, the hypocrite in the person of the Pardoner--such as were familiar in literature of the age. And taken together, they cover nearly the whole range of life in Chaucer's England. . . . Possibly Chaucer did not set out deliberately to make the group so inclusive and well-distributed. But whatever chance or purpose governed his choice, it would be hard to find such a description of English society between the *Beowulf*, with its picture of the heroic age, and the broader canvas of the Elizabethan drama.<sup>153</sup>

Masefield classifies the types on the Canterbury pilgrimage:

Reckoning that ten of the society are in religion; Three are concerned with the raising of food; another three seem to be mainly occupied with wool; two with war, two with foreign trade, two are in learned professions, the rest are followers of crafts necessary to man in all ages, the Cook, the Miller, etc.<sup>154</sup>

Tatlock adds that because the pilgrims are generally middle-class,

The Canterbury Tales can be placed near the beginning of modern

literature: ". . . none outranks the Knight, or the Monk (who ranks as a prior), none is beneath the rather prosperous Plowman."<sup>155</sup> The Wife of Bath, actually "of beside Bathe" is a weaver by profession. This is mentioned only in the Prologue by Chaucer, the narrator:

Of clooth-makyng she hadde swich an haunt,  
She passed hem of Ypres and of Gaunt. (ll. 447-8)

Donaldson writes that weavers are

. . . economically independent bourgeoisie, a type that was becoming increasingly common in Chaucer's time. One ought not to forget, however, that Eve, the prototype of all women, was a weaver who spun while Adam dug the earth, and that the Wife of Bathe in all respects takes after her mother.<sup>156</sup>

Mary Carruthers contends that the Wife

As a cloth maker in the west of England at this time. . . was engaged in the most lucrative trade possible. . . . The Wife is not a weaver, but a capitalist clothier, one of those persons who oversaw the whole process of cloth manufacture. . . .<sup>157</sup>

That the Wife is wealthy is certainly confirmed in Chaucer's omniscient review of the Wife's opulent garb on Sundays:

Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;  
I dorste swere they weyeden ten pounds  
That on a Sondag weren upon hir heed.  
Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,  
Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.  
(ll. 453-457)

and her many pilgrimages:

And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;  
 She hadde passed many a straunge strem;  
 At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,  
 In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne  
 She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye.  
 (ll. 463-67)

However, not all her wealth comes from her profession. She has had five husbands whom she proudly describes in her prologue. Each of these men through "persuasion," gentle and otherwise, turned over his money to her. That she was married so many times is natural during the medieval era. Bowden writes that it was typically medieval to marry many times: "A women of any property in the Middle Ages found it difficult to remain single. . . ."158 Marchette Chute verifies:

Both the poet's mother and his grandmother were married three times each, a phenomenon that was not at all uncommon in medieval London. Women of their position were almost as independent as men, and possessed a series of civic and personal rights that would have seemed incredible to a women living in Victorian London. Under common law a woman was her husband's adjunct, but under merchant law she was free as any man. She could operate any business she chose, even one entirely different from her husband's, and take on her own apprentices. She was free to join the trade guild of her chosen profession and to wear its livery, and in the law courts she could plead as a femme sole independent of her husband.<sup>159</sup>

Although the Wife of Bath is representative of medieval society, like the other pilgrims she is an individual. It is significant that when Chaucer the narrator in the Prologue lists the pilgrims for their "portraits" each is named in ranking order from the Knight to the Pardoner by profession except one, the



Wife of Bath. Perhaps this is a sure sign that Chaucer the poet meant for her to stand out as the most individual of them all.

That scholars have sought to identify the Wife in real life, as some have for all the pilgrims, attests to her sense of reality. John Gardner cites Alice Perrers, mistress for many years to Edward III, as one possibility, although he concedes that she may only have been one of many.

