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A study of Chaucer's influence on English literature through Dryden

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A STUDY OF CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE
ON ENGLISH LITERATURE THROUGH DRYDEN

BY

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A THESIS
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PREFACE

Geoffrey Chaucer is one of the greatest poets of our English literature. If Shakespeare stands apart as our greatest, then it is John Milton who must dispute with Chaucer the honor of second place. Milton undoubtedly surpasses Chaucer in the grandeur of his imagination and the sublimity of his poetic style; but "he cannot equal him in the range and variety of his art." On one hand we have Chaucer, the grave and serious poet, always keenly conscious that "our human life is a shifting quicksand of mutability, that lasting happiness can never be our earthly portion;" whereas we have but to turn the page and find evidence of his sprightly fancy and lively wit and humor—humor that ranges all the way from the most delicate hint of the ludicrous to the broadest farce—a farce that is often anything but delicate.¹

¹British Poetry and Prose, "Geoffrey Chaucer," ed. by Paul R. Lieder, Robert M. Lovett, and Robert K. Root, Boston, 1950, vol. I, p. 95.

Further, he brought to English poetry a wide range of experience. As a young man we know that he saw military service, and as an older man he twice made the long journey to Italy. In England, his duties in the custom house and other employments in civil government allowed him to associate with and talk with all sorts and conditions of men. However, if he knew the world of experience, he was equally familiar with the world of books. He must have been a voracious reader. It is said that he possessed a library of some sixty volumes, which in fourteenth century England was an imposing collection. He had not only read or looked into the Latin classics, but he was also intimately acquainted with the courtly poets of France, and his knowledge of Italian opened for him the great pages of Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio. Besides literature, we know Chaucer to have been interested in the pseudo-science of his day, astronomy, the mysteries of alchemy, and he knew in detail the medieval theory of dreams. And, throughout his poetry we find evidence of the philosopher—sometimes serious, sometimes delightfully ironical. It is not strange that one of his contemporaries aptly refers to him as the "noble philosophical poet in English." And in addition to the variety and range of his poetry, he had shown

. . . that our newly recovered English could be the vehicle of poetry as elevated and

profound as that of any poet who used the more exalted medium of Latin, or as light and graceful as that of any courtly singer of France—but he was also a poet who could condescend at times to write a lively tale of ribald farce.²

It is, then, these intrinsic qualities of Chaucer's genius that from his own age to this have made him a moving force in English literature. Indeed no poet since him has exerted a greater influence on the writers of subsequent ages than this first great English poet, writing, as it were, in the dawn of our language. Chaucer's own contemporaries were the first to recognize and pay tribute to his genius. Throughout the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, the man's poetic personality constantly revealed itself in the literature of England and Scotland. Often this influence was largely academic; however, on occasion we find instances of an author who not only understood, but who sincerely tried to capture the spirit of Chaucer's penetrating psychology, catholic sympathy, and objective but deeply human charity.

Unfortunately, towards the close of the sixteenth century Chaucer's position as master poet is less prominent. He was generally looked upon by the Elizabethans as not only obscure, but somewhat barbarous. And, it was not until Dryden modernized several of Chaucer's poems in his volume

²Ibid., pp. 95-96.

called the Fables Ancient and Modern, published at the close of the seventeenth century, that interest in the poet rose from its low ebb.

To a large extent, this brief outline represents the scope of this present study. I have endeavoured to present carefully selected evidence by which to illustrate the vast influence which Chaucer's ageless genius exerted over the poets of England and Scotland during the three hundred years which followed his death. This investigation, however, is by no means to be taken as an exhaustive survey of the Chaucerian influence during those three centuries of English literary history. It is, rather, a selective study of the most significant, and in some cases, the most curious examples of this influence. In certain instances, I have used my own judgment in this selection; more often, however, I have chosen to accept the example given preference by the authors of my source material. I can merely express the hope that this selection has been appropriate to the general thesis of this study.

By way of introduction, it would perhaps be well to note the arrangement I have given to the various authors discussed in this paper. Almost without exception my organization has been chronological. The positions assigned to authors whose dates overlap is purely arbitrary. Emphasis, in each instance, is generally proportionate to the degree

and extent of Chaucer's influence on the work of the individual writer. Thus, in the first chapter I have given the greatest amount of space to Edmund Spenser, who I feel represents the first broadly significant emulation of Chaucer. Correspondingly, I have devoted the final portions of this study to a comparatively detailed evaluation of John Dryden's Fables and the Preface to that volume.

In stressing the significance of the Fables, I have accepted the position most contemporary scholarship takes when it regards Dryden's adaptation of Chaucer to be the most important prior to 1700. In the Fables, Dryden not only endeavours to popularize the poetry of Chaucer, but attempts to provide his reader with an interpretative analysis of the earlier poet's essential genius. Thus, Dryden has given us what is generally accepted as the first significant critical estimate of Chaucer, in respect to both form and content. When we consider the usual quality of seventeenth century literary criticism, especially in its attitude towards the literature of the Middle Ages, we cannot help designating Dryden's work a most remarkable achievement.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
PREFACE	i
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS	vi
I. CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE PRIOR TO DRYDEN	1
1. The English Chaucerians	1
2. The "Chaucerian Apocrypha"	52
3. The Scottish Chaucerians	54
II. DRYDEN'S PREFACE TO THE <u>FABLES ANCIENT</u> <u>AND MODERN</u>	67
III. THE <u>FABLES ANCIENT AND MODERN</u>	85
APPENDIX A: <u>THE FLOWER AND THE LEAF</u>	117
APPENDIX B: EDITIONS OF CHAUCER'S WORKS THROUGH 1793	120
BIBLIOGRAPHY	123
VITA	

CHAPTER I

CHAUCER'S INFLUENCE ON ENGLISH LITERATURE PRIOR TO DRYDEN

1. The English Chaucerians:

Before undertaking a comprehensive study of John Dryden's modern translations of four of Chaucer's works, and one piece which Dryden erroneously attributed to him, it would, perhaps, be wise to discuss briefly the extent of Chaucer's influence on English literature prior to the publication of Dryden's Fables in 1700.

It is not without some accuracy that Dryden refers to Chaucer in the Preface to his Fables as the "father of English Poetry."¹ Indeed, the influence of Chaucer upon English poetry of all dialects, during the entire century which followed his death, and part, at least, of the next,

¹John Dryden, "Preface, Fables Ancient and Modern," The Poems of John Dryden, ed. by John Sargeant, London, 1913, p. 272. This work hereinafter referred to as Poems.

is something to which there is hardly a parallel in literature.² This is not surprising, for "when we consider the greatness of Chaucer's genius it is nothing but natural to expect that his art must have exercised a mighty influence on all subsequent periods of English literature."³ Through the years "the poetical memory" of the country stretched up to him, and the impression which he has made upon the minds of the poets of England and Scotland dates from his own day; and the poets of these countries must constantly and unani- mously acknowledge him for their master.⁴

Throughout the fourteenth century, the literary authority of Chaucer was paramount, although his subordinate, John Gower, is mentioned with considerable, if not equal respect.⁵ One thing is certain: had it not been for the high level reached at the end of the fourteenth century in the Pearl, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, Piers Plowman,

²George Saintsbury, "The English Chaucerians," Cambridge History of English Literature, (ed. by A. W. Ward and A. R. Waller), New York, 1908, vol. II, p. 225. This work hereinafter referred to as CHEL.

³Alfred Tobler, Geoffrey Chaucer's Influence on English Literature, Inaugural dissertation . . . University of Zurich, Berne, 1905, Preface.

⁴John Wilson (Christopher North), Specimens of the British Critics, Philadelphia, 1846, p. 158.

⁵Albert C. Baugh, A Literary History of England, New York, 1948, p. 291. This work hereinafter referred to as LHE.

and the poetry of Geoffrey Chaucer and John Gower, the entire century might well have been dismissed as a "dreary and barren waste in the history of English literature."⁶ Unfortunately, this high level of achievement was not maintained during the fifteenth century in the works of Lydgate, Occleve, and their contemporaries. The fifteenth century has little new to offer; it is in every respect "the child" of the fourteenth. "Its poets appear as followers of Chaucer . . . and later of Lydgate, rather than as leaders pointing new directions."⁷ It is significant, then, to note that Chaucer, who had been the major literary figure of his own century, was also to be a primary influence in the literature of England during the subsequent centuries.

The strongest instance of this influence is noted in the works of John Lydgate (c.1370 - c.1450), monk of the great Suffolk Abbey of St. Edmunds Bury. The influence of Chaucer on Lydgate's poetry is evident throughout most of his work. Unfortunately, however, the genius of Chaucer's poetry carried only an academic influence into Lydgate's work. That Lydgate had humor is evident. But "this humour was never concentrated to anything like Chaucerian strength; while of Chaucerian vigour, Chaucerian pathos, Chaucerian vividness of

⁶Ibid., p. 288.

⁷Ibid.

description, Lydgate had no trace or tincture." In addition to these defects, Professor Saintsbury adds "two great faults" neither of which Chaucer had ever exhibited in any great measure: "prosodic incompetence" and "longwinded prolixity."⁸

That Lydgate had the greatest admiration for Chaucer is evidenced by the numerous occasions on which he pays tribute to him, always in the same tone as

The noble poete of Breteyne,
My mayster Chaucer.⁹

Lydgate wrote in all of Chaucer's three chief metres. He used the octosyllabic couplet with some degree of fluency; but his seven-line (decasyllabic) stanzas were spiritless and clumsy; and in the decasyllabic couplet, he usually wrote only gracefully enough to allow scansion.¹⁰

Instances of the Chaucerian influence on Lydgate's poetry are to be found in his Complaint of the Black Knight, which was once ascribed to Chaucer, and which is an imitation of Chaucer's Dethe of Blaunche,¹¹ and echoes the situation in Chaucer's Book of the Duchesse; and in the allegorical love

⁸Saintsbury, CHEL, pp. 227-228.

⁹Baugh, LHE, p. 291.

¹⁰Chamber's Cyclopoedia of English Literature, ed. by David Patrick, rev. by T. Lindell Geddie, Edinburgh, 1901, vol. I, p. 79. This work hereinafter referred to as CCEL.

¹¹Ibid.

poem, the Temple of Glas, Lydgate employs the familiar convention of the imaginary dream, and is written both in the heroic couplet and the seven-line stanza.¹²

Toward the close of the fourteenth century, we have the monk's The Churl and the Bird, suggested perhaps by Aesop's Fables,¹³ but strongly reminiscent of The Nun's Priest's Tale of the "Cok and Hen, Chauntecleer and Pertelote."¹⁴ Two long pieces appeared soon after: Reson and Sensuallyte (1406-1408), and the Life of Our Lady. "Reson and Sensuallyte still makes rather pleasant reading with its allegory of the poet's meeting with Venus and the journey to the Garden of Fleasure which Guillaume de Lorris had acquainted us with in the Roman de la Rose." The Life of Our Lady (nearly 6000 lines in rime royal) is still unedited.¹⁵ The Siege of Thebes (1420-1422) was written as an additional Canterbury Tale,¹⁶ and includes a prologue modelled on Chaucer's.¹⁷

¹²Baugh, LHE, p. 295.

¹³Ibid.

¹⁴Geoffrey Chaucer, The Poetical Works of Chaucer, ed. by F. N. Robinson, New York, 1933, pp. 238-246. This work hereinafter referred to as Works.

¹⁵Baugh, LHE, p. 295.

¹⁶CCEL, p. 79.

¹⁷An Outline-History of English Literature, ed. by William Bradley Otis and Morriss H. Needleman, New York, 1952, vol. I: To Dryden, p. 85. This work hereinafter referred to as OHEL.

Others of Lydgate's pieces which were apparently influenced by his "mayster Chaucer" are the Nightingale Poems, which are religiously allegorical, and the Fall of Princes (1431-1439), which because of its fewer metrical shortcomings, is one of his best pieces.¹⁸ The poem is his longest work (about 36,365 lines) and appears in nine books, in both the rime royal stanza, and the eight-line stanza, riming ababbcbc.¹⁹

During the course of his eighty years Lydgate wrote nearly 140,000 lines,²⁰ the bulk of which were translations (e.g. The Troy Book of 30,117 lines in decasyllabic couplets, rendered from a Latin prose piece).²¹ The Chaucerian influence on Lydgate is evident throughout his career. Most authorities agree, however, that in the majority of instances, this influence is largely mechanical. Thomas Gray reminds us in his essays On the Poems of Lydgate that we cannot even pretend to set him on a level with his master, Chaucer; but states that, comparatively speaking, he comes the nearest to him of any writer of that period. "His choice

¹⁸Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 228.

¹⁹OHEL, p. 85.

²⁰Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 225.

²¹Baugh, LHE, pp. 296-297.

of expression," says Gray, "and the smoothness of his verse, far surpass both Gower and Occleve."²²

George Puttenham, on the other hand, in The Arte of English Poesie in 1589, calls the monk "a translatur only and no deuiser of that which he wrate."²³ Similarly, William Webbe writes:

Neere in time vnto him Lydgate a Post,
surely for good proporation of his verse,
and meetely currant style, as the affoorded
comparable with Chawcer, yet more occupyed
in superstitious and odde matters, then was
requisite in so good a wytte: which, though
he handled them commendably, yet the matters
themselues beeing not so commendable, hys
estimation hath beene the lesse.²⁴

By far the harshest and most caustic in his criticism is Joseph Ritson, who in 1802 described Lydgate as a

Voluminous, prosaick, and driveling monk
. . . In truth and fact these stupid and
fatigueing productions, which by no means
deserve the name of poetry, and their stil
more stupid and disgusting author, who
disgraces the name and patronage of his

²²Thomas Gray, "On the Poems of Lydgate," from The Library of Literary Criticism of English and American Authors, ed. by Charles Wells Moulton, Buffalo, 1901, vol. I, p. 183. This work hereinafter referred to as LLC.

²³George Puttenham, "The Arte of English Poesie,"
ibid.

²⁴William Webbe, "A Discourse of English Poetrie,"
ibid.

master Chaucer, are neither worth collecting . . . nor even worthy of preservation.²⁵

And yet, so prominent a critic as Cibber says of Lydgate that he was not only "another disciple and admirer of Chaucer," but that it must be owned that Lydgate

. . . far excelled his master, in the article of versification . . . his verses were so very smooth, and indeed to a modern ear they appear so, that it was said of him by his contemporaries, that his wit was framed and fashioned by the Muses themselves.²⁶

Nevertheless, "We will wander far and wearily," says Saintsbury, "among Lydgate's myriads to find such lines as . . ."

And he that made the high and crystal heven
The firmament, and also every sphere
The Golden ax-tree and the starres seven,
Citherea so lusty for to appere
And redde Marse with his sterne here.²⁷

And, although these lines may represent an example of some of Lydgate's best, I do not feel that they can compare with the graceful expression and vividness of description found in similar lines from Chaucer's "Knight's Tale." For

²⁵Joseph Ritson, "Bibliographia Poetica," *ibid.*

²⁶Theophilus Cibber, The Lives of the Poets of Great Britain and Ireland To the Time of Dean Swift, London, MDCCLIII, vol. I, pp. 23-24.

²⁷Chaucer, Works, p. 42.

example, compare Lydgate's description of Citherea, or Venus, with the following one by Chaucer:

The statue of Venus, glorious for to se,
Was naked, fletyng in the large see,
And fro the navele doun all covered was
With wawes grene, and brighte as any glas.

Also from "The Knight's Tale" we have Chaucer's fine picture of Mars:

Withinne the temple of myghty Mars the rede?
Al peynted was the wal, in lengthe and brede,²⁸

and from the Invocation to Anelida and Arcite:

Thou ferse god of armes, Mars the rede,
That in the frosty contre called Trace,
Within thy grisly temple ful of drede . . .²⁹

Contemporary with John Lydgate and his inseparable companion in English literature is Thomas Occleve (or Hoccleve). Most of Occleve's life (c.1369 - c.1450) was spent as a clerk in the Privy Seal Office.³⁰ Generally speaking, Occleve's poetry is not so tiresome as that of Lydgate; although the latter writes better than Occleve and is immeasurably his superior in learning. Occleve has one important merit—his ability to tell a story. After the

²⁸Ibid., ll. 1969-1970.