. . . Alice Perrers, famous for her wit and intelligence, sexuality and ambition, may have provided part of the inspiration for Chaucer's single most magnificent character, middle-aged Dame Alice, the inexhaustible Wife of Bath. As J. M. Manly proved years ago, Chaucer and his audience delighted in in-jokes, personal satire or praise. It is true that, because of his association with Petherton Forest, Chaucer may have known various weavers, even some named Alice, from Walcot, the tiny village 'besyde Bathe,' and his courtly audience may just possibly have known this. Nevertheless, they might not unnaturally have remembered Alice Perrers when they considered the intelligence, humor, shameless sexuality, greed, ambition, sensitivity to slight, and, above all, the opinions of the Wife of Bath--her comically overprotested conviction that birth is irrelevant to 'gentillesse,' her sympathetic view (which she shared with John of Gaunt and the Black Prince) of certain Lollard tenets, and her ability, given the right lover, to love truly and well. They might think of Alice, too, when it occurred to them that the Wife's tale is Irish in part of its origin, that is, that it came from the country where Alice Perrers' husband was lord lieutenant. The magical hag in the Wife of Bath's Tale is the traditional ghostly figure of Erin; and the implied political philosophy of the Wife's tale is the Irish persuasion that the subject should have a say in things. As the Wife claims that women, subject to men, should have a voice in family government, Irishmen claimed that the Irish,

subject to England, should have a voice in the governing of Ireland. Needless to say, Chaucer's Wife of Bath, as a character in fiction, is drawn from any number of real-life and literary models, but it may well have seemed to his original audience that Alice Perrers was one of them.<sup>160</sup>

Muriel Bowden discusses the question of whether the Wife of Bath is drawn from Jean de Meun's *La Vieille* in the Romance of the Rose, as some scholars have acknowledged, and concludes that she was not.

In the Wife's own Prologue, a great many of the phrases assigned to *La Vieille* are borrowed by the English poet for his Alisoun's use [Fansler (Ch. & R.R., pp. 168 f) lists thirty-five parallels between the Wife of Bath's Prologue and the Romance of the Rose], but in the General Prologue only one parallel to what *La Vieille* says is found: the Wife of Bath has had 'oother compaignye in youthe'--*La Vieille* boasts that she ignored a number of would-be lovers when she was young, for 'j'avoie autre compaignie'. Furthermore, as Mead so convincingly points out, the essential character of *La Vieille* is fundamentally different from that of Alisoun. *La Vieille* is old, decrepit, through with life; the Wife of Bath has still many years to live, she is vigorous and imbued with joie de vivre. *La Vieille* is morose; the Wife is good-natured, even when she is occasionally shrewish. Chaucer may have taken words from the French poem, but Dame Alisoun is straight from life.<sup>161</sup>

Donaldson writes that it is a tribute to Chaucer's realism that scholars have searched fourteenth century documents and records to find actual models, but it also "undervalues Chaucer's true genius."<sup>162</sup> Bronson agrees with Donaldson. He rejects Manly's search for original people in the pilgrims and concludes that if Chaucer had meant for them to be recognized he would have made

the identification obvious.<sup>163</sup> The general consensus is that the Wife of Bath, like all the pilgrims, is drawn from Chaucer's imagination based on constant observations of people. Marchette Chute says of these observations:

For many years Chaucer had been meeting people of all classes and all types, and he had been watching them with so fascinated and affectionate an interest that he knew them better than they knew themselves. He knew the furniture in their houses and the cut of their clothes, the turn of their speech and the very color of their minds. He knew them all--the rowdy ones and the quiet ones, the dignified professional men and the drunks, the girls with plucked eyebrows and the cackling old men with their thin necks, the knaves, the fools, and the innocent. He knew and loved them for the one quality they all had in common, the fact that they were alive.<sup>164</sup>

Chaucer is noted in his "portraits" for establishing the pilgrims' inner character through outward appearances: the Miller's wart, the cook's running sore, and the Wife of Bath's gap-tooth are most notable. Her "gat-tothe" is surely a key to the character and realism of the Wife of Bath. There are several theories as to the medieval meaning of the gap-tooth. Donaldson's interpretation is "lust" and "wanderlust."<sup>165</sup> Bowden cites various scholars on the subject: Skeats sees it as a characteristic of much travel and good fortune; Curry says it connotes a person "envious, irreverent, luxurious by nature, bold, deceitful, faithless, and suspicious"; Barnouw describes it as a sign of one "'predestined for the office of love.'" Bowden concludes that all the theories fit, even though Chaucer may not have had

knowledge of all the medieval interpretations of the gap-tooth.<sup>166</sup> The Prologue gives only a glimpse of the Wife. She is obviously wealthy, proud, and self-assured. However, her own prologue opens the vista to the total person. Here, in the longest segment dealing with the Wife, she completely and unabashedly reveals herself through an absolutely inexhaustible speech on sex. The wife very briefly records her tolerant attitude toward chastity for everyone else before launching into a discussion of her own enjoyment of sex. Speaking in the most earthy language, she relates her activities with her five husbands whom she married "at chirche dore," a medieval custom of saying the banns in the vernacular so that the couple would be certain to understand and afterward entering the church with the priest and witnesses for nuptial mass sung in Latin.<sup>167</sup> She says ". . . thre of hem were goode, and two were badde" (l. 196). The three good ones were old and rich so that she could easily win over their affection and their money by using her own and her mother's psychology that the best defense is the best offense. She nagged, accused, and "loved". Meanwhile having secured their money, love, and faith, she proceeded to be unfaithful. The fourth husband, of whom she has the least to say, turned the tables on her. He had a mistress, and she was jealous. Although she was obviously stung by this turn of fate she was not outdone, for she made him jealous. When he died, while she was on a pilgrimage to Jerusalem, she quickly and unelaborately buried

him, for she already had her eyes on number five, Jenkin, a clerk from Oxford. Although she was forty and he twenty, she loved him. However, their marriage, too, was rocky, but the good Wife managed to get the upper hand. Typically, the Clerk liked to read, and, typically, the Wife did not, although throughout her prologue she cites literary sources and scholars for her argument. One night she tore a page from one of his books; as a result, he whacked her on the ear with such force that it sent her to the floor. Thus the reason for her deafness mentioned in the Prologue. Up to this time the Wife had no control over Jenkin, but now she made him pay for all the damages to her ego up to this point:

But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,  
 We fille accorded by us selven two.  
 He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,  
 To han the governance of hous and lond,  
 And of his tonge, and of his hond also;  
 And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.  
 An whan that I hadde geten unto me,  
 By maistrie, al the soveraynetee,  
 And that he seyde, 'Myn owene trewe wyf,  
 Do as thee lust the terme of al thy lyf;  
 Keep thyn honour, and keep eek myn istaat--  
 After that day we hadden never debaat. (ll. 811-822)

The Wife always knew what she wanted and how to get it. The opening lines to her prologue--

Experience, though noon auctoritee  
 Were in this world, is right ynogh for me  
 To speke of wo that is in marriage (ll. 1-3)

--set the stage. She certainly had experience in marriage which she glowingly related in vivid color. Chesterton writes,

Perhaps nothing is more characteristic of the Wife of Bath's Tale than the enormous and inordinate length of the Wife of Bath's Prologue. . . . But her glorious and garrulous egotism, her unfathomable and inexhaustible vitality, are quite admirably hit off in the mere fact that she talks about things in general at such interminable, if not intolerable length, long before she gets to the beginning of her story at all. Chaucer, with his typical shrewdness, has not supplied any such long personal preface to any other stories.<sup>168</sup>

Her speech is not randomly related, however, for there is definitely a theme: the woman's right to sovereignty in marriage. This same theme is carried into her tale.

A further characteristic of Chaucer's sense of reality is to assign appropriate tales to the teller. F. N. Robinson writes, "In almost every case Chaucer assigned to a pilgrim a tale suited to his character and vocation."<sup>169</sup> Perhaps the only two exceptions are the Second Nun's Tale where she refers to herself as an "unworthy son of Eve" and the Shipman's Tale, originally meant for the Wife of Bath,<sup>170</sup> where several times he classes himself among women.<sup>171</sup> Even these oversights, however, make Chaucer, as well as the pilgrims, seem more human. Just as the pilgrims represent a cross section of fourteenth century English life, so their tales represent a cross section of fourteenth century imagination.<sup>172</sup> Chaucer, as in all his works, had many sources for the tales: "Many of his tales are not original. He took

them from other sources in Latin, French, and Italian and put them into his own tongue."<sup>173</sup> The Wife's tale is an exemplum, a following-up of the prologue, similar to the tales of the Pardoner and Canon's Yoeman. Possible sources are Gower's Tale of Florent, the (fragmentary) Marriage of Sir Gawaine, and the Weddyng of Sir Gowen and Dame Ragnell. As usual, critics are unclear as to whether Chaucer borrowed directly from one or perhaps borrowed something from all. Whiting concludes,