²⁹Chaucer, Works, p. 355.

³⁰Baugh, LHE, p. 297.

heavily pompous and detailed diction of Lydgate, Occleve, regardless of his technical shortcomings, presents in his writings a "freshness of expression and manner" which make him preferred reading to Lydgate.³¹

Occleve was an even more devoted admirer of Chaucer than was Lydgate.³² Occleve's affection seems to have sprung from a personal acquaintance with Chaucer, and he calls him "maister deere and fadir reverent." That he felt Chaucer's death deeply is apparent from the manner with which he alludes to it:

Death, by thi deth, hath harm irreparable
Unto us doon;³³

"The bulk of Occleve's verse is not large, and the range is limited." All his verse has been printed in a single volume. There are several autobiographical pieces, a dozen occasional poems, usually short, and an equal number of religious verses, addressed in most instances to the Virgin or to Christ. He is also credited with several brief translations. Generally, Occleve's poetry lacks Lydgate's fluency. He rarely wrote for the sheer love of writing, and "he seldom rises to the level of poetry."³⁴ Henry Hallam

³¹Saintsbury, CHEL, pp. 236-237.

³²Baugh, LHE, p. 297.

³³Ibid., p. 291

³⁴Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 239.

calls his poetry "wretchedly bad, abounding with pedantry, and destitute of all grace of spirit."³⁵ And yet, his complete frankness, his many personal revelations, and his frequent references to current events make his verse almost always interesting. "In poets of the fifteenth century . . . this is no small merit."³⁶

Occleve's chief work, the De Regimine Principum (1411-1412), constitutes a treatise on the duties of a ruler and was addressed to Henry, Prince of Wales, later Henry V. It is written in rime royal.³⁷ Other examples of Occleve's poetry are The Mother of God, long assigned to Chaucer, The Letter of Cupid Lovers, in octaves, and the Complaint of the Virgin, probably a translation.³⁸ His poetry is primarily important in that he is considered the best "narrator among the English Chaucerians." His verse is generally written in a "sprawling rime royal or couplets."³⁹

The most original and vivacious of the English Chaucerians is John Skelton (c.1460 - c.1529), tutor probably

³⁵Henry Hallam, "Introduction to the Literature of Europe," from LLC, p. 185.

³⁶Baugh, LHE, p. 298.

³⁷OHEL, p. 86.

³⁸Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 239.

³⁹OHEL, p. 86.

to Prince Henry, and appointed Parson of Diss in Norfolk in 1504. Otis and Needleman state in their Outline-History that Skelton "wrote doggerel almost with genius," and that his metrical ease is attributable to either his structural adaptation of the Low Latin hymns or to his introduction of Martial d'Auvergne's pattern of the short line. His verse is "staccato, voluble, now scrambling, now shuffling, often slipshod."⁴⁰ Pope called Skelton's verse "low and bad," concluding that "there's nothing in it worth reading."⁴¹

He wrote primarily in the octosyllabic couplet, usually with six-syllable lines, varying in length and rime together in continuous succession of two, three, four and sometimes as many as seven times.⁴²

The most important of his works is The Bouge of Court (c.1499), an original allegorical poem in rime royal, using Chaucer's seven-line stanza. In 1523 he wrote his Garlande of Laurell, a stilted, self-laudatory, allegorical poem, written mainly in the rime royal.⁴³ Most of Skelton's faults and peculiarities, says Baugh, are to be found in this Right Delectable Treatise upon a Goodly Garland or

⁴⁰Ibid., p. 87.

⁴¹Alexander Pope, "Spence's Anecdotes," LLC, p. 220.

⁴²OHEL, p. 87.

⁴³Ibid.

Chaplet of Laurel, which is his longest poem and one of his latest (printed and composed in the year 1523). Skelton ends his poem, none too decorously, by placing the laurel upon his head, and in the company of Chaucer, Cowar, and Lydgate, presents himself before the Queen of Fame, where Occupation reads "in 350 lines, in which the rime royal is interspersed with 'Skeltonics' and even Latin hexameters, the long roll of the author's works." He completes the poem with some Latin lines in laudation of Skelton, and decently enough, in compliment to Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey.⁴⁴

Another of Skelton's major works is his The Tunnyng of Elynour Rummyng (c.1522), which, although vigorous and humorous,⁴⁵ was coarse and indelicate enough to justify Pope's epithet—"beastly." It is divided into seven "passus" after the fashion of Langland, and has traces of the earlier poet's alliterative rhythm—which, Baugh tells us must always be considered in any full study of the origins of the so-called "Skeltonic" verse. It should also be noted that the poem "owes an obvious debt to Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale, and a less conspicuous one to the opening of the Nun's Priest's Tale . . ."⁴⁶

⁴⁴Baugh, LHE, pp. 346-347.

⁴⁵OHEL, p. 87.

⁴⁶Baugh, LHE, p. 348.

Additional works of Skelton are Colyn Cloute (c.1521), and Why came ye nat to Courte in 1522.⁴⁷ In both works Skelton abandoned the rime royal "like an encumbering garment and bent to his work in hard-hitting Skeltonics," a fair example of which is here given:

And if ye stand in doubt
 Who brought this rime about,
 My name is Colin Clout.
 I purpose to shake out
 All my cunning bag . . .⁴⁸

Also important in a catalogue of Skelton's works is The Boke of Phyllyp Sparowe (1504-1508), described by Coleridge as "an exquisite and original poem"; and Speke, Parrot (c.1521), both poems executed in the seven-line stanza of Chaucer.⁴⁹

Although there was no poetry in Benet (or Benedict) Burgh, he should be mentioned, if for no other reason than because he continued Lydgate's Secrees of Old Philisoffres,⁵⁰ and because like many of his contemporaries he wrote awkwardly in Chaucer's rime royal. Cato, A Christmas Game,

⁴⁷OHEL, p. 87.

⁴⁸Baugh, LHE, p. 349.

⁴⁹OHEL, p. 87.

⁵⁰Baugh, LHE, p. 302.

addressed to and in praise of Lydgate, and Aristotle A B C are his principal poetical efforts. As noted, Burgh's favorite meter is the rime royal, "which he manages with all the staggering irregularity common to English poets of the fifteenth century." Nor was this irregularity fully explicable by the "semi-animate" condition of the final -e.

Saintsbury states:

Burgh's earlier equivalent for the so-called decasyllable vary numerically from seven syllables to fourteen: no principle of metrical equivalence and substitution being for the most part able to effect even a tolerable correspondence between their rhythm, which is constantly of the following kind:⁵¹

When from the high hille, I mean the mount
Canice

Poem to Lydgate, I, 45.

Secunde of the persone the magnificence
royale

Secrets, I, 1558.⁵²

In Cato, Saintsbury continues, "the lines are more regular, which is as it should be after thirty years practice of counting on his fingers." In the opening verses of Cato we have lines like this, probably representing some of Burgh's best:

⁵¹Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 238.

⁵²Ibid.

Mannes soule resembleth a newe plain table
 In whiche yet apperith to sight no picture
 The philosophre saith withouten fable
 Right so is mannes soule but a dedly figure
 Unto the tyme she be reclaimed with the lure
 Of doctrine and gete hir a good habit
 To be expert in cunnyng science and prouffit.⁵³

And even here may be noticed that strong tendency toward the alexandrine which is notable in all the disorderly verse of this period, and which attempted to establish and regularize itself in the poetry of the earlier Elizabethans, making its last and greatest effort in Polyolbion.⁵⁴

Another of the amateurs of the rime royal stanza who hazarded an occasional venture in verse is George Ashby, a clerk of the Signet. Ashby left behind him three poems: the rather long and dreary The Active Policy of a Prince, A Prisoner's Reflection, a philosophical poem of 350 lines in rime royal, and a paraphrase of some extracts from the Liber Philosophorum Moraliu Antiquorum.⁵⁵ Ashby is mentioned here because he illustrates with unusual clearness the process by which Chaucer's five-foot decasyllabics were being converted into a ragged line of four beats.⁵⁶ Nevertheless,

⁵³Ibid.

⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 238-239.

⁵⁵Baugh, LHE, p. 302.

⁵⁶Chambers, CCEL, p. 80.

it should be recognized that Ashby's verse is not so irregular as that of some of his contemporaries. "But it is not illumined by one spark of the divine fire."⁵⁷ A single stanza of his verse, fairly average in character is given:

Yf ye cannot bringe a man by mekenesse,
By swete glosyng wordes and fare langage,
To the entente of your noble highnesse,
Correcte him sharpely with rigorous rage,
To his chastysment and ferful damage.
For who that wol not be feire entreted
Must be foule and rigorously threted.⁵⁸

To the same "rime royal division" belongs Henry Bradshaw (d.1513), a monk of St. Werburgh's Abbey at Chester. Saintsbury writes that "in place of the Chaucerian decasyllabic, Bradshaw retains the 'old popular line,' what ever that may be." His verse, perhaps as well as anything else, makes us understand the wrath of the next generation with "beggarly balducktoom riming."⁵⁹

A still more noteworthy set of instances of the all-powerful attraction of rime royal, and a curious and not uninteresting section of the followers of Chaucer, is provided by the fifteenth century writers in verse on alchemy . . . And there is the further noteworthy point that each of the two chief of

⁵⁷ Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 239.

⁵⁸ Ibid., p. 240.

⁵⁹ Ibid.

these writers follows one of Chaucer's main narrative measures, the couplet and rime royal.⁶⁰

These are George Ripley and Thomas Norton, both of whom, by their own testimony wrote in the eighth decade of the fifteenth century, and who, by tradition were connected as master and pupil. Little is known of Ripley except he was an Augustinian and canon of Bridlington. His principal English work is The Compound of Alchemy or the Twelve Gates (1471), followed five years later by the Medulla Alchemiae.⁶¹

In the first stanza of the preface to The Compound we find an excellent example of the aureate language and hopelessly insubordinate metre common to Ripley's age:

O hygh yncomprehensyble and gloryous Mageste,
Whose luminous bemes obtundyth our speculation,
One-hode in Substance, O Tryne-hode in Deite,
Of Heirarchicall Jubylestes the gratulant
gloryfycation;
O pytewouse purifyer of Soules and puer
perpetuation;
O deviant fro danger, O drawer most deboner
Fro thys envios valey of vanyte, O our Exalter!⁶²

Thomas Norton, or "Tomas Norton of Bristo," is noted primarily for his Ordinall of Alchemy (1477), written in

⁶⁰Ibid., p. 240-241.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 241.

⁶²Ibid., pp. 241-242.

exceedingly irregular heroic couplets, often shortened to octosyllables; for example:

He was, and what he knew of schoole
And therein he was but a fool⁶³

Regardless of his bad riming, Norton is not entirely uninteresting, because he shows, even more than Lydgate, "how many hares at one time the versifiers of this period were hunting when they seemed to be copying Chaucer's couplet." At the same time, it should be carefully noted that neither man (Ripley or Norton) can be called a poet, except in the most general of terms. To compare them with their master, Chaucer, is absurd.⁶⁴

"Great as was the attraction of rime royal, it was not likely to oust the older favorite, the octosyllabic couplet, which, it has to be remembered, could also boast the repeated, if not final, patronage of Chaucer." The so-called romance of Boctus and Sidrac, by Hugh de Campden, is representative of this influence,⁶⁵ while Osbern Bokenham (or Bokenam), "a suffolke man, frere Austyn of the convent of Stokclare (Stoke Clare)," wrote his Legends of the Saints (c.1445) in Chaucerian decasyllabic verse. It is composed

⁶³Ibid., p. 242.

⁶⁴Ibid., p. 243.

⁶⁵Ibid., p. 244.

of a collection of thirteen Legends of Hooly Wummen, running to more than 10,000 lines.⁶⁶

Towards the close of the fifteenth century, the immediate influence of Chaucer's writings on English literature had begun to decline. This decline continued steadily throughout the sixteenth, so that by the seventeenth, we find that the old, medieval poet's influence extended to only a limited number of English poets. ". . . Chaucer began to be regarded as a poet whose language was intricate and obsolete, and whose versification and style were imperfect and barbarous."⁶⁷

Nevertheless, there were still Englishmen who recognized and were influenced by the ageless genius of Geoffrey Chaucer. In 1563, Thomas Sackville (c.1536 - 1608) contributed to the second edition of the Mirror for Magistrates⁶⁸ his seventy-nine stanza poem Induction written in Chaucer's rime royal.⁶⁹ Signay Lee called it the "best poetry written in the English language between Chaucer and Spenser"; and Baugh states that Sackville "handles the rime royal as few

⁶⁶Baugh, LHE, p. 289.

⁶⁷OHEL, p. 80.

⁶⁸Tucker Brooke, LHE, p. 401.

⁶⁹OHEL, p. 121.

poets have done since Chaucer." Indeed, the young Sackville not only equalled, but perhaps surpassed Chaucer in his fastidious feeling for words . . . the perfect line. Not only are these lines from the fourth stanza of The Complaint of Henrie Duke of Buckingham strongly reminiscent of the earlier poet, in many respects their "dark beauty" exceeds that found in Chaucer.

When lo the night with mistie mantels spred
 Can darke the daie and dimme the azure skies,
 And Venus Hermes in her message sped
 To blooddie Mars to will hym not to ryse
 While she her selfe approcht in spedie wyse,
 And Virgo hiding her disdainful breast
 With Thetis now had laied her downe to reast.⁷⁰

The heartbreak he feels towards the fate of Troy also recalls Chaucer.

But Troie alas, me thought above them all
 It made mine eyes in vearie teres consume
 When I beheld the woful werd befall
 That by the wrathfull wil of gods was come,
 And Joves unmoved sentence and fordome
 On Priam king and on his town so bent
 I cold not lin but I must ther lament,

.

Not worthie Hector worthiest of them all
 Her hope, her jole, his force was now for
 nought;
 O Troie Troie, ther is no bote but bale,

⁷⁰Thomas Sackville, "The Complaint of Henrie Duke of Buckingham," Poets of the English Language, ed. by W. H. Auden and Norman Holmes Pearson, New York, 1950, p. 461.

The hugie horse within thy walles is
 brought,
 Thy turrets fall, thie knightes that
 whilome fought
 In armes amid the feld ar slain in bed,
 Thie gods defild, and all thine honnour
 ded.⁷¹

Contemporary with Sackville is the Elizabethan courtier and poet, Sir Philip Sidney (1554-1586), whose breadth of "literary sympathy" is evidenced by his enthusiastic praise of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde⁷² in his prose essay The Defence of Poesie (written c.1580, published in 1595).⁷³ In a discussion of the poetry of Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate in 1652, Peter Heylyn attributes the following praise of Chaucer to Sir Philip Sidney:

he [Sidney] marvelled how in those mistie times, he could see so cleerly, and others, in so cleer times go so blindly after him.⁷⁴

Another of the seventeenth century versifiers who employed Chaucer's rime royal was Michael Drayton (1563-1631), who echoes the seven-line stanza of Troilus and Criseyde in

⁷¹Ibid., pp. 480-481.

⁷²Brooke, LHE, p. 478.

⁷³OHEL, p. 139.

⁷⁴Thomas Kirby, "Further Seventeenth-Century Chaucer Allusions," Modern Language Notes, Baltimore, Feb., 1949, vol. LXIV, no. 2, p. 82.

his Mortimeriados which was published in 1596, and later republished as The Baron's Wars (1603) in ottava rima. In 1627 Drayton published Nymphidia, the Court of Faery, a delightful and ingenious mock-heroic fantasia, suggested to Drayton by Chaucer's Rime of Sir Thopas.⁷⁵

Additional evidence of the Chaucerian influence on writers of the seventeenth century is to be noted briefly in George Chapman's drama Sir Giles Goosecap (1606), which takes its main story from Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, but almost completely denuded of any of the passion or candor found in the original plot.⁷⁶

Similarly, Ben Jonson (c.1573 - 1637), Shakespeare's great dramatic contemporary, found Chaucer's House of Fame helpful when he wrote his comic-satire The Staple of News in 1626.⁷⁷ Prior to this in 1620, John Fletcher (1579-1625) used as a partial theme in his Women Pleased Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale.⁷⁸ When collaborating with Shakespeare and Massinger on The Two Noble Kinsmen (c.1613; printed 1634), Fletcher, in the main retells Chaucer's popular story of Palamon and Arcite in The Knight's Tale, a theme Richard

⁷⁵OHEL, pp. 146-147.