One thing is certain: despite the varying merits of the other documents, no better proof of Chaucer's overwhelming literary power and artistry is to be found than in a comparison of the Wife's Tale with its analogues.<sup>174</sup>

The Wife of Bath's Tale is a romance, seemingly contradictory to her practical, realistic nature. The fairy-tale deals with Kings and Queens, knights and hags, yet its primary theme is exactly that of her prologue: women wish to have mastery in marriage. The setting is King Arthur's Briton, a land of the supernatural. In the opening scene there is a touch of reality as one of Arthur's lusty knights rapes a lonely damsel. Arthur commands that the knight be killed, but the Queen and her ladies beg for and receive mercy. So far, the story is a reversal of roles from courtly love. To earn his right to live the knight has one year and a day to learn the answer to the Queen's question: "What thyng is it that wommen moost desiren" (l. 905). Returning home on the appointed day without the answer, the knight

sees twenty-four dancing girls in the forest who quickly disappear and are replaced by an old and ugly woman--"A fouler wight ther may no man devyse" (l. 999). She offers her help, he tells her his problem; she answers the question, after he has agreed to the stipulation that he will do the next thing she asks if it were in his power. They go directly to Court where before everyone he announces that women want complete control of their husbands:

Wommen desiren to have sovereynetee  
As wel over hir housbond as hir love,  
And for to been in maistrie hym above. (ll. 1038-1040)

All agree that it is the correct answer and with that the loathly hag demands her wish--his hand in marriage. Stunned, the knight pleads that she take money and let his body go! She is insistent; so they are married--in the quietest of ways. That night, in bed, the knight tosses and turns, but his wife wears a steady smile. Finally, in place of the action appropriate to the Wife in this situation, there issues a discourse on true gentleness, whether nobility of character is inherited with riches or comes from God. It is obvious who is defending which side. The discourse sounds like the Wife's prologue where she uses one scholarly source after another to win her argument. At last the hag lays it on the line:



Chese now, quod she, oon of thise thynges tweye:  
 To han me foul and old til that I deye,  
 And be to you a trewe, humble wyf,  
 And nevere you displease in al my lyf;  
 Or elles ye wol han me yong and fair,  
 And take youre aventure of the repair  
 That shal be to your hous by cause of me,  
 Or in som oother place, may wel be. (ll. 1219-1226)

After much thought and many deep sighs, he gives his answer: he will put himself in her full control and she shall choose whichever is the best for both of them. With that she becomes his master in the marriage and her first command is for him to kiss her. When he looks at her she has been transformed into a beautiful young creature. Needless to say, the knight is beside himself with joy, and they live happily ever after. The tale delightfully proves the Wife's point. Happiness in marriage arrives when the wife is made the master. Perhaps, too, the Wife is hoping that number six husband will transform her into a beautiful young woman.

Further realism in the Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is her allusion to former scholars and their works. Chaucer has alluded to scholars known to medieval readers in all his works, and he continues this practise throughout The Canterbury Tales. The Wife refers to many of Chaucer's old favorites. However, in previous works, the citations are appropriate inserts made by the erudite poet or learned characters. Here, the Wife "quotes" from sources that she has only heard about through sermons and from her husbands; certainly she has never taken the time to read.

Therefore, her quotings or misquotings, as the case may be, add yet another dimension to the Wife's character. In the beginning of her prologue she refers to the Bible, particularly to Christ and his Apostles, to reinforce her point about chastity; but, she prefers Solomon who "enjoyed many wives." Later, in a discussion of her first three husbands, she cites the astrologer Ptolemy to make a point about the sovereignty of women in marriage. He writes in his Almageste that the wisest men do not care who rules the world. While discussing husband number four, Wilkin, the Wife alludes to Metellius who took his wife's life with a stick because she, like the Wife, drank wine. Her fifth husband, Jenkin, is a learned clerk who often "preaches" to his wife. He quotes from Roman histories, the Bible, and one book, in particular, which he calls Valerius and Theophrastus that contains a collection of writings from St. Jerome, Tertullian, Chryseppus, Tratula, Heloise, Parables of Solomon, Ovid's Art of Love, and others. He takes great delight in reading to her from this collection of stories pertaining to the wicked ways of women. In her tale she refers at the onset to the King Arthur stories which form the setting of her own fairytale-like story. Then, just as the expanded work is a tale within a tale, her own tale has a tale within it. Hers is of Midas from Ovid. Midas has two ass's ears growing under his hair. Only his wife knows, and he begs her not to tell. She promises, but unable to keep the secret goes to the marsh one day and whispers the knowledge to

the water. The Wife uses this abridged story to prove that women cannot keep a secret. To reinforce her own and the hag's point that nobility comes from God, the Wife cites Dante, Seneca, Boethius, and Juvenal. Her citations, while often giving an ironic twist to her characterization because she obviously did not read, show that her prologue and tale are representative of Chaucer's past and present.

The final evidence of realism is the interaction of the pilgrims. F. N. Robinson comments:

He represents the party as engaged in free and natural social intercourse, and oftener than not the tales are evoked by talks along the way. Sometimes they are told to illustrate a point or enforce an argument; sometimes they grow out of an altercation. . . . Sometimes they are given simply in response to the request of the Host.<sup>175</sup>

Because Chaucer never combined the tales in one manuscript, no one knows the exact order in which he meant for them to appear. As a result, scholars have arranged them differently. In the case of the Wife of Bath, F. N. Robinson places her tale after the Man of Laws, where there is no lead-in to her tale; Lumiansky shows the Host calling on her to follow the Nun's Priest Tale. At any rate, the verbal exchange that occurs during and after her tale is clear. Having concluded her opposing views to chastity, she says:

Myn husbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,  
 Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.  
 An housbonde I wol have, I wol not lette,  
 Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,  
 And have his tribulacion withal  
 Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.  
 I have the power duryng al my lyf  
 Upon his propre body, and nocht be.  
 Right thus the Apostel tolde it unto me;  
 And badoure housbondes for to love us weel.  
 Al this sentence me liketh every deel-- (ll. 152-162)

The Pardoner interrupts here to claim that he has intended to take a wife, but that he certainly does not want to punish his flesh. The Wife tells him to hear her out, and he asks her to tell all. Actually the Pardoner is an eunich who certainly has no intention of taking a wife. His sole interest in women is to know them better in order to more easily deceive them into buying his false relics.<sup>176</sup> At the end of her prologue the Friar and Summoner have a go at it. The Friar criticizes the Wife for her long "preamble." The Summoner quickly tells him to sit down and shut up. Angry, each declares he will tell a funny story on the other. The Host cries "Peace" which comes, and the Wife proceeds. True to her nature, she gets the last word. Offended by the Friar's remark she begins her tale with a dig at him: the evil spirits of the dancing elves in King Arthur's time are replaced by "holy friars as thick as dust in a sunbeam" everywhere begging. At the end of her tale, the Friar and Summoner fulfill the promises made earlier by telling fabliaux at each other's expense. Bronson writes that the Wife

is "natural prey" for the Friar, Summoner, and Pardoner, all of whom are "stalking her," for "They are conscious rivals--not for the dubious privilege of becoming her sixth, but for her purse."<sup>177</sup> Following these come the remaining tales of what Kittredge has termed the Marriage Group.<sup>178</sup> The Wife of Bath's Tale is the impetus for the tales of the Clerk, Merchant, and Franklin, all of which give differing views on marriage.