⁷⁶Brooke, LHE, p. 555.

⁷⁷OHEL, p. 230.

⁷⁸Ibid., p. 243.

Edwards had successfully adopted to the stage nearly fifty years previous to Fletcher's version.⁷⁹

The most noteworthy example of the Chaucerian influence on an English poet of the sixteenth century is to be found in a study of Edmund Spenser (c.1552 - 1599). By Spenser's own admission, we know Chaucer to have been his master. Indeed, the young Spenser felt that no Englishman who aspired to poetic rank should ignore the poetic genius of their medieval predecessor. And, as Professor Renwick points out, "no one could demand that the younger man should follow the elder any more closely than Spenser . . ."⁸⁰

Nor was Spenser's allusion to the literature of Chaucer purely academic. Unlike the Chaucerian "copyists" of the fifteenth century, Spenser's interest in the old poet was much broader in its scope. The essential thing to Spenser was neither an antiquated language nor the revival of a tradition. Spenser was primarily concerned with the "making of poetry,"⁸¹ a concern which closely paralleled his recognition of the powers of the English language when handled by one who has discerned its genius, and "is not

⁷⁹Brooke, LHE, p. 451.

⁸⁰W. L. Renwick, Edmund Spenser: An Essay on Renaissance Poetry, London, 1949, pp. 25-26.

⁸¹Ibid., p. 24.

afraid to use its wealth."⁸² Spenser was fully conscious of what Ariosto had done in Italy, what Ronsard and the Pleiade were doing in France, and was fired to emulation and encouraged in him ambition of a "new poetry" for Englishmen. He had before him the example of France and Italy, both "newly made illustrious" by men who had successfully achieved a "new poetry" for their countries by bringing about a balance between the matter and ideals of the classicists and the cultivation of their old native speech. The Italians were the first to defend their mother tongue, not so much on its past accomplishments, but on the grounds of its possibilities—possibilities which the individual poet must prove by his own endeavours. Later "the new poets" of France embodied this concept; and after them so did the English poets. Edmund Spenser was one of the earliest enthusiasts of such a concept.⁸³

Edward Kirke, Spenser's fellow-student at Pembroke, in a long, critical epistle to Gabriel Harvey, expresses with a bold confidence his delight in the "yet unrecognized excellence of 'this one new poet,' whom he is not afraid to put side by side with 'that good old poet, Chaucer, the

⁸²R. W. Church, Spenser, London, 1906, p. 39.

⁸³Renwick, op. cit., pp. 23-27, et. passim.

loadstar of our language."⁸⁴ He writes further:

In my opinion, it is one praise of many, that are due to this poet, that he hath laboured to restore, as to their rightful heritage, such good and natural English words, as have been long time out of use, or almost clean disinherited, which is the only cause, that our mother tongue, which truly of itself is both full enough for prose, and stately enough for verse, hath long time been counted most bare and barre of both.⁸⁵

Neither of Spenser's friends, Kirke or Harvey, was wrong in his estimate of the poet's work. The "new poet," as he came to be customarily called, had

. . . really made one of those distinct steps in his art, which answers to discoveries and inventions in other spheres of human interest—steps which make all behind them seem obsolete and mistaken.⁸⁶

There was, perhaps, much in the "new poetry" of Spenser which was immature and imperfect, "not a little that was fantastic and affected." But it was the first adequate effort of reviving English poetry.⁸⁷ In this effort Spenser became a disciple of the only man in English letters who had,

⁸⁴Church, op. cit., pp. 38-39.

⁸⁵Ibid., p. 39.

⁸⁶Ibid.

⁸⁷Ibid.

as yet, earned the title of master poet. Combining his own creative imagination and instinctive poetic genius with the traditions of the past, and the fashions of the moment, Spenser set out, not only as disciple, but challenger—"to prove his mother tongue capable and himself a master."⁸⁸

In attempting to revive for his own age the suspended art of Chaucer, Spenser met with considerable reproach in certain circles. Chief among his critics was a "school" of thought which seems to have had its origin with Roger Ascham, who not only denounced the poetry of the Middle Ages, but went so far as to apologize for having written his Toxophilus in English.⁸⁹ Such critics viewed Chaucer as a poet belonging to a "dead past," obsolete of language, syntax, and vocabulary; and one whose spirit and doctrine were of another social, political, and cultural epoch.⁹⁰ Sympathetic to such a concept is Samuel Daniel (1562-1619), a contemporary of Spenser's, who in his poem Musophilus (c.1599) pays the medieval poet noble tribute, but sorrowfully admits that his day is all but over. The lover of the Muses instances Chaucer as one

⁸⁸Renwick, op. cit., p. 33.

⁸⁹Ibid., p. 17.

⁹⁰Ibid., p. 26.

. . . who yet lives, and yet shall,
Though (which I grieve to say) but in his last,⁹¹

Earlier, in Delia, his sonnet-cycle, Daniel ridicules
Spenser for the obsolete language of the Faerie Queene:⁹²

Let others sing of Knights and Palladines
In aged accents and untimely words.⁹³

Thomas Wilson (c.1525 - 1581) in his The Arte of
Rhetorique (1553)⁹⁴ scornfully notes that

. . . the fine courtier will speake nothing
but Chaucer,⁹⁵

Opposed to such a criticism of Spenser's revival of
Chaucer were those who felt that although the poetry of the
fourteenth century should not find mere continuation in the
sixteenth, its medieval charm could be appreciated, and even
cultivated.⁹⁶ Gabriel Harvey, for example, noted in the
margin of his copy of Dionysius Periegetes:

Chaucer and Lidgate; fine artists in many
kinds, and much better learned than owre
modern poets . . . Other commend Chaucer

⁹¹Alfred Ainger, Lectures and Essays, London, 1905,
vol. II, p. 136.

⁹²OHEL, p. 145.

⁹³Thomas Warton, Observations on the Fairy Queen of
Spenser, London, 1807, p. 170.

⁹⁴OHEL, p. 117.

⁹⁵Renwick, op. cit., p. 82.

⁹⁶Ibid., p. 26.

and Lidgate for their witt, pleasant veine,
and all humanitie: I specially their
astronomie, philosophie, and other parts of
profound or cunning art . . .⁹⁷

William Webbe's attractive Discourse of English Poetry (1586), "together with the author's judgement touching the reformation of our English verse," is mainly notable for its "enthusiastic admiration of the 'new poet,' Spenser, and its not quite consistent faith in the practicability of Latin metres for English poems."⁹⁸

However, I am of the opinion that the critics of both points of view missed the greater import of Spenser's affectation of Chaucerism. It cannot be repeated too often that Spenser's service to English poetry was by far greater than simply bringing "Chaucer up to date," or by imitating his language, vocabulary, poetic form, and even to some extent his sentiment. Chaucer's influence on Spenser was of importance not only to the sixteenth century, but to all subsequent centuries.

Spenser was to some extent a product of the humanistic philosophy which we find pervading his century. And, "learning, in the minds of men of humanist training, carried with it the theory of imitation." Like the classical Cicero

⁹⁷ Ibid., pp. 26-27.

⁹⁸ Brooke, LHE, p. 436.

and Virgil, the humanist was largely concerned with improving a "homely literature" by the importation of good methods, and fine, proven models.⁹⁹ The contribution of the humanists, then, was "the nobler theory of literature and the provision of the models."¹⁰⁰ Chaucer was Spenser's model. Professor Renwick, in speaking of this "greater service" which Spenser has rendered to our English literature, states that he has

. . . revived the satiric fable, helped the vogue of sonneteering, improved the elegy, and made his England free of pastoral, hymn, canzone, ode, and epic. It was a serious business, for a serious end, and though pressed in different directions by natural claims and motives, he kept the balance even between Chaucerism and classicism, misled neither by patriotic self-satisfaction nor by textbook rule, but seeing the value of each, and seeing the essential unity of their values.¹⁰¹

Instances of Spenser's allusion to Chaucer are virtually numberless. Authors have devoted many volumes to the influence of Chaucer on Spenser. For our purpose here, a few major instances of this influence should suffice to show how deeply indebted the Elizabethan poet was to his medieval predecessor.

The first noteworthy evidence of the Chaucerian

⁹⁹Renwick, op. cit., p. 28.

¹⁰⁰Ibid., p. 30.

¹⁰¹Ibid., p. 64.

influence on Spenser is to be found in The Shepheardes Calender (1579), a series of Aeglogai, i.e., goatherd's tales or eclogues, and called a "calender" because there was an eclogue for each month of the year.¹⁰² The work bore the signature of Immerito, and was dedicated to "the noble and vertuous Gentleman, most worthy of all titles both of learning and chevalerie, Maister Philip Sidney."¹⁰³

In The Shepheardes Calender imitation of Chaucer is to be noted both in choice of vocabulary and verse form. But of even greater significance is the fact that behind

. . . the remarkable variety, both in matter and metre, which is one of the essential tokens of promise in The Shepherd's Calender, lies the fundamental assertion that the only way for the poetry of Spenser's time is the way of Chaucer, who is exalted as Tityrus, 'the god of shepherds,'

Who taught me, homely as I can, to make.
He, whilst he lived, was the sovereign head;
Of shepherds all that bene with love ytake;¹⁰⁴

And, he is (as Spenser was later to phrase it) the "well of English undefiled." Thus, the prime purpose of this first notable work of Spenser's was to rid poetic diction of foreign encumbrance and restore Chaucerian vigor and

¹⁰²OHEL, p. 125.

¹⁰³H. S. V. Jones, A Spenser Handbook, New York, 1947, pp. 39-40.

¹⁰⁴Brooke, LHE, p. 484.

simplicity.¹⁰⁵ Spenser professes to make the language and style of The Shepheardes Calender suitable to the "ragged and rustical rudeness of the shepherds whom he brings on the scene, by making it both archaic and provincial." He found in Chaucer a store of forms and words sufficiently well known to be with a little help intelligible, and sufficiently out of common use to give the character of antiquity to a poetry which employed them.¹⁰⁶

In "April" in which the linked quatrains make a unit, we have actually the eight-line stanza of Chaucer's Monk's Tale, which is commonly regarded as the basis of the Spenserian stanza.¹⁰⁷ Chaucer had introduced the eight-line, or decasyllabic stanza, which rimed ababbcbc, and which becomes the Spenserian stanza with the addition of the final alexandrine riming g.¹⁰⁸ In the "April" hymn we find Spenser employing the rime couee or "tail-rhyme," which Chaucer parodies in the metrical romance the Rime of Sir Thopas.¹⁰⁹ The eight-line stanza is also used in "June," and the ottava rima is employed in "November," riming abababcc.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁵Ibid.

¹⁰⁶Church, op. cit., p. 44.

¹⁰⁷Jones, op. cit., pp. 68-69.

¹⁰⁸QHEL, p. 80.

¹⁰⁹Jones, op. cit., pp. 69-70

¹¹⁰Ibid., p. 404.

Further evidence of the Chaucerian influence is to be noted in the two-volume collection of poems, Daphnaida, published in 1591. The poem is a long, ceremonious elegy on the recent death of a lady of rank. The work is notable for its lovely metrical structure (an original adaptation of the rime royal), and delicate balance of parts. "It is reminiscent of Chaucer's Book of the Duchess, and may be regarded as Spenser's most consummate tribute to medieval art and to his great predecessor."¹¹¹

"In 1591, about twelve years after the publication of the Shepheardes Calender, there appeared from the press of William Ponsonby a volume entitled Complaints Containing Sundrie Small Poemes of the Worlds Vanitie."¹¹² Ponsonby claims to have made the collection of the nine parts, but there is evidence that the poet assisted him, for the book is in four parts with separate title-pages (the first three dated 1591, the fourth 1590), and each part has a signed dedication from Spenser to a lady of the Court.¹¹³

The Ruines of Time, the first poem in Complaints, is dedicated to Lady Mary Countess of Pembroke, sister of Sir Philip Sidney.¹¹⁴ Otis and Needleman describe it as a

¹¹¹Brooke, LHE, p. 486.

¹¹²Jones, op. cit., p. 73.

¹¹³Brooke, LHE, p. 486.

¹¹⁴Jones, op. cit., p. 79.

"Macedoine-like poem in rime royal "on the Chaucerian and Lydgatian theme of how the mighty are fallen, blended with the Widsithian theme of how the poets confer immortality by their songs."¹¹⁵

Another poem in Complaints perceptibly influenced by Chaucer is Prosopopoeia: or Mother Hubberds Tale, which is probably the most vital poem in the volume.¹¹⁶ The dedication date is 1591, but was probably composed between 1579 and 1580.¹¹⁷ Generally, critics label the poem a "political and personal allegory" grafted upon the old fable-satire scheme.¹¹⁸ Spenser was influenced by the Speculum Stultorum, by Chaucer. Jones states:

However interesting may be the allegory of Mother Hubberd's Tale, an even greater interest attaches to its ideas and its style. In more than one respect it may be compared with Colin Clouts Come Home Againe. Both poems written under the influence of Chaucer succeed in reproducing in some measure the familiar and leisurely style of the master . . . In terse and balanced phrases, in the forms of proverb and epigram, Spenser here clearly stands between Chaucer and Dryden in the tradition of poetic wit and satire.¹¹⁹

¹¹⁵OHEL, p. 126.

¹¹⁶Ibid., p. 127.

¹¹⁷Jones, op. cit., p. 99.

¹¹⁸Ibid., p. 102.

¹¹⁹Ibid., p. 104.

Mother Hubberds Tale is interesting in that it was Spenser's only attempt at satire. It is a long poem, containing 1388 lines, and is in the ten-syllable rhyming couplet of the Canterbury Tales.¹²⁰

In the colorfully melodic, and beautifully sustained nuptial hymn, Epithalamion (1591-1595), Spenser, although noticeably influenced by the Italian or Provençal canzone, is, nevertheless, greatly indebted to Chaucer's Parliament of Fowls;¹²¹ while in Colin Clouts Come Home Againe (c.1591; printed 1595) there is a peculiarity in the rhyme that seems to be an imitation of Chaucer. "A paragraph often ends with an unfinished rhyme, that is, with a word the rhyme to which must be sought in the next paragraph, even where a new subject is begun."¹²² In 1596 we have the Fowre Hymnes, written in honor of Love, of Beauty, of Heavenly Love, and of Heavenly Beauty.¹²³ They are composed in Chaucer's seven-line stanza.¹²⁴

In discussing Chaucer's influence on The Faerie

¹²⁰John S. Hart, An Essay on the Life and Writings of Edmund Spenser with a Special Exposition on The Fairy Queen, New York, 1847, p. 63.

¹²¹OHEL, p. 130.

¹²²Hart, op. cit., p. 103.

¹²³OHEL, p. 130.

¹²⁴Hart, op. cit., p. 110.

Queene (1589-1596), it might be well to begin with the subject of verse and metre. Basically, the metrical form of The Faerie Queene is the "so-called Spenserian stanza." And, the stanza is not, as commentators used to affirm, a "variation of the Italian ottava rima, as employed by Ariosto and Tasso."¹²⁵

The Italian measure running ab ab ab cc, indeed, concludes with a couplet on the third rhyme, but its rhyme arrangement varies after the middle of the stanza and it does not conclude with an Alexandrine. A more simple hypothesis, now generally accepted, derives the famous strophe from an old French eight-line ballad stanza rhyming ababbcbc. This, frequently employed in Middle English, Spenser would have known in Chaucer's Monk's Tale . . . If it seems too simple to say that it occurred independently to Spenser to add an Alexandrine to the octave of the Monk's Tale, we might accept Professor Skeat's explanation that the 'Spenserian stanza resulted from a judicious combination of metres employed by the most obvious models, viz. Chaucer and Surrey.' From Chaucer came the octave and from Surrey the idea of combining the Alexandrine with lines of different length.¹²⁶

Warton notes, however, that "in chusing this stanza," Spenser "did not sufficiently consider the genius of the English language, which does not easily fall into a frequent repetition of the time termination, a circumstance natural

¹²⁵Jones, op. cit., p. 142.