The Canterbury Tales, the culmination and assimilation of Chaucer's past romance and present realism, is undoubtedly his finest work, and The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale is the best of those included. Not only is the Wife chatty and witty as she reveals herself, but her prologue and tale serve as an exemplum for the entire work.

## Chapter V: Conclusion

Scholars rank Chaucer among the greatest English poets. Judged collectively his poetry earns that reputation, yet judged separately many of his poems, though good, are not great. Chaucer worked up to his greatness gradually and by degrees. His poetry is a steady process of building that parallels his life which critics are fond of commenting, was so full and active that it was a wonder he had time to write. Bronson represents that group:

The conditions of his life as a poet had always meant the seizing of occasions or the response to demands. His associates must often have seen him in the role of occasional entertainer. His poetry was the product of the leisure hours of a busy man continually occupied with workaday affairs. Through the middle years of his life, in the midst of 'reckoning' of customs duties at the Port of London, or workman's accounts at Westminster or Windsor royal building operations and overseeing the Thames Embankment, or journeys at home and abroad on state matters, it is a wonder that he managed to salvage time and energy for so much reading and so much writing. . . . 178

Yet, it was because the poet was exposed to so many facets of life that he was able to write as he did. Obviously, without natural curiosity, love of people, propensity for writing, and vivid imagination, none of the exposure would have amounted to much; but the combination of these added to the events in his life made Chaucer the genius that he was.

His poetry, like his life, divides naturally into three stages: the early romantic period of the French influence; the middle transitional, romantic-realistic period of the added Italian influence; the latter, realistic period of the assimilation of all the influences. Chaucer grew up knowing and using the French language as well as his native English; he was exposed to the French-speaking court that housed French poets and courtiers; he fought and was captured on French soil; he traveled in France for the King; he read French courtly love literature. Naturally his first poems emulated that which he knew best. Chaucer's initial poem is The Book of the Duchess which is ninety-nine percent purely French; the remaining one percent is a hint of the budding genius Chaucer. There are other poems written under the influence of the French, and successively, each one exhibits slight additions of originality; basically, however, his early poetry follows the pattern of courtly love established by Lorris's Roman de la Rose.

Phase two of his life was that of civil servant and diplomat. This time Chaucer's journeys took him farther away to Italy where he gained the added influences of the Italian writers, particularly Boccaccio, Dante, and Petrarch. Chaucer had matured and his work reflects the change. Instead of imitating the Italians, the poet borrowed, altered, and combined their works to suit his own purpose. His major work from this period is Troilus and Criseyde. The sustained narrative includes the

Italian influences of Boccaccio and Dante as well as Boethius and his old favorite Lorris. To these influences Chaucer added an equal part of his genius to create the romantic-realistic work.

In the final phase, Chaucer, having fallen from favor, had a little less money and a little more time in Greenwich where he served the government in lesser jobs. As an aging man, at least by medieval standards, he wrote his most mature work, The Canterbury Tales which reflects all the influences of his life. The many sources he had read, the many people he had met, the many experiences he had had are blended so finely that the total effect is one hundred percent Chaucer. The Canterbury Tales is a masterpiece in realism.

Chaucer's poetry matured with the man. Although he never wrote about himself, his life is an integral part of his poetry which advanced from foreign to home, symbols to people, serious to light, romance to reality. Indeed, taken altogether Chaucer's poetry merits him a position among England's greatest poets.



## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> Bertrand H. Bronson, In Search of Chaucer (Canada: University of Toronto Press, 1960), p. 21.
- <sup>2</sup> John Masefield, Chaucer (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1931), p. 1.
- <sup>3</sup> Derek S. Brewer, Chaucer and Chaucerians: Critical Studies in Middle English Literature (University: University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 1.
- <sup>4</sup> Alfred W. Pollard, Chaucer (London: Macmillan and Company, 1931; rpt. New York: Greenwood Press, 1969), pp. 15-16.
- <sup>5</sup> F. N. Robinson, ed., The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1961), p. xix.
- <sup>6</sup> Marchette Chute, Geoffrey Chaucer of England (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1946), p. 27.
- <sup>7</sup> Chute, p. 17.
- <sup>8</sup> Robinson, pp. xix-xx.
- <sup>9</sup> Robinson, p. xx.
- <sup>10</sup> Chute, p. 22.
- <sup>11</sup> J. S. P. Tatlock, The Mind and Art of Chaucer (New York: Gordian Press, Inc., 1966), p. 1.
- <sup>12</sup> John Gardner, The Life and Times of Chaucer (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1977), p. 52.
- <sup>13</sup> Masefield, pp. 1-2.
- <sup>14</sup> Gardner, p. 68.

- 15 Chute, pp. 33-36.
- 16 Gardner, p. 70.
- 17 Chute, pp. 32-33.
- 18 Pollard, p. 5.
- 19 Pollard, p. 5.
- 20 Robinson, p. xx.
- 21 Robinson, p. xx.
- 22 Pollard, p. 8.
- 23 E. T. Donaldson, ed., Chaucer's Poetry (New York: The Ronald Press Company, 1958), p. 863.
- 24 Donaldson, p. 866.
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- 27 Chute, p. 322.
- 28 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 17.
- 29 Donaldson, p. 863.
- 30 Brewer, Chaucer and Chaucerians, p. 1.
- 31 J. I. Wimsatt, "Chaucer and French Poetry," in Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Derek Brewer (G. Bell and Sons Ltd., 1974; rpt. Ann Arbor: Edwards Brothers, Inc., 1976), p. 110.
- 32 Chute, p. 46.
- 33 Nevill Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 4.
- 34 D. S. Brewer, "The Relationship of Chaucer to the English and European Traditions" in Chaucer and the Chaucerians: Critical

Studies in Middle English Literature, ed. D. S. Brewer (University:  
University of Alabama Press, 1966), p. 1.

35 Pollard, p. 32.

36 Pollard, p. 28.

37 Wimsatt, p. 112.

38 Ian Robinson, Chaucer and the English Tradition (Cambridge:  
University Press, 1972), p. 33.

39 Ian Robinson, p. 28.

40 Ian Robinson, pp. 29-30.

41 Chute, p. 72.

42 Pollard, pp. 28-29.

43 Pollard, p. 30.

44 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, pp. 10-14.

45 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 14.

46 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 4.

47 Tatlock, pp. 28-29.

48 Gardner, p. 60.

49 Chute, pp. 43-44.

50 Donaldson, p. 863.

51 Gardner, p. 113.

52 Donaldson, pp. 863-67.

53 Tatlock, p. 31.

54 F. N. Robinson, p. 267. These and all subsequent lines  
are found in this text.

55 Bronson, p. 36.

- 56 Bronson, p. 38.
- 57 George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry. (1915 rpt. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1936).
- 58 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 19.
- 59 Gardner, p. 249.
- 60 Pollard, pp. 32-33.
- 61 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 28.
- 62 Howard Schless, "Transformations: Chaucer's Use of Italian" in Geoffrey Chaucer, ed. Derek Brewer, pp. 193-4.
- 63 Schless, p. 196.
- 64 Pollard, p. 48.
- 65 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 30.
- 66 Masefield, p. 19.
- 67 Pollard, pp. 49-50.
- 68 F. N. Robinson, p. 385.
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- 72 Gordon, pp. xii-xiii.
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- 77 R. M. Lumiansky, Geoffrey Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1952), p. vii.
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- 81 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 52.
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- 85a Dante Alighieri, The Divine Comedy with introductory notes by H. R. Huse (New York: Holt, Rhinehart and Winston, Inc., 1954), p. 432.
- 85b F. N. Robinson refers to this passage in his Explanatory Notes, p. 837. He alludes to various studies particularly that of H. R. Patch, E St, LXV, 357 ff who suggests that Chaucer may well have had Canto xxii of Dante's Paradiso in mind when he created the passage in Troilus and Criseyde.
- 86 Bronson, p. 117.
- 87 Shepherd, pp. 79.