¹²⁶Ibid.

to the Italian, which deals largely in identical cadences."¹²⁷ In regard to Spenser's rhyme, it ought to be noted that he often "new-spells" a word to make it rhyme more precisely. This "destruction of orthography," as Warton terms it, simply for the sake of rhyme, was a liberty which Chaucer, Gower, and Lydgate frequently made use of.¹²⁸ The almost too perfect rhyme scheme of Spenser's verse did, at times run into "ridiculous redundancy," which Dr. Johnson noted as being "at once difficult and unpleasing . . . tiresome to the ear by its uniformity . . ."¹²⁹ Lowell, more sympathetic in his judgment, found "soothingness . . . but no slumberous monotony" in the verse of The Faerie Queene.¹³⁰

It should also be mentioned that Spenser must have had some notion of the "secret of the accented final e and -es in Chaucerian verse," for, indeed, some of his own lines, even in The Faerie Queene, can hardly be scanned without this licence.¹³¹

Concluding this discussion of the verse and metre of The Faerie Queene, we might note Professor Renwick's summation:

¹²⁷Warton, op. cit., pp. 157-158.

¹²⁸Ibid., p. 163.

¹²⁹Jones, op. cit., p. 143.

¹³⁰Ibid.

¹³¹Renwick, op. cit., pp. 99-100.

The main metrical result of the study of Chaucer, however, was the continuance of the stanza and the determining of the ten-syllable lines as central to English metre.¹³²

Spenser not only alluded to Chaucer's metre and versification, but very often closely copied his language. Spenser expressly states, says Todd, "that Chaucer's language which he so closely copied was the pure English." Spenser clearly expresses this feeling in his own words in the Fourth Book of The Faerie Queene:

Dan Chaucer well of English undefilde.¹³³

To illustrate briefly the extent of Spenser's actual borrowing of words from Chaucer, I have compiled a list of words from The Faerie Queene which Spenser has taken from the Middle English, and which appear commonly in Chaucer. The list is by no means a complete one; the words have been picked at random, and no particular order is intended.

FROM SPENSER'S
FAERIE QUEENE:

whylome, whilom
corage, corages
wight

FROM CHAUCER:

whilom, whilome
corage, corages
wight, wightes

¹³² Ibid., p. 100.

¹³³ Henry John Todd, The Works of Edmund Spenser, London, 1805, vol. II, p. cxxxvi.

FROM SPENSER'S
FAERIE QUEENE:

wimple

eke

unkindly

despight

ruth

endlong

lief

guerdon

spill

wood

darrayne, darraine, darrain

eld

devise

hight

leach

yede

pyned

smart

sheene

wise

witt

FROM CHAUCER:

wimpel, ywympled

eke, eek

unkinde

despyt

reuthe, rewthe, routhe

endelong, endlong

lief, leef, lief

gerdonen

spill (spillen)

wood

darreyne

eld, elde

devys

hight (e)

leche

yede

forpyned

smert (e)

shene

wyse, wys

wit, wyt

Other affections of Chaucer are to be noted in

Spenser's use of entire phrases common to the earlier poet. Warton lists several of these phrases in his Observations on the Fairy Queen which Spenser used throughout The Faerie Queene: do him to die; And doen to die; bite him nere; bit her neare; with him went Danger (personification of danger); never none (the double negative is found frequently in Chaucer); the use of lad for led, a milk white lamb she lad; whom they lad; a wretched life they lad; to their purpose lad; and the virgin lad.¹³⁴

Further use of archaic forms by Spenser are noted by Jones in his Spenser Handbook. For example, he tells us that one meets with the verbal ending -en as an inflection not only for the past participle and the infinitive but as well for the plurals of both present and preterite. Along with the other writers of the period Spenser uses the endings -st, -est, -edest, -eth, and a number of the older preterites of both strong and weak verbs, such as strake, dronck, meint, yold, swolt. He further varies his diction by the free use of the archaic prefixes a-, ab-, ac-, af-, de-, dis-, en-, for-, un-, to-, and y-, as in abeare, accourage, enraced, to-worn, ytost; and he frequently employs the forms of do and can as auxiliaries. Also in the Spenser vocabulary we find the older adverbs and connectives, such as albe, forthy, eath,

¹³⁴Warton, op. cit., pp. 231-267, et. passim.

liever, enaunter. Finally, it should be noted that Spenser used many dialect forms which not only existed during the Middle English period, but were in contemporary use, particularly in the northern regions of England where Spenser probably became familiar with them during his visit there. Examples of these archaic dialectical words are: cloieth, couthe, herie, adawed, chamfred, venteth, basket, dapper, hidder and shidder, ronte, todde, and wimble.¹³⁵

It has been observed that in general Spenser copied the language of Chaucer; and it is also evident that in some instances he imitated the medieval poet's sentiment. Warton gives the following as a specimen of Spenser's imitation of Chaucer, both in sentiment and language:

Much can they praise the trees so straight
 and high,
 The sayling pine, the cedar proud and tall,
 The vine-prop elme, the poplar never dry,
 The builder oake, sole king of forests all,
 The aspine good for staves, the cypresse
 funeral.
 The laurell, meed of mighty conquerours,
 And poet's sage; the firre that weepeth still,
 The willow, worne of forlorne paramours,
 The eugh, obedient to the bender's will,
 The birch for shafts, the sallow for the mill,
 The myrrhe sweet-blending in the bitterwound.
 The warlike beech, the ash for nothing ill,
 The fruitful olive, and the platane round
 The carver holme, the maple seldom inward sound.¹³⁶

¹³⁵Jones, op. cit., pp. 398-400.

¹³⁶Warton, op. cit., p. 190.

We have only to turn to Chaucer's Knight's Tale to discover Spenser's model in this instance:

Ne eek the names that the trees highte,
 As ook, firre, birch, aspe, alder, holm,
 poplar,
 Wylugh, elm, plane, assh, box, chasteyn,
 lynde, laurer,
 Mapul, thorn, bech, hasel, ew, whippeltree,¹³⁷

In Chaucer's The Parliament of Fowls, we find a further cataloging of trees:

The byldere ok, and ek the hardy asshe;
 The piler elm, the cofre unto carayne;
 The boxtre pipere, holm to whippes lashe;
 The saylynge fyr; the cipresse, deth to
 playne;
 The shetere ew; the asp for shaftes pleyne;
 The olyve of pes; and eke the dronke vynes;
 The victor palm, the laurer to devyne.¹³⁸

From Spenser's Daphnaida we have an imitation of the invocation of Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde:

Let those three Fatall Sisters, whose sad
 hands
 Doe weave the direfull threeds of Destinie
 And in their wrath break off the vitall
 bands,
 Approach hereto; and let the dreadful
 Queene
 Of Darknes deepe come from the Stygian
 strands,

¹³⁷Chaucer, Works, p. 53.

¹³⁸Ibid., p. 365.

And grisly ghosts to heare this doleful
teene.¹³⁹

In The Faerie Queene, Book III, Canto I, we note
these lines:

Ne may Love be compeld by Maistry;
For soone as Maistry comes, sweet Love
anone
Taketh his nimble wynges, and soone away
is gone—¹⁴⁰

Todd states: "This seems plainly from Chaucer in
the Frankelins Tale."

Love wolle not be constreyn'd by maistry.
Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!¹⁴¹

In Book I, Canto III, of The Faerie Queene, we find
further evidence of Spenser having alluded to the Chaucerian
sentiment:

Up Una rose, up rose the lyon eke;¹⁴²

Reminiscent of Chaucer's:

Upross the Sunne, and upross Emelye,¹⁴³

¹³⁹Todd, op. cit., vol. VII, pp. 537-538.

¹⁴⁰Ibid., vol. IV, p. 262.

¹⁴¹Chaucer, Works, p. 163.

¹⁴²Todd, op. cit., vol. II, p. 94.

¹⁴³Chaucer, Works, p. 46.

As a final example we might note Spenser's lines:

With paines for far passing that long-wand-
ring Greeke,
That for his love refused deitye,

"Deitie may be interpreted as immortality here,"
says Todd, "for so Chaucer uses the word."¹⁴⁴

It has been briefly noted that Spenser turned to Chaucer for verse form and metre, to a great extent for language and expression, and to some measure for sentiment. In The Faerie Queene, particularly, Spenser turned to Chaucer for theme as well. A considerable portion of the allegorical element in The Faerie Queene was influenced by Chaucer's The Parliament of Fowls.¹⁴⁵ In Book IV, "The Legend of Cambel and Triamond, or of Friendship," Spenser completes Chaucer's The Squire's Tale, and for style he was perceptibly influenced by The Knight's Tale.¹⁴⁶ Thomas Warton notes also that Spenser was probably influenced to some extent by Chaucer's Rime of Sir Thopas, in which the knight, Sir Thopas, goes in search of a fairy queen as does Spenser's Prince Arthur.¹⁴⁷ And Cawley quotes Upton as having suggested "that Spenser in his famous description of the House of Pride (The Faerie

¹⁴⁴Todd, op. cit., vol. II, p. 94.

¹⁴⁵OHSL, p. 132.

¹⁴⁶Ibid., p. 134.

¹⁴⁷Warton, op. cit., p. 83.

Queene, I, iv), may have had in mind Chaucer's Hous of Fame . . . and it would be reasonable to suppose that he might transfer from it a definite picture."¹⁴⁸

Even from this relatively brief discussion, we can conclude, as did Ainger, that "Spenser is full of Chaucer . . ." And, there are, perhaps, many who will agree with Ainger when he remarks that Spenser is not only "full of Chaucer," but in an important respect, "the worse for him." However, Ainger does not censure Spenser for having been attracted to, and influenced by the archaic charm of Middle English. He does criticize him, though, for having used only "a portion of it" in his writings, which resulted in "a strange blend such as never was in the King's English, or any other . . ."¹⁴⁹ Such a criticism, Professor Renwick tells us, "is commonplace."¹⁵⁰ Ben Jonson with his robust frankness remarked that "Spenser writ no language,"¹⁵¹ which Professor Renwick denies with this explanation:

His [Spenser's] is an artificial speech constructed for his own purposes out of many and various elements, and that with the

¹⁴⁸Robert R. Cawley, "A Chaucerian Echo in Spenser," Modern Language Notes, Baltimore, May, 1926, vol. XLI, no. 5, p. 314.

¹⁴⁹Ainger, op. cit., pp. 136-137.

¹⁵⁰Renwick, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁵¹Ainger, op. cit., p. 137.

intention of supplying and beautifying the English language . . .¹⁵²

Spenser's friend, Edward Kirke, objecting to the poet's condemner's, writes:

The last, more shameful then both, that of their owne country and natural speach, which together with their Nources milk they sucked, they have so base regard and bastard judgement, that they will not onely themselves not labor to garnish and beautifie it, but also repine, that of other it should be embellished. Like to the dogge in the maunger, that him selfe can eate no hay, and yet barketh at the hungry bullock, that so faine would feede: whose currish kind, though it cannot be kept from barking, yet conne I them thank that they refrain from byting . . . And first of the wordes I speake, I graunt they be something hard, and of most men unused, yet both English, and also used of most excellent authors and most famous Poetes . . . If any will rashly blame such his purpose in choyse of old and unwonted words, him may I more justly blame and condemn . . . for in my opinion it is one special prayse of many, which are dew to this Poete, that he hath laboured to restore, as to theyr rightful heritage, such good and naturall English words, as have ben long time out of use . . .¹⁵³

Professor Renwick reminds us that it was only through a poetic boldness, unprecedented and virtually unknown in his day, that Spenser could have accomplished his goal of a "new poetry." Spenser not only faced the situation boldly, he

¹⁵²Renwick, op. cit., p. 79.

¹⁵³Ibid., pp. 79-80.

faced it masterfully. For the purposes of great poetry English was practically a new language; it had to be made, and Spenser, taught by Ariosto, Ronsard, Mulcaster, and Geoffrey Chaucer, saw that it must be made by a poet and not by grammarians; and he set himself to be that poet.¹⁵⁴

If then, as Todd points out, "Chaucer rose like the morning starr of Wit, out of those black mists of ignorance," which hung over the Middle Ages, "since him Spenser [sic] may deservedly challenge the crown."¹⁵⁵

In 1646, an English poet whom we know only as "E. G." embodies such a sentiment in the following bit of verse. What our unknown author lacked in poetic excellence is to be overlooked, perhaps, by the rather lofty perception behind his sentiment.

If ever I believ'd Pythagoras,
 (My dearest friend) even now it was,
 While the grosse Bodies of the Posts die,
 Their Soule doe onely shift. And Poesie
 Transmigrates, not by chance, or lucke; for so
 Great Virgils soule into a goose might go.
 But that is still the labour of Joves braine,
 And he divinely doth conveigh that veine:
 So Chaucers learned soule in Spencer sung,
 (Edmund the quaintest of the Fairy throng.) . . . 156

¹⁵⁴Ibid., pp. 95-96.

¹⁵⁵Todd, op. cit., vol. II, p. cxli.

¹⁵⁶Kirby, op. cit., p. 82.

Whereas Chaucer's influence on Spenser was largely a matter of prosody and linguistics, William Shakespeare (1564-1616) turned to the works of the elder poet primarily for story and plot. In his poetic work Lucrece (1594) Shakespeare retells an old story found in the works of Fiorentino, Bandello, Gower, and probably Ovid. Nevertheless, he seems to have "drawn particularly upon Chaucer's Legend of Good Women;"¹⁵⁷ and his Phoenix and the Turtle (1601), Otis and Needleman state that "he was probably influenced by Chaucer."¹⁵⁸ In his early romantic comedy A Midsummer-Night's Dream (c.1595) some of the characters and minor incidents show slight resemblance to incidents in Chaucer's Knight's Tale, and the story of Thisbe and Pyramus was probably taken from his Legend of Good Women and the Wife of Bath's Tale. For the fairy element Shakespeare may have referred to The Merchant's Tale.¹⁵⁹ For the love story of Troilus and Cressida (c.1602), Shakespeare is undoubtedly indebted to Chaucer's earlier version;¹⁶⁰ and it has already been noted that when collaborating with Fletcher on the tragi-comedy The Two Noble Kinsmen (1613), the collaborators

¹⁵⁷OHEL, p. 163.

¹⁵⁸Ibid., p. 164.

¹⁵⁹Ibid., p. 188.

¹⁶⁰Ibid., p. 201.

present a reasonably faithful dramatization of Chaucer's Knight's Tale.¹⁶¹

John Milton (1608-1674) was the last great English poet prior to Dryden whom we know to have "read Chaucer with delight," and who "felt the archaic charm of old-fashioned words . . ." ¹⁶² And, according to Magoun, "it is even possible to identify the edition of Chaucer in which Milton read, and to which he refers in the course of his writings." On page 191, line seven, of Milton's Commonplace Book one reads under the heading "Nobilitas": "See Chaucer wife of Bath tale fol. 36 and Romant of $\frac{8}{y}$ Rose fol. 118." The edition of Chaucer to which Magoun refers is Speght's edition of 1602.¹⁶³

In the tract, Of Reformation Touching Church Discipline in England (pub. 1641), Milton twice finds an occasion to refer to Chaucer. In the first instance he quotes the familiar lines:

Ful swetely herde he confessioun,
And plesaunt was his absolucioun:
He was an esy man to yeve penaunce,¹⁶⁴

¹⁶¹Ibid., p. 226.

¹⁶²Ainger, op. cit., p. 140.

¹⁶³F. P. Magoun, Jr., "The Chaucer of Spenser and Milton," Modern Philology, Chicago, Nov., 1927, vol. XXV, no. 2, p. 132.

¹⁶⁴Ibid., p. 133.

Further on in Book II of the same work Milton cites as Chaucer's the supposititious Ploughman's Tale, Part II, stanza 28, and Part III, stanza 1. Magoun quotes W. T. Hale as stating: "On this allusion to Chaucer, Milton is wrong." The Ploughman's Tale was regarded for a time as Chaucerian, and "in 1602 was thought by Milton to be genuine."¹⁶⁵

In Il Penseroso (1631-1633) Milton makes a felicitous allusion to Chaucer and his unfinished Squire's Tale:

Or call up him that left half-told
The story of Cambuscan bold,
Of Camball, and of Algarsife,
And who had Canace to wife,
That owned the virtuous ring and glass,¹⁶⁶

It was in the companion poem L'Allegro, however, that Milton showed most plainly the lasting influence of his predecessor. "The gaiety of L'Allegro is thoroughly Chaucerian. What has been called Chaucer's 'lightsomeness' appears afresh in Milton's 'hedge-row elms' and 'meadows trim with daisies pied.'¹⁶⁷

In Section I of the Animadversions upon the Remonstrant against Smectvmanus (1642), Milton finds occasion to cite a number of Chaucerian proper names:

¹⁶⁵Ibid., pp. 132-133.

¹⁶⁶John Milton, "Il Penseroso," The Student's Milton, ed. by Frank Allen Patterson, New York, 1933, p. 28.

¹⁶⁷Ainger, op. cit., p. 140.

Remember how they mangle our Brittish names abroad; what trespasse were it, if wee in requitall should as much neglect theirs? And our learned Chaucer did not stick to doe so, writing Semyramus for Semiramis, Amphiorax for Amphiaraus, K/ing/ Sejes for K/ing/ Ceyx, the husband of Alcyone, with many other names strangely metamorphis'd from true Orthography, if he had made any account of that in these kinds of words.

Showing, says Magoun, that "Milton read Chaucer with considerable attention to detail."¹⁶⁸

In his sonnet, O Nightingale (c.1630), Miltonas, according to Professor Hanford, followed "the Chaucerian tradition (though his poem is a sonnet in Petrarchan form), writes himself gracefully into the role of unsuccessful lovers." The poem is strongly reminiscent of Clanvowe's The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, a piece which Milton would have read as Chaucer's, for as we noted previoualy, Milton used the Speght edition in which it is included.¹⁶⁹

A further allusion to Chaucer is noted in Milton's Mansus (1639), in Latin hexameters, addressed to the Marquis of Manso.¹⁷⁰ Mansus is "one of the noblest and least offensive patriotic poems written by an Englishman." But for our present purpose it is Milton's account of the English claim

¹⁶⁸Magoun, op. cit., p. 135.

¹⁶⁹James Holly Hanford, A Milton Handbook, New York, 1939, p. 171.

¹⁷⁰OHEL, p. 290.

to poetical culture that is of main interest. "Though not thinking fit to name any English poet, he claims firmly but ostentatiously that England too has had her poets and that one of them has already visited Italy:

Nos etiam in nostro modulantes flumine cygnos
 Credimus obscuras noctis sensisse per umbras,
 Qua Thamesis late puris argenteus urnis
 Oceani glaucos perfundit gurgite crines.
 Quin et in has quondam pervenit Tityrus oras.

Of course it cannot be definitely proved how many poets Milton is referring to, but Tillyard believes he means (as did Hurd and Warton) Chaucer, Spenser, and no more.

"Tityrus is certainly Chaucer, because that was Spenser's name for him and because he only of England's great poets before Milton had visited Italy."¹⁷¹

2. The "Chaucerian Apocrypha":

There can be no doubt that, putting ballads, carols and the like aside, no verse in southern English, from 1400 to 1500 or even a little later, has anything like the literary and poetical merit or interest which attaches to the best of the doubtful "Chauceriana" themselves. These doubtful pieces were eventually assigned to a "Chaucerian Apocrypha,"

¹⁷⁰OHSL, p. 290.

¹⁷¹E. M. W. Tillyard, Milton, Edinburgh, MCMXXX, p. 95.

and in time suffered considerably from want of notice, for there are some Chaucer-students, who in their fear of seeing them re-admitted to the "canon of Chauceriana" have cast them out altogether, refusing to have anything to do with them. This, it seems, is highly irrational, and it is certainly unfortunate, for in most instances they are not only indicative of the Chaucerian influence, but in certain instances possess considerable poetic efficacy and can be merited above much of the doggerel produced by some of the previously mentioned poets. Among these are the Plowman's Tale (which is quite out of Chaucerian possibility); The Tale of Beryn or Second Merchant's Tale; La Belle Dame Sans Merci, ascribed on MS authority to Sir Richard Ros; the very attractive and harmonious The Cuckoo and the Nightingale, with its unusual metre of aabba ascribed to Sir Thomas Clanvowe, also on MS authority, the MS carrying the quasi-signature of "explicit Clanvowe." There is also the dream-allegory, The Flower and the Leaf, of fine poetic quality, and once attributed to Chaucer, but probably written by a woman. In the rime royal we have The Assembly of Ladies and The Court of Love, which like the preceding examples deserve notice in that they not only strongly intimate the Chaucerian influence, but are good enough as literature and strangely like the old master poet in temper and complexion.¹⁷²

¹⁷²Saintsbury, CHEL, pp. 244-247, et. passim.

3. The Scottish Chaucerians:

It is a critical tradition to speak of the fifteenth century in Scotland as "the golden age of Scottish poetry." It has been equally commonplace to say of the poets of that time that they, best of all Chaucer's followers, fulfilled "with understanding and felicity the lessons of the master-craftsman." It has also been long customary to enforce these assumptions by contrasting the skill of Lydgate, Occleve, and their contemporaries in the south, with that of James I, Henryson, Dunbar, and Gavin Douglas.¹⁷³ Such a comparison has led the academicians, in time, to think of the Scottish Chaucerians as the "true disciples of Chaucer."¹⁷⁴ Saintsbury points out that such a contrast is, at best, a superficial one, and may "lead us to exaggerate the individual merit" of Chaucer's northern followers.¹⁷⁵ The important fact, however, for our purpose here is the knowledge that Chaucer was the "inspiring force" behind these men's writings—and not merely in "turns of phrase and in the fashion of verse," but in "poetic fabric."¹⁷⁶

¹⁷³G. Gregory Smith, "The Scottish Chaucerians," CHEL, vol. II, p. 272.

¹⁷⁴Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁷⁵Ibid., p. 272.

¹⁷⁶Ibid., p. 278.

Unfortunately, these Scottish followers of Chaucer have never enjoyed wide popularity either in their own country, or England. They are set, according to Louis Golding, "dubiously upon a border-line of appreciation." This is true to some extent because they wrote in "imported forms," from a foreign land, then hostile; and possibly, to a lesser extent, because of the difficulty of the dialect. Golding sets forth a greater reason:

In the weak eyeballs of academicians the virtues of the Scottish Chaucerians are blurred in the glory thrown about them by the sun of Chaucer . . . It is the multiplicity of the man, Chaucer, the abundance of his large lungs breathing. This laughing colossus standing wind-towed over his age, that so cheats the air from our puny pinnaces.¹⁷⁷

None of the Scottish company is such a "colossus." They are great in their detail rather than their mass. And it is in the

. . . beauty of their texture, their delight in the threads they weave into comely silken patterns like Henryson's "Robene and Makyne," stout tapestries like the "Prologues" of Douglas, that anticipate the marvelous housewifery of Spenser, and, at their highest, in the sweetness and strength of "The Golden

¹⁷⁷Louis Golding, "The Scottish Chaucerians," The Living Age, Concord, N. H., Jan. 6, 1923, vol. 316, no. 4096, p. 45.

Targe," that they anticipate John Keats,
the last of their line.¹⁷⁸

But, like their English contemporaries these northern poets had their limitations. "They are not, we learn, original 'makers.' Without Chaucer they fall to the ground." They consistently made use of long-familiar forms. Without exception they seized Chaucer's antiquated "orange of allegory," attempting once more to "squeeze thence new drops of invention." Yet apart from this fact, at least three of these Scottish Chaucerians were highly original in much of their work.¹⁷⁹

Whether the form of the Scottish Chaucerians was native or derivative, or their language a blend of northern and southern modes, their achievement was poetry, of which there is so little in the world, of which there cannot be too much. One feels that if Gower had lived today, he would not have attempted Parnassus' slope. He would have found the cinema a more effective instrument of moral suasion and have written scenarios for films of religious propoganda. Lydgate would have been a Civil Servant writing letters to the reviews milding repudiating Mr. Bayfield on Shakespearian versification. The Scottish Chaucerians, who were poets of the fifteenth century, would have been poets today.¹⁸⁰

Of these Scottish poets, "the simplest and most

¹⁷⁸Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁷⁹Ibid.

¹⁸⁰Ibid.

naive" was James I of Scotland (1394-1437). His love-allegory, The Kingis Quair (1423), represents the first phase of Scottish Chaucerianism, in which the imitation, though individualized by the genius of its author, is deliberate and direct.¹⁸¹ The atmosphere of the poem is that of The Romance of the Rose; in general treatment, as well as in details it at once appears to be modelled upon that work.

Not only is the poem by its craftsmanship superior to any by Chaucer's English disciples, but it is in some respects, in happy phrasing and in the retuning of old lines, hardly inferior to its models. Indeed, it may be claimed for the Scots author . . . that he has, at times improved upon his master.¹⁸²

The Kingis Quair, or King's Book (which runs to 1379 lines, divided into 197 "Troilus stanzas," riming ababbcc), may be described as a dream-allegory dealing with two main topics: the "unsekernesse" of Fortune and the poet's happiness in life. For this reason many critics consider the poem a composite work, written at different times—the earliest portion having been written during the author's dejection (real or imaginary), and the latter portion in subsequent joy which the sight of the fair lady in the garden by his

¹⁸¹Smith, CHEL, p. 278.

¹⁸²Ibid., pp. 273-274.

prison had brought into his life.¹⁸³

The only MS text of The Kingis Quair that we have preserved for us is in the Bodleian Library in the composite MS marked "Arch. Selden. B. 24" which has been supposed to belong to the last quarter of the fifteenth century. It is there described in a prefatory sentence (Fol. 191) as

Maid be King James of scotland the first
callit the kingis quair and Maid quhen his
Maiestie Wes in Ingland.¹⁸⁴

This reference is confirmed in the Latin explicit on Fol. 211. Thus, the ascription of The Kingis Quair to James I, King of the Scots, remains uncontroverted. The story of the poem is James's capture by Norfolk pirates in March, 1405, his imprisonment by the English, and the wooing of Joan Beaufort. There is no reason to doubt that the story was written by James himself, and the date of composition may be fixed about the year 1423. During his exile in London the Scottish king found ample opportunity to study the works of the "Great English poet," Geoffrey Chaucer, whose name was yet unknown in the north, and whose influence there might have been delayed indefinitely had it not been for the young Scottish prince.¹⁸⁵

¹⁸³Ibid., p. 274.

¹⁸⁴Ibid., p. 277.

¹⁸⁵Ibid., pp. 277-278.

Lines from The Kingis Quair strongly reminiscent of Chaucer appear in "The Dawn of Love," where the opening lines bear a striking resemblance to the description of Palamoun first beholding Emelye from his prison cell in the Knight's Tale:

And there-with kest I doun mine eyes again,
 Where as I saw, walking under the tower,
 Full secretly new comen her to pleyne,
 The fairest or the freshest yonge flower
 That ever I saw, me thought, before that hour,
 For which sudden abate, anon astert
 The blude of all my body to my heart.¹⁸⁶

Further evidence of the Chaucerian influence on James is to be noted in his Ballad of Good Counsel, written in the rime royal, and imitative of Chaucer's Truth, repeating as in the latter, the last line in each stanza.¹⁸⁷

None of the Chaucerians, English or Scot, were closer to the "spirit" of Chaucer than James. His craftsmanship is superior in quality, his verses "are constructed with so clear a music, and the architecture of his poetry is so gracefully poised" that James displays himself a "craftsman of high rank."¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁶James I of Scotland, "The Kingis Quair," The Edinburgh Book of Scottish Verse, ed. by W. MacNeile Dixon, London, 1910, p. 7. This work hereinafter referred to as EBSV.

¹⁸⁷OHSL, p. 88.

¹⁸⁸Golding, op. cit., p. 47.

The second Scottish poet who followed in Chaucer's train was Robert Henryson (c.1425 - c.1506), a schoolmaster, connected with the grammar school of the Benedictine Abbey in Dunfermline.¹⁸⁹

"Henryson," says Golding, "is as delicate as James, but he has more variety and skill."¹⁹⁰ William Ernest Henley wrote thus of Henryson:

His verse is usually well-minted and full of weight. Weak lines are rare in him; he had the instinct of the refrain, and was fond of doing feats in rhythm and rhyme; he is close, compact, and energetic. He narrates with a gaiety, an ease, a rapidity, not to be surpassed in English literature between Chaucer and Burns . . . He had withal an abundance of wit, humor, and good sense; he had considered life and his fellow-man, nature and religion, the fashions and abuses of his epoch, with the grave, observant amiability of a true poet.¹⁹¹

Most outstanding of Henryson's accomplishments is his powerful dramatic sequel to Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, The Testament of Cresseid (1593). H. J. C. Grierson has declared the 616 lines in rime royal to be "perhaps the most original poem that Scotland has produced."¹⁹²

¹⁸⁹OHEL, p. 88.

¹⁹⁰Golding, op. cit., p. 47.

¹⁹¹William Ernest Henley, "The English Poets," LLC, p. 209.

¹⁹²OHEL, p. 88.

If The Testament of Cresseid is Henryson's most important work, then Robene and Makyne is his most beautiful. Besides, it is probably the earliest specimen of pastoral poetry in the Scottish language.¹⁹³ A fair example of Henryson's verse is to be found in the first two stanzas of Robene and Makyne:

Robene sat on gude green hill,
 Keepand a flock of fe:
 Merry Makyne said him till,
 'Robene, thou rue on me;
 I haif thee luvit loud and still,
 Thir yearis two or three;
 My dule in dern bot gif thou dill,
 Doubtless but dreid I die.'

Robene answerit, 'Be the rude,
 Naething of lufe I knaw,
 Bot keepis my sheep under yon wud,
 Lo where they raik on raw:
 What has marrit thee in thy mude,
 Makyne, to me thou shaw;
 Or what is lufe, or to be lo'ed?
 Fain walk I leir that law.'¹⁹⁴

And in The Testament of Cresseid, Henryson makes frequent mention of Chaucer:

. . . Writtin be worthie Chaucier
 glorious,
 Of fair Cresseid and worthie
 Troylus.

.

¹⁹³David Irving, "The History of Scottish Poetry," LLC, p. 208.

¹⁹⁴Robert Henryson, "Robene and Makyne," EBSV, p. 12.

For worthie Chauceir, in the samin
 buik,
 In gudelic termis and in joly veirs¹⁹⁵

A final example of Henryson's work which was written under the Chaucerian influence is his Morall Fabillies of Esops, executed in the rime royal, and is probably indebted to Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale.¹⁹⁶

It would be idle to refuse to William Dunbar's forehead "the laurel of Scottish Chaucerian poetry." Although he has neither James's simplicity, nor Henryson's grace, he does have a range and power and originality which elect him high among the second rank of poets.¹⁹⁷

Dunbar and Chaucer belong to the same class of easy, self-contained men, whose balance is seldom deranged by restless straining and soaring; but within that happy pleasure loving circle they occupy distinct habitations: and one way of bringing out their difference of spirit is to lay stress upon their nationality. Dunbar is unmistakably Scotch. He is altogether of stronger and harder—perhaps of harsher—nerve than Chaucer; more forcible and less diffuse of speech; his laugh is rougher; he is boldly sarcastic and derisive to persons; his ludicrous conceptions rise to more daring heights of extravagance; and

¹⁹⁵Robert Henryson, "The Testament of Cressid," The Golden Treasury of Scottish Poetry, ed. by Hugh MacDiarmid, New York, 1941, pp. 195-196.

¹⁹⁶OHEL, p. 89.

¹⁹⁷Golding, op. cit., p. 47.

finally, he has a more decided turn for preaching, for offering good advice . . . ,¹⁹⁸

Dunbar was an East Lothian educated at the University of St. Andrews, where he took his M. A. in 1479. He was a Franciscan friar, a wandering preacher, messenger to the King, and poet laureate.¹⁹⁹

The earliest of Dunbar's poems in the Chaucerian tradition is The Thrissil and the Rois (1503), a political allegory of twenty-seven stanzas written in the rime royal. It is characterized by Chaucer's rich imagery and excellent description.²⁰⁰ The Dance of the Sevin Deidly Synnis (1503-1508) and The Goldyn Targe (c.1508) followed The Thrissil and the Rois, and Golding says of the latter, "Never was poetry more thick inlaid with patines of bright gold . . ." ²⁰¹

Dunbar has been called the "Chaucer of Scotland," and like his master, he is at times indecent. He is, likewise, a fine craftsman, dexterous and versatile in technique. His allegiance to Chaucer, however, is one of "literary reminiscence, of motif, of phrase, of stanza—a bookish reminiscence, perhaps, which often results in a spiritual

¹⁹⁸William Minto, "Characteristics of English Poets," LLC, p. 225.

¹⁹⁹OHSL, p. 89.

²⁰⁰Ibid.

²⁰¹Golding, op. cit., p. 48.

antithesis."²⁰² And, it might be added that his debt to Chaucer is much less intimate than Henryson's or King James's. Chaucer was, to him, "the rose of rethoris all," but "he follows him at a distance, and perhaps with divided affection."²⁰³

"Most scholarly of the Scottish Chaucerians, but the least vigorous," is Gawain (Gawin or Gavin) Douglas, (c.1474 - 1522) Bishop of Dunkeld.²⁰⁴ To some extent Douglas marks a decadence in the burst of poetry which has been briefly examined here. "He is more of a litterateur, an Alexandrian, than the rest." We feel that the tremendous versatility of Dunbar, his feverish experimentation with many techniques, is implicit in the man, "native to him." In Douglas we feel "a sense of deliberation, his concern with form a greater stimulus than matter." There is, nevertheless, much fine poetry in his work, but of a "cunning silver" rather than "plain fine gold."²⁰⁵

The Palice of Honour (1501) is his most important work. It is written in the style of the Chaucerian verse

²⁰²Smith, CHEL, p. 292.

²⁰³Ibid., p. 287.

²⁰⁴OHIEL, p. 90.

²⁰⁵Golding, op. cit., pp. 47-48.

allegory, or dream poem.²⁰⁶ It is a fairly long poem, 2166 lines, riming aabaabbab, and the inspiration of the piece is unmistakable. Not only does it carry on the Chaucerian allegory, but is directly indebted to

Geffray Chauceir, as A per se sans peir
In his vulgare

In machinery the work is obviously indebted to Chaucer's Rose sequence, The House of Fame, and The Court of Love. "The whole interest of the poem is retrospective."²⁰⁷

In his poem the Ballade of Commendation of Honor, we have a work of amazing virtuosity. It is an excellent example of Douglas's ability to adapt sound to meaning. Golding says of the lines quoted: "how the rhymes dance and sparkle like ascending and descending watery arrows in a sunlit fountain."

Hail, rois maist chois til clois thy fois
 greit nicht!
Haill, stone quhilk schone upon the throne
 of licht!
Vertew, quhais, trew sweit dew our threw al
 vice.²⁰⁸

In general retrospect of this school of Scottish Chaucerians, it is not difficult to note that the

²⁰⁶OHEL, p. 90.

²⁰⁷Smith, CHEL, p. 297.

²⁰⁸Golding, op. cit., p. 47.

"discipleship," though sincere, was by no means blind.

If the Scottish poets imitated well, and often caught the sentiment with remarkable felicity, it was because they were not painful devotees. In what they did they showed an appreciation beyond the faculty of Chaucer's southern admirers; and, though the artistic sense implied in appreciation was dulled by the century's craving for a 'moral' to every fancy, their individuality saved them from the fate which befel their neighbors.²⁰⁹

²⁰⁹Smith, CHEL, pp. 302-303.

CHAPTER II

DRYDEN'S PREFACE TO THE FABLES ANCIENT AND MODERN

In 1700, when John Dryden penned the Preface to his Fables Ancient and Modern, he was an old man, ill, penniless, "divorced from the Court and vilely lampooned by the Whigs." And yet, Dryden's career was to end as it had begun, in a "triumph of the will."

His probable resolution at twenty-three or twenty-four to proceed to London and become a poet is matched only by the fire and perseverance which drove him at the end of his life through pain and sickness to the conclusion of his Fables.

As many are wont to do in their old age, he might have "raged and snarled or complained or degenerated." Instead, he settled down to the telling of stories. "The tattling quality of age," he had written in the Discourse of Satire, "as Sir William Davenant says, is always narrative."¹

¹Mark Van Doren, John Dryden, A Study of His Poetry, New York, 1946, p. 214.

On Candlemas Day, 1698, he wrote to his grandniece, Mrs. Seward of Cotterstock Hall, informing her of the progress of his volume:

I am still drudging on: always a poet, and never a good one. I pass my time sometimes with Ovid, and sometimes with our old English poet Chaucer; translating such stories as best please my fancy; and intend besides them to add somewhat of my own; so that it is not impossible, but ere the summer be passed, I may come down to you with a volume in my hand, like a dog out of the water, with a duck in his mouth.²

On the fourth of March, 1698, he continued:

I am still drudging at a Book of Miscellaneyes, which I hope will be well enough, if otherwise, three-score & seven may be pardon'd.³

Twenty days before his death, on the eleventh of April, 1700, he wrote to his grandniece with some pride:

The Ladies of the Town have infected you at a distance: they are all of your Opinion; & like my last Book of Poems, better than any thing they have formerly seen of mine.⁴

The work had certainly been a tiresome drudgery for the aging poet. Worst of all, it had to be done as rapidly

²John Dryden, The Letters of John Dryden, ed. by Charles E. Ward, Durham, N. C., 1942, p. 109.

³Ibid., p. 113.

⁴Ibid., p. 135.

as possible.⁵ With the accession of William and Mary to the throne of England, Dryden, naturally, lost his pension and the laureateship. "Now, as he was entering old age, Dryden again had to write for a living."⁶ But, regardless of the drudgery of the task, it is clear that Dryden "grew fonder of his occupation as he proceeded." The "golden Preface" describes his delighted progress from Homer to Ovid, from Ovid to Chaucer, and from Chaucer to Boccaccio. The volume continued to grow, even beyond his expectations. "I have built a house," he concludes, "where I intended but a lodge." If, however, he had thought of his "lodge" as a green retreat for a fading muse, he was wrong; instead, he found a "house" whose bustling halls entertained his ripest powers. There had been no fading!⁷

In the Preface to his Fables, Dryden established his greatness as a critic. The Preface presents us not only with a true estimate of his originality and insight in appreciation, but also a new set of ideas which have enriched the function of English criticism. In this respect the Preface can be compared to the Essay of Dramatick Poesie. The latter work has many novelties which were to be made common by his

⁵Van Doren, op. cit., p. 214.

⁶George Sherburn, LHE, p. 730.

⁷Van Doren, op. cit., pp. 214-215.

successors. "But we never know where he will not point the way to what is coming. In the Preface to the Fables, all is overshadowed by the praise of Chaucer, but Dryden foresaw a habit which was to be indulged in, for good or ill, by many literary critics of the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, and with which we may sometimes think that we have become too familiar:

Milton was the Poetical Son of Spencer [sic],
Mr. Waller of Fairfax; for we have our lineal
Descents and Clans, as well as other Families.

Here Dryden says "Clans" and "Families"; but we are at the beginning of the division of our poets into "Schools."⁸ The Preface, however, is of primary importance because it initiated the revival of the "sunken reputation of one of the greatest English poets." Van Doren suggests that perhaps the one thing which has assured Dryden's reputation as a poet is the fact that "he championed and gave vogue to the Canterbury Tales." Chaucer's reputation was lower in the seventeenth century than it had been before or has been since. His poetry was seldom read. Englishmen referred to him as a "difficult old author who had a remarkable but obscure vein of gaiety." Spenser's tribute was forgotten, and Milton's went unnoticed. According to Dryden, "Mr. Cowley despised

⁸David Nichol Smith, John Dryden, London, 1950, pp. 83-84.

him." Addison, in his Account of the Greatest English Poets which he contributed to the fourth Miscellany in 1694, pronounced what seemed a "final benediction over the skeleton of his fame":

In vain he jests in his unpolished strain
And tries to make his readers laugh in vain . . .
But now the mystic tale that pleased of yore
Can charm an understanding age no more.⁹

Such a stntiment was not peculiar to Addison. Most of the writers of the century regarded Chaucer as an antiquated buffoon, sometimes coarsely amusing, and a convenient pattern for a coarseness worse than his own.¹⁰ Dryden's Preface, then, was a bold critique.¹¹ There had been little criticism of Chaucer prior to Dryden. Sherwood quotes Miss Spurgeon as calling the Preface "the first detailed and careful criticism of Chaucer" in our language.¹² Dryden took great pains to deny that Chaucer was "a dry, old-fashion'd Wit, not worth reviving." Throughout the Preface, he proclaims the humanity of Chaucer, declaring that he "had

⁹Van Doren, op. cit., pp. 220-221.

¹⁰Saintsbury, CHEL, p. 186.

¹¹James Russell Lowell, Among My Books, Boston, 1896, p. 72.

¹²John O. Sherwood, "Dryden and the Rules: The Preface to the Fables," The Journal of English and Germanic Philology, Urbana, Illinois, Jan., 1953, vol. LII, no. 1, p. 19.

written for all times."¹³ And, it is further to Dryden's credit that he noted that the elder poet "follow'd Nature everywhere." This is a particularly significant statement from a poet who lived in an age when "nature was more talked about than explored." Further, Dryden's criticism of Chaucer indicated a sincere appreciation and affection for the medi-
eval poet. "The humanity of Chaucer had its effect on the Fables." It is a genuine pleasure to watch Dryden, who had dealt so exclusively throughout his career in the styles and accidents of utterance, expand and ripen under the influence of so richly human a writer as Chaucer.¹⁴

In sum, I seriously protest, that no Man ever had, or can have, a greater Veneration for Chaucer than my self. I have translated some part of his Works, only that I might perpetuate his Memory, or at least refresh it, amongst my Countrymen. If I have alter'd him anywhere for the better, I must at the same time acknowledge, that I could have done nothing without him . . .

In the Preface Dryden has allowed the "rules to take care of themselves." His judgment of Chaucer is based largely on "tastes and instincts." In contrast to the Essay Of Dramatick Poesie, there is hardly a clear and direct reference to a specific rule in the whole essay. The Preface

¹³Van Doren, op. cit., p. 221.

¹⁴Ibid.

undoubtedly lacks the precision, the directness, and critical range of the earlier essay. On the other hand, in no other of Dryden's prose essays do we find so much personal enthusiasm. That the critical judgments "have an air of unorthodoxy about them" is unimportant. The chief interest, as Sherwood points out, lies in the fact that a "poet of genius exalted over a poet of art."¹⁵ For our purpose here, the important thing about Dryden's appreciation of Chaucer is that he was able to see, through the barriers of language and an unfamiliar literary idiom, the essential virtues which he admired; whereas the more arbitrary neo-classical critics, though holding to the same principles, were never quite able to apply them to such seemingly unpromising material.¹⁶

Because of its scattered nature, Dryden's criticism of Chaucer in the Preface is rather hard to deal with. For convenience, Sherwood regards it as falling into four sections: (1) a comparison of Chaucer and Boccaccio; (2) a comparison of Chaucer and Ovid; (3) a "character" of Chaucer; and (4) a second comparison of Chaucer and Boccaccio.¹⁷

The first of these empirical divisions consists of little more than a brief discussion of Chaucer and Boccaccio

¹⁵Sherwood, op. cit., p. 14.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 25.

¹⁷Ibid., p. 19.

as refiners of their respective languages.

He [Boccaccio] and Chaucer, among other Things, had this in common, that they refin'd their Mother-Tongues . . . Chaucer (as you have formerly been told by our learn'd Mr. Rhymer [Thomas Rymer]) first adorn'd and amplified our barren Tongue from the Provencall, which was then the most polish'd of all the Modern Languages.

The comparison of Chaucer with Ovid in the second section is original with Dryden.¹⁸ Indeed, when Dryden writes that Chaucer "is a perpetual Fountain of good Sense" and that he likes him better than Ovid, he is making a bold confession.¹⁹ Dryden frankly admits that there are some who will think of him as a "little less than mad for preferring the Englishman to the Roman." In the comparison of Ovid and Chaucer, Dryden speaks generally in terms of form. He refers briefly to the wonderful facility and clearness both men exhibited, and then goes on to compare them under the following categories: "invention," "manners," and "thoughts and words." "Here," says Sherwood, "we have a standard form of classical and neo-classical criticism."²⁰ Aristotle discusses tragedy under the headings Plot, Character (manners), Diction (words), Thought, Spectacle, and Song; while the

¹⁸Ibid., p. 20.

¹⁹Lowell, op. cit., p. 72.

²⁰Sherwood, op. cit., p. 21.

French Le Bossu in treating the epics, speaks of Fables, Matière, Forme, Moeurs, Pensées, and Expression. Finally, Dryden mentions briefly the learning of Ovid and Chaucer.²¹

Taking Dryden's comparisons in order, we should note his remark that neither Chaucer nor Ovid was an inventor.

. . . Ovid only copied the Grecian Fables; and most of Chaucer's Stories were taken from his Italian Contemporaries or their Predecessors: Boccace his Decameron was first publish'd; and from thence our Englishman has borrow'd many of his Canterbury Tales; Yet that of Palamon and Arcite was written, in all probability, by some Italian Wit, in a former Age, as I shall prove hereafter: The Tale of Grizild was the invention of Petrarch; by him sent to Boccace; from whom it came to Chaucer: Troilus and Cressida was also written by a Lombard Author . . . Both of them built on the Inventions of other Men;

and, as to "manner," Dryden writes:

Both of them understood the Manners, under which Name I comprehend the Passions, and, in a larger Sense, the Descriptions of Persons, and their very Habits. For an Example, I see Baucis and Philemon as perfectly before me, as if some ancient Painter had drawn them; and all the Pilgrims in the Canterbury Tales, their Humours, their Features, and the very Dress, as distinctly as if I had supp'd with them at the Tabard in Southwark.

Here he concludes that Chaucer is Ovid's superior.

²¹Ibid., p. 22.

The characters of Chaucer are much more lively than Ovid's, and are "set in a better Light."

In the matter of "words," Dryden is unable to make a case for Chaucer, showing a common neo-classical prejudice against Chaucer's language.²² Dryden's remarks here lack their usual directness; instead, he brushes aside the matter with the statement that Ovid lived when "the Roman Tongue was in its Meridian; whereas Chaucer wrote "in the Dawning of our Language." He concludes the issue with a statement that this part of the comparison is not on "an equal Foot."

Chaucer's "thoughts," on the other hand, seem to Dryden superior to Ovid's. They are to be measured, he says, "only by their Propriety"; that is, as they flow more or less naturally from the persons described on such and such occasion, and as an example of lack of propriety, Dryden instances the uses of "conceits," "jingles," and "turns" in scenes of passion, where "they are nauseous, because they are unnatural." Thus, to Dryden, Chaucer succeeds where Ovid fails.²³

The comparison of Chaucer and Ovid is followed by a character of Chaucer alone. In this section Dryden mingles critical and biographical matter. The results are somewhat rambling and digressive.²⁴ It will be sufficient to point

²²Ibid.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Ibid., p. 23.

out and discuss only those passages which have some critical significance. Dryden begins with some general praises of Chaucer:

In the first place, As he is the father of English Poetry, so I hold him in the same Degree of Veneration as the Grecians held Homer, or the Romans Virgil: He is a perpetual Fountain of good Sense; learn'd in all Sciences; and therefore speaks properly on all Subjects: As he knew what to say, so he knows also when to leave off; a Continnence which is practis'd by few Writers, and scarcely by any of the Ancients, excepting Virgil and Horace.

Dryden goes on to point out that Chaucer always followed nature, "but was never so bold to go beyond her." "The tone of this," says Sherwood, "is obviously neo-classical," with its constant emphasis on good sense, learning, continence, and following nature. Much of Dryden's criticism here is conventional enough. Chaucer was still regarded as the father of English poetry, and aside from the fact that most of Dryden's contemporaries regarded the Middle English as a barbarous language, the older poet's learning had been generally praised.²⁵ The first part of the character of Chaucer is followed by some comments on Chaucer's verse, which, Dryden confesses, is not harmonious to his age. Nevertheless, he feels its eloquence and musical quality, which has about

²⁵Ibid.

it the "rude Sweetness of a Scotch tune." Although not perfect, this "rude sweetness" of Chaucer's verse is natural, and highly pleasing, even to the seventeenth century ear.²⁶ Then follows a discussion which indicates clearly Dryden's ignorance of not only Chaucer's versification and metre, but of the value the earlier poet's age placed on the final e.

'Tis true, I cannot go so far as he who publish'd the last Edition of him; for he would make us believe the Fault is in our Ears, and that there were really Ten Syllables in a Verse where we find but Nine: But this opinion is not worth confuting; 'tis so gross and obvious an Error, that common Sense . . . must convince the Reader, that Equality of Numbers in every Verse which we call Heroick, was either not known, or not always practis'd in Chaucer's Age. It were an easie Matter to produce some thousands of his Verse, which are lame for want of half a foot, and sometimes a whole one, and which no pronunciation can make otherwise. We can only say, that he liv'd in the Infancy of our Poetry, and that nothing is brought to Perfection at the first.

In failing to understand or appreciate Chaucer's versification, Dryden was at one with most of his contemporaries and predecessors since the sixteenth century.²⁷ Furthermore, we should not condemn Dryden for not recognizing the perfection of Chaucer's verse on the basis of the text which he used—Speght's edition of 1687—in which we

²⁶Ibid.

²⁷Ibid.

constantly come on lines which are, as Dryden said, "lame for want of half a foot." Also, Dryden was not a textualist. He lived before textual criticism had spread to English poetry. He accepted the text that he was given, and he was right in saying, on the evidence of this text, that Chaucer's versification was very irregular.²⁸

Following the discourse on Chaucer's versification, Dryden gives space to a biographical sketch of the poet, after which he raises the question as to whether a poet has a right to satirize the clergy.

I [Dryden] cannot blame him for inveighing so sharply against the Vices of the Clergy in his Age: Their Pride, their Ambition, their Pomp, their Avarice, their Worldly Interest, deserv'd the Lashes which he gave them . . . A Satyrical Poet is the Check of the Laymen on bad Priests.

These matters in the Preface are then followed by what is possibly the finest passage in the essay—a passage of enthusiastic appreciation:

He [Chaucer] must have been a Man of a most wonderful comprehensive Nature, because, as it has been truly observ'd of him, he has taken into the Compass of his Canterbury Tales the various Manners and Humours (as we now call them) of the whole English Nation in his Age. Not a single Character has escap'd him.

²⁸Smith, D. N., op. cit., pp. 82-83.

The passage continues with a rather lengthy, but understanding analysis of the various types of persons whom Chaucer had depicted so skillfully in the Canterbury Tales. He notes with enthusiasm how Chaucer, by means of characterization, tells his reader of the manners and customs of his age. Dryden's praise in this passage is a noble tribute to his predecessor's insight into humanity:

We have our Fore-fathers and Great Grandames all before us, as they were in Chaucer's Days; their general Characters are still remaining in Mankind, and even in England, though they are called by other Names than those of Moncks and Fryars, and Chanons, and Lady Abbesses, and Nuns: For Mankind is ever the same, and nothing lost out of Nature, though every thing is alter'd.

In the remaining portions of the Preface which deal with Chaucer, Dryden concerns himself with a defence of his translations of Chaucer and, finally, a brief comparison of Chaucer and Boccaccio with an appended discussion of The Knight's Tale.

In modernizing Chaucer Dryden had to overcome two prejudices:

I find some People are offended that I have turned these Tales into modern English; because they think them unworthy of my Pains, and look on Chaucer as a dry, old-fashion'd Wit, not worth reviving.

.

But there are other Judges who think I ought not to have translated Chaucer into English, out of a quite contrary Notion: They suppose there is a certain Veneration due to his old Language; and that it is little less than Profanation and Sacrilege to alter it. They are farther of opinion, that somewhat of his good Sense will suffer in this Transfusion, and much of the Beauty of his Thoughts will infallibly be lost . . .

To the first, and by far the largest group, Dryden's answer was that now, by means of his modern translation they might see for themselves that Chaucer was worth knowing. And, to the second and scholarly group, Dryden's answer was equally pertinent:

'Tis not for the Use of some old Saxon Friends that I have taken these Pains with him: Let them neglect my Version, because they have no need of it. I made it for their sakes who understand Sense and Poetry as well as they; when that Poetry and Sense is put into Words which they understand.

Dryden concludes his defence with a protest that no man had ever felt a greater affection for Chaucer than he. "I have translated some part of his Works," he declares, "only that I might perpetuate his Memory, or at least refresh it, amongst my Countrymen."

In his second comparison of Chaucer with Boccaccio Dryden tells his reader that not only did the two men live in the same age, but that they were endowed with similar

genius, and "follow'd the same Studies." He reminds us again that each of them was a cultivator of his mother-tongue, and that each, generally speaking, was a borrower rather than an inventor. For serious poetry, however, Dryden favors the English poet, whose more difficult medium of verse is far superior to the easier medium of prose which the Italian writer employed. But, says Dryden, "let the reader weigh them both; and if he thinks me partial to Chaucer, 'tis in him to right Boccace."

In conclusion he writes:

I prefer in our Countryman, far above all his other Stories, the Noble Poem of Palamon and Arcite.

He tells us further that his reason for preferring this story is its epic possibilities, and goes so far as to suggest that it is "perhaps not much inferiour to the Ilias or the Aeneis." This story, he concluded, is more pleasing than either of the classical epics, and

. . . the Manners as perfect, the Diction as poetical, the Learning as deep and various; and the Disposition full as artful . . .

John Dryden's Preface stands today as a memorial to the power of an aging poet.²⁹ David Smith calls it the most important introductory preface that Dryden wrote. "It is," Smith says, "a volume of great richness." And, undoubtedly

²⁹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 237.

the passages on Chaucer are some of the great pronouncements of English criticism. His criticisms of Chaucer recall to mind some of the criticisms which he had penned thirty years earlier, in which he spoke his mind freely. But there is this difference:

In his praise of Shakespeare he gave heightened expression to what others were thinking; in his praise of Chaucer he broke through received opinion, and about Chaucer's essential merits, as distinct from his versification, he said what we all say now.³⁰

It is evident, then, that Dryden was not only the first Englishman to praise with enthusiasm and understanding, the poetic genius of Geoffrey Chaucer, he literally "broke new ground,"³¹ giving popular vogue to the first of England's great poets. As Van Doren notes, there was coming into existence in England, for the first time, "a reading public."³² In 1700 this audience was not so familiar with Chaucer as we are. It was with this knowledge that Dryden undertook the modernization of Chaucer. It was an act of service, an act of piety to "the father of English poetry, to make him better known to his own countrymen."³³ For this reason, it is hard

³⁰Smith, D. N., op. cit., pp. 81-83.

³¹Ibid., p. 84.

³²Van Doren, op. cit., p. 237.

³³Ibid., p. 82.

to agree with Warton that the "Preface to the Fables is superficial."³⁴ It is desultory sometimes, digressive, often redundant, more informal than most of Dryden's prose, but never superficial. To offer to a reading public, who generally thought of Chaucer as a kind of "freak," a lusus naturae,³⁵ the idea that he (Chaucer) could be compared more than just favorably with the Greek and Roman classical poets, is hardly superficial insight. No poet before Dryden had chosen to see so clearly the poetic genius of Chaucer. They may have felt it, imitated it, alluded to it, but they never attempted an analysis of it. This, Dryden has done for us in the Preface to his Fables.

³⁴Warton, op. cit., vol. II, p. 247.

³⁵Ainger, op. cit., p. 144.

CHAPTER III

THE FABLES ANCIENT AND MODERN

The volume of verse which is known as Dryden's Fables was to be the last he was ever to write. For this volume his publisher, Jacob Tonson, paid Dryden 250 guineas, which "for 12,000 lines works out, as Pope calculated, to approximately sixpence a line."¹ Small reward, perhaps, for a work which Warton described as "the most animated and harmonious piece of versification in the English language."² And, indeed, the Fables stand today as noble tribute to the poetic genius of a man writing in the very twilight of his life. The Fables are the work of a mature mind; and they show a rare instance of a talent so steadfastly and perseveringly self-improved, that "in life's seventh decennium,

¹Alexandre Beljame, Men of Letters and The English Public in the Eighteenth Century: 1600-1744, Dryden, Addison, Pope, London, 1948, p. 365.

²Warton, op. cit., vol. II, p. 203.

the growth of Art overweighed the detriment of Time. But, in truth, no detriment of time is here perceptible . . ." Both a youthful fire and an unusually accomplished skill are to be found in the Fables.³ With the unfailing catholicity of taste which is one of Dryden's finest literary characteristics, he completely ignored the contempt with which his age was wont to look on medieval literature. As a result, his translations, or rather paraphrases, of Chaucer were to be one of the most singular, and at the same time most brilliantly successful of all his poetical experiments.⁴

Dryden called his book of poems Fables, using that word in its simplest sense, stories. As the volume finally appeared, the Fables contained, besides prefatory matter and a dedication to the Duke of Ormond, four pieces from Chaucer, one piece then attributed to Chaucer,* three selections from Boccaccio, the first book of the Iliad, some versions of Ovid's Metamorphoses in continuation of others previously published, an Epistle to John Dryden, the second St. Cecilia Ode, commonly called Alexander's Feast, and an Epitaph.⁵

The four works of Chaucer which Dryden included in his volume

³Wilson, op. cit., p. 206.

⁴George Saintsbury, Dryden, English Men of Letters, ed. by John Morley, New York, 1880, p. 153.

*See Appendix A.

⁵Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 155.

are Palamon and Arcite, from The Knight's Tale, the Cock and the Fox from The Nun's Priest's Tale, The Wife of Bath's Tale, and The Character of a Good Parson.

The chivalric romance of Palamon and Arcite, taken from The Knight's Tale, is the longest and most labored of the Chaucerian stories; however, it possesses a degree of regularity which might satisfy the most severe critics. Dryden's treatment of this poem enables us to judge to what extent he understood "an accurate combination of parts," a coherence of narrative, and the essentials of epic poetry. And, if it cannot be called an improvement of Chaucer, it is, nevertheless, so spirited a transfusion of his ideas into modern verse, as almost to claim the merit of originality. Indeed, there are many passages which show reason to carry this praise still higher, and "the merit of invention" is added to that of imitation.⁶

However justified Scott's praise, it should be pointed out, nevertheless, that in Palamon and Arcite, Dryden has obviously applied the heroic formulas of the seventeenth century. The result is a sometimes stilted poem. "Surrendering to the Restoration heroic tradition, Dryden has drawn the sting of Chaucer's colloquial charm and

⁶Sir Walter Scott, "The Life of John Dryden," The Miscellaneous Prose Works of Sir Walter Scott, ed. by Robert Cadell, Edinburgh, MDCCCXLI, Section I, p. 85.

injected with a blunt needle the false dignity of Almanzor and Aureng-Zebe."⁷

Neither the "jovial satire nor the purple melodrama" of Chaucer's tale are to be found in Dryden's translation. Epithets, circumlocutions, latinisms, grave conceits, and standard allusions are run profusely in to thicken his version. They do not ennoble the original texture. The verse is uniform and handsome, but the psychology is almost everywhere gross.⁸ Dryden did, however, follow Chaucer's original plot, but by adding and enlarging some passages, or by omitting others, he has altered the aspect of the poem to such a degree that his piece cannot lay claim to the title of translation. Dryden was too much a man of his time to follow the masterly simplicity of Chaucer's diction. Instead he used the polished, artificial, and often pompous language which we know from his other works.⁹

Evidence of Dryden's artificial and at times ostentatious expression can be noted in the early portions of the tale. For Chaucer's simple, and yet gracefully expressive lines,

⁷Van Doren, op. cit., p. 223.

⁸Ibid., pp. 223-224.

⁹Tobler, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

Where that ther kneled in the heighe weye
 A compaignye of ladyes, tweye and tweye,
 Ech after oother, clad in clothes blake;
 But swich a cry and swich a wo they make
 That in this world nys creature lyvyng
 That herde swich another waymentyng;
 And of this cry they nolde nevere stenten
 Til they the reynes of his brydel henten.
 "What folk ben ye, that at myn homcomyng
 Perturben so my feste with cryng?"
 Quod Theseus. "Have ye so greet envye
 Of myn honour, that thus compleyne and crye?
 Or who hath yow mysboden or offended?
 And telleth me if it may been amended,
 And why that ye been clothed thus in blak."¹⁰

Dryden has substituted:

Marching, he chanc'd to cast his Eye aside,
 And saw a Quire of mourning Dames, who lay
 By Two and Two across the common Way:
 At his Approach they rais'd a rueful Cry,
 And beat their Breasts, and held their Hands
 on high,
 Creeping and crying, till they seiz'd at last
 His Coursers Bridle and his Feet embrac'd.
 Tell, said Theseus, what and whence you are,
 And why this Funeral Pageant you prepare?
 Is this the Welcome of my worthy Deeds,
 To meet my Triumph in Ill-omen'd Weeds?
 Or envy you my Praise, and would destroy
 With Grief my Pleasures, and pollute my Joy?
 Or are you injur'd, and demand Relief?
 Name your Request, and I will ease your
 Grief.¹¹

Generally speaking, Dryden has not changed the basic meaning of Chaucer's lines; but, he has enlarged on it, and,

¹⁰Chaucer, Works, p. 29.

¹¹Dryden, Poems, p. 282.

it would seem, somewhat unnecessarily. And, I believe, even those with the most casual knowledge of Chaucer's Middle English must admit that in this particular instance Dryden is Chaucer's inferior in the choice of words.

Further evidence of what appears to be an inferior choice of words on Dryden's part is to be noted in those very fine lines in which Chaucer describes Palamon's first vision of Emily:

. . . thurgh a wyndow, thikke of many a barre
Of iren greet and square as any sparre,
He cast his eye upon Emelya,
And therwithal he bleynte and cride, "A!"
As though he stongen were unto the herte.
And with that cry Arcite anon up sterte,
And seyde, "Cosyn myn, what eyleth thee,
That art so pale and deedly on to see?"¹²

In his description, Dryden writes:

He thro' a little Window cast his Sight,
Tho' thick of Bars, that gave a Scanty Light:
But ev'n that Glimmering serv'd him to descry
Th' inevitable Charms of Emily.
Scarce had he seen, but, seiz'd with sudden
Smart,
Stung to the Quick, he felt it at his Heart;
Struck blind with overpowering Light he
stood,
Then started back amaz'd, and cry'd aloud.
Young Arcite heard; and up he ran with haste;¹³
To help his Friend, and in his Arms embrac'd;

¹²Chaucer, Works, p. 31.

¹³Dryden, Poems, p. 285.

Here, it would seem, Dryden's verse not only suffers from such undue verbiage as "Th' inevitable Charms . . ." and "Struck blind with overpowering Light he stood," but we feel Palamon's reaction is a little contrived, a little too dramatic. Perhaps, as he was often wont to do, Dryden was writing with "tongue in cheek," thus losing some of the sincerity of his original.

Similarly, Dryden's psychology, as Van Doren points out, is often insensitive and indiscriminating. For Chaucer's lines,

The quene anon, for verray wommanhede,
 Gan for to wepe, and so did Emeleye,
 And alle the ladies in the companye,¹⁴

Dryden has substituted the rather gross:

The Queen, above the rest, by Nature Good,
 (The Pattern form'd of perfect Womanhood)
 For tender Pity wept: When she began,
 Through the bright Quire th' infectious
 Vertue ran.
 All dropt their Tears, ev'n the contented
 Maid;¹⁵

Equally dissonant are Dryden's lines,

Fierce Love has pierc'd me with his fiery
 Dart,
 He fries within, and hisses at my Heart.¹⁶

¹⁴Chaucer, Works, p. 39.

¹⁵Dryden, Poems, p. 294.

¹⁶Ibid., p. 291.

which can hardly be called even a paraphrasal of Chaucer's:

This Palamoun, that thoughte that thurgh
his herte
He felte a coold swerd sodeynliche glyde,¹⁷

Very often Dryden's treatment of his original is almost completely inconsistent with the spirit of the poem; for example, in one instance, he turns Chaucer's serious and colorfully graphic description of the murals in the Temple of Venus into a rather ludicrous picture. Whereas in the earlier poet we have such fine poetry as:

The statue of Venus, glorious for to se,
Was naked, fletynge in the large see,
And fro the navele doun al covered was
With wawes grene, and brighte as any glas.¹⁸

Dryden gives us such facetious inventions as:

She trode the Brine, all bare below the Breast,¹⁹
And the green Waves but ill conceal'd the Rest;

Further on, Chaucer's "smylere with the knyf under the cloke," is very inadequately replaced by three whole lines about hypocrisy in Dryden's version.²⁰ According to Warton, Dryden has converted this image into clerical hypocrisy, under which he takes an opportunity of gratifying his

¹⁷Chaucer, Works, p. 37.

¹⁸Ibid., p. 42.

¹⁹Dryden, Poems, p. 296.

²⁰Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 158.

spleen against the clergy.²¹ Dryden also may be accused of loading the dying speech of Arcite with conceits for which his original gave no authority. In like manner, the plea used by Palamon in his prayer to Venus, although undeniably fine poetry, is somewhat more nakedly expressed by Dryden than by Chaucer. The modern poet appears to have forgotten that Palamon speaks the language of chivalry, and ought not to use an "expression of Lord Herbert."²²

While Dryden sometimes falls short of Chaucer in simple description, or in pathetic effect, we should note that in dialogue, or in argumentative parts of the poem, Dryden has frequently improved upon his original. Thus, the quarrel between Arcite and Palamon is wrought up with greater energy by Dryden than Chaucer, particularly by the addition of the following lines, which describe the enmity of the captives against each other:²³

Now Friends no more, nor walking Hand in Hand;
 But when they met, they made a surly Stand;
 And glar'd like angry Lions as they pass'd,
 And wish'd that every Look might be their
 last.²⁴

²¹Warton, op. cit., vol. II, p. 193.

²²Scott, op. cit., p. 86.

²³Ibid.

²⁴Dryden, Poems, p. 286.

Dryden further redeems himself by the regal characterization of Lycurgus and Emetrius, the prayers of Palamon, Emily, and Arcite to Venus, Cynthia, and Mars. Also notably done are the splendid settings which Dryden gives for the martial actions. Finally, we can delight in the occasional couplets which Dryden's mind has slashed "with a shining malice through the tissue of knightly palaver." On these occasions his knowingness is neither ugly, nor smart. He never "looks greedily out of the corner of his eye to see how you take it"; indeed, it is too native with him for him to be concerned about that, and "he himself is too humane."²⁵

Both poets like to describe groups of men conversing; but when Chaucer was only amused, Dryden became contemptuous.

Chaucer's delicious account in the Squire's tale of the loquacious courtiers who gathered around the steed of brass that stood before the throne of Cambinskan and speculated upon its origin is perhaps matched here in the Knight's Tale by a few lines hitting off the throng that forecast the outcome of tomorrow's tournament:²⁶

The paleys ful of peples up and doun,
 Heer three, ther ten, holding hir questioun,
 Divynings of thise Theban knightes two.
 Somme seyden thus, some seyde it shall be so;
 Somme helden with him with the blake berd,
 Somme with the balled, somme with the thikke-
 herd;

²⁵Van Doren, *op. cit.*, p. 224.

²⁶*Ibid.*, p. 225.

Somme seyde, he looked grim and he wolde
 fighte;
 He hath a sparth of twenty pound of wichte.
 Thus was the halle ful of divyninge,
 Longe after that the sonne gan to springe.²⁷

Dryden is more graphic in this case, and more caustic:

In Knots they stand, or in a Rank they walk,
 Serious in Aspect, earnest in their Talk:
 Factions, and fav'ring this or t'other Side,
 As their strong Fancies, and weak Reason
 guide;
 Their Wagers back their Wishes: Numbers hold
 With the fair freckl'd King, and Beard of
 Gold:
 So vig'rous are his Eyes, such Rays they
 cast,
 So prominent his Eagles Beak is plac'd.
 But most their Looks on the black Monarch
 bend,
 His rising Muscles, and his Brawn commend;
 His double-biting Ax, and beamy Spear,
 Each asking a Gygantic Force to rear.
 All spoke as partial Favour mov'd the mind;
 And safe themselves, at others Cost divin'd.²⁸

Also, we might note Dryden's description of the
 Temple of Mars, which in Saintsbury's opinion is his most
 famous:

The Temple stood of Mars Armipotent;
 The Frame of Burnish'd Steel, that cast
 a glare
 From far, and seem'd to thaw the freezing
 Air.
 A streight, long Entry to the Temple led,

²⁷Chaucer, Works, p. 49.

²⁸Dryden, Poems, p. 305.

Blind with high Walls; and Horrour over
 Head:
 Thence issu's such a Blast, and hollow
 Rore,
 As threaten'd from the Hinge, to heave the
 Door;
 In, through that Door, a Northern Light
 there shone;
 'Twas all it had, for Windows there were
 none.
 The Gate was Adamant; Eternal Frame!
 Which, hew'd by Mars himself, from Indian
 Quarries came,
 The Labour of a God; and all along
 Tough Iron Plates were clench'd to make
 it strong.
 A Tun about was ev'ry Pillar there;
 A polish'd Mirrour shone not half so
 clear.²⁹

Saintsbury, however, limits his praise in this instance to Dryden's description of the Temple itself, which when contrasted with Chaucer's is no less vivid. But "he is beaten," Saintsbury continues, "when it comes to 'the portraiture which was upon the wall.'"³⁰ Nevertheless, it should be pointed out that with few exceptions it is in these passages that Dryden distinguishes himself as a translator. For Chaucer's lines,

Amyddes of the temple sat Meschaunce,
 With discomfort and sory contenance.
 Yet saugh I Woodnesse, laughynge in his rage,
 Armed Compleint, Outhees, and fiers Outrage;
 The careyne in the busk, with throte ycorve;

²⁹Ibid., p. 297.

³⁰Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 158.

A thousand slayn, an nat of qualm ystorve;
 The tiraunt, with the pray by force yraft;
 The toun destroyed, ther was no thyng laft.³¹

Dryden gives us:

In midst of all the Dome, Misfortune sat,
 And gloomy Discontent, and fell Debate,
 And Madness laughing in his ireful Mood;
 And arm'd Complaint on Theft; and Cries of
 Blood.

There was the murder'd Corps, in Covert laid,
 And Violent Death in thousand shapes display'd:
 The City to the Soldier's Rage resign'd:
 Successful Wars, and Poverty behind:
 Ships burnt in Fight, or forc'd on Rocky
 Shores,³²

In a comparison of the two men's work in this particular example, one feels that Dryden has introduced considerable strength into the earlier poet's verse. Here, we cannot honestly accuse Dryden of diluting his lines with "elegant epithets," or the "flowing versification," which marks so much of his poetry. Instead, the lines are characterized by a boldness, a sustained strength, and "greater perfection of workmanship" than is ordinarily to be found in his adaptation of Chaucer's Knight's Tale.³³ On the other hand, Dryden has judiciously omitted or softened some degrading

³¹Chaucer, Works, pp. 42-43.

³²Dryden, Poems, p. 297.

³³Saintsbury, op. cit., pp. 158-159.

and some disgusting circumstances in this portion of the poem; as the "cook scalded in spite of his long ladle," the swine "devouring the cradled infant," the "pickpurse," and other details too grotesque or ludicrous to harmonize with the dreadful group around them.³⁴

Before concluding the discussion of Dryden's Palamon and Arcite, I mention, as mere outward details, several facts about his poetic form. For example, Dryden has rendered in 2431 verses a tale which Chaucer accomplished in only 2250. Dryden divides his poem into three books, whereas Chaucer has four parts. The metre which Dryden has employed in his poem is the same as in the original, the line of ten syllables, rhyming in couplets. In his inaugural dissertation, Alfred Tobler mentions as further criticism of Dryden's work the great number of faulty rhymes, sometimes only slightly inexact, sometimes quite bad. Tobler suggests that in certain instances Dryden may have intended his rhyme "only for the eye";³⁵ however, we should not overlook the fact that pronunciation has changed since the seventeenth century. We can assume that as careful a stylist as Dryden would be unlikely to write false rhymes. To illustrate Tobler's criticism, I have included some of his examples of Dryden's

³⁴Scott, op. cit., p. 86.

³⁵Tobler, op. cit., pp. 66-67.

inaccurate rhyming, taken from approximately the first five hundred lines of the poem: won, crown 5, 6; sow (verb), plough 25, 26; forlorne, turn 29, 30; nigh, clemency 71, 72; lie, tyranny 85, 86; flow, two 93, 94; declar'd, reward 103, 104; won, town 125, 126; cries, obsequies 131, 132; ground, wound (n) 149, 150; were, appear 151, 152; care, war 159, 160; loos'd, inclos'd 166, 167; stood, aloud 235, 236; wound, found 257, 258 - 273, 272; spoke, look 270, 271; feet, sweat 448, 455; possess, peace 458, 459; unaware, traveller 492, 493; mourn(s), returns 502, 503 - 508, 509 - 612, 611; shares, hears 534, 535; brought, draught 627, 628, etc.³⁶

Upon the whole, Dryden's introducing Chaucer's Knight's Tale to the modern reader, has deprived it of some of the charms which it possesses for those who have been able to peruse it in its original state. Chaucer, as John Wilson states, "having passed through the hands of Dryden, is no longer old Chaucer--no longer Chaucer."³⁷ And yet, as Professor Saintsbury remarks, "it is only when Chaucer is actually compared that the defects . . . rise to the eye." If Dryden's Palamon and Arcite be read by itself, it is almost entirely delightful.³⁸ The spirited and splendid

³⁶Ibid., p. 67.

³⁷Wilson, op. cit., p. 207.

³⁸Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 158.

verse and language of Dryden have given us a new poem.³⁹ Let us also grant him that in passages of gorgeous description, some of which we have noted earlier, he has even added to the chivalric splendor of Chaucer and has in many notable instances graced with poetic ornament the simplicity of his original.

That Dryden was, on occasion, artificial, ornate, and even unnecessarily ostentatious, we cannot deny. Almost always he fails in tenderness; and he is completely out of sympathy with the chivalric palaver and flattery which abounds in his model. Similarly, Dryden's humor, it would seem, lacks the warmth and humanity of Chaucer's. This is particularly evident in Palamon and Arcite, in which the humor generally fluctuates between the sardonic and the ludicrous. Nevertheless, if in this poem Dryden fails in tenderness, he is never deficient in majesty; and if the heart be sometimes untouched, the understanding and fancy are always exercised and delighted.⁴⁰

When the story is light and of the ludicrous kind, as the fable of The Cock and the Fox, or the tale of the Nun's Priest, Dryden displays all the humorous expressions of his

³⁹Wilson, op. cit., p. 204.

⁴⁰Scott, op. cit., p. 87.

satirical poetry. There is in this rather brief piece "a quaint Cervantic gravity," which Dryden has employed to express himself, and which wonderfully enlivens what otherwise might be "mere dry narrative."⁴¹ Van Doren designates this tale as one of the best and most original of the Fables; and further suggests that it would be sheer affectation to insist that Chaucer's Nun's Priest's Tale has suffered in hands of Dryden. Chaucer's poem is surpassingly human, concrete, and sly; but Dryden's is no less so, "though its pitch is altered."⁴²

In the opening lines of the poem Dryden's picture of the old widow in her cottage is delightfully droll. Van Doren calls this account "superior comedy," surpassing, perhaps, its original.⁴³ Because of the unusually fine manner in which Dryden has transfused the Chaucerian spirit into these lines, I believe they bear repeating in this text:

There liv'd, as Authors tell, in Days of Yore,
A Widow, somewhat old, and very poor:
Deep in a Cell* her Cottage lonely stood,
Well thatch'd, and under Covert of a Wood.
This Dowager, on whom my Tale I found,

⁴¹Ibid., p. 86.

⁴²Van Doren, op. cit., p. 226.

⁴³Ibid.

*Cell / Sargeaunt says this can hardly be right. In Robinson's text, Chaucer's word is "dale."

Since last she laid her Husband in the Ground,
 A simple sober Life in patience led,
 And had but just enough to buy her Bread:
 But Huswifing the little Heav'n had lent,
 She duly paid a Groat for Quarter-Rent;
 And pinch'd her Belly, with her Daughters two,
 To bring the Year about with much ado.
 The Cattel in her Homestead were three Sows,
 And Ewe called Mally, and three brinded Cows.
 Her Parlow-Window stuck with Herbs around
 Of sav'ry Smell; and Rushes strewed the Ground.
 A Maple-Dresser in her Hall she had,
 On which full many a slender Meal she made:
 For no delicious Morsel pass'd her Throat;
 According to her clothes she cut her Coat:
 No paynant Sawce she knew, no costly Treat,
 Her Hunger gave a Relish to her Meat:
 A sparing Diet did her Health assure;
 Or sick, a Pepper-Posset was her Cure.
 Before the Day was done, her Work she sped,
 And never went by Candle-light to Bed;
 With Exercise she sweat ill Humours out;
 Her Dancing was not hinder'd by the Gout.
 Her Poverty was glad; her Heart content,
 Nor knew she what the Spleen or Vapors meant.
 Of Wine she hever tasted through the Year,
 But White and Black was all her homely
 Chear;
 Brown Bread, and Milk (but first she skim'd
 her bowls)
 And Rashers of sindg'd Bacon on the Coals.
 On Holy-Days, an Egg or two at most;
 But her Ambition never reach'd to roast.
 A Yard she had with Pales enclos'd about,
 Some high, some low, and a dry Ditch
 without.⁴⁴

In subsequent lines, Dryden's description of the
 amorous Chanticleer is an equally fine portrait. In this
 particular instance a comparison shows how closely Dryden
 has adhered to his original. Chaucer, in his tales, tells

⁴⁴Dryden, Poems, pp. 315-316.

us that

His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
 And batailled as it were a castel wal;
 His byle was blak, and as the jeet is shoon;
 Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
 His nayles whitter than the lylve flour,
 And lyk the burned gold was his colour.
 This gentil cok hadde in his goveraunce
 Sevene hennes for to doon al his plesaunce,
 Whiche were his sustres and his paramours,
 And wonder lyk to hym, as of colours;
 Of whiche the faireste hewed on hir throte
 Was cleped faire damoysele Pertelote.
 Curteys she was, discreet, and debonaire,
 And compaignable, and bar hyrself so faire,
 Syn thilke day that she was seven nyght
 oold,
 That trewely she hath the herte in hoold
 Of Chauntecleer, loken in every lith;
 He loved hire so that wel was hym therwith.⁴⁵

While Dryden says of the "noble Chanticleer":

High was his Comb, and Coral-red withal
 In dents embattel'd like a Castle-Wall;
 His Bill was Raven-black, and shon like
 Jet,
 Blue were his Legs and Orient were his
 Feet:
 White were his Nails, like Silver to
 behold,
 His Body glitt'ring like the burnish'd
 Gold.
 This Gentle Cock, for solace of his Life
 Six misses had besides his lawful Wife;⁴⁶

Van Doren notes further that the disputation between
 Dame Partlet and the Cock on the subject of dreams offers

⁴⁵Chaucer, Works, p. 238.

⁴⁶Dryden