- 88 Schless, pp. 210-211.
- 89 Schless, p. 211.
- 90 F. N. Robinson, p. 387.
- 91 Mieszkowski, p. 79.
- 92 Schless, p. 214.
- 93 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 60.
- 94 Shepherd, p. 68.
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- 114 Donaldson, p. 865.
- 115 Nevill Coghill, Geoffrey Chaucer (London: Longmans, Green and Company, 1962), pp 33-34.
- 116 Chute, p. 241.
- 117 Kittredge, p. 148.
- 118 Robert A. Pratt and Karl Young, "The Literary Framework of The Canterbury Tales," in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1941), pp. 22.
- 119 Kittredge, p. 152.
- 120 Chute, p. 242.
- 121 Pollard, pp. 63-101.
- 122 Kittredge, pp. 148-149.
- 123 Tatlock, p. 91.
- 124 Tatlock, p. 91.
- 125 Donaldson, p. 872.
- 126 Pratt and Young, p. 20.
- 127 Pratt and Young, p. 20.
- 128 Pratt and Young, p. 26.
- 129 F. N. Robinson, pp. 1-2.
- 130 Giovanni Boccaccio, Decameron with introductory notes by Sir Walter Raleigh (New York: Liveright Publishing Corporation, 1943), p. xx.

- 131 Ian Robinson, p. 282.
- 132 Vittore Branca, Boccaccio: The Man and His Works (New York: New York University Press, 1976), p. 77.
- 133 Ian Robinson, p. 286.
- 134 Boccaccio, p. 12.
- 135 Boccaccio, p. 20.
- 136 Donaldson, p. 876.
- 137 Donaldson, p. 876.
- 138 Chute, p. 247 and Pollard pp. 97-98 discuss the dual nature of the pilgrimages. Originally they were intended for religious purposes, but by Chaucer's time, pilgrimages served both for religion and pleasure. Chaucer's character's have motives that run the gamut.
- 139 Boccaccio, p. xxviii.
- 140 F. N. Robinson, p. 4.
- 141 Boccaccio, p. xxv.
- 142 Tatlock, pp. 88-89.
- 143 Donaldson, p. 873.
- 144 Branca, p. 206.
- 145 Branca, p. 77.
- 146 Boccaccio, p. 69.
- 147 Bronson, p. 61.
- 148 R. M. Lumiansky, trans. The Canterbury Tales (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1954), p. x.
- 149 Donaldson, p. 872.
- 150 Donaldson, p. 873.



- 151 Donaldson, p. 871
- 152 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 106.
- 153 F. N. Robinson, pp. 3-4.
- 154 Masefield, p. 26.
- 155 Tatlock, p. 92.
- 156 Donaldson, p. 893.
- 157 Mary Carruthers, "The Wife of Bath and the Painting of Lions," PMLA, 94 (1979), 209-210.
- 158 Muriel Bowden, "The Good Wife of Juxta Bathon" in Critics on Chaucer, ed. Sheila Sullivan (Coral Gables: University of Miami Press, 1970), p. 100.
- 159 Chute, pp. 22-23.
- 160 Gardner, pp. 189-190.
- 161 Bowden, pp. 103-4.
- 162 Donaldson, pp. 875-6.
- 163 Bronson, pp. 68-69.
- 164 Chute, p. 240.
- 165 Donaldson, p. 894.
- 166 Bowden, p. 102.
- 167 Bowden, pp. 101-2.
- 168 Chesterton, pp. 160-61.
- 169 F. N. Robinson, p. 4.
- 170 Bartlett J. Whiting, "The Wife of Bath's Tale" in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, p. 223.
- 171 F. N. Robinson, p. 2.

172 Coghill, The Poet Chaucer, p. 92.

173 Anne Malcolmson, A Taste of Chaucer (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, Inc., 1964), p. 18.

174 Whiting, p. 224.

175 F. N. Robinson, p. 4.

176 In his own prologue and tale the Pardoner, like the Wife, completely reveals himself to the other pilgrims. The difference is that the Wife intends to tell all, but the Pardoner does not; he becomes so absorbed in his "sermon" that his secrets slip out. The result is a decidedly revolting character with no redeeming qualities.

177 Bronson, p. 63.

178 Kittredge, p. 147.

179 Bronson, p. 70.

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## Biographical Sketch

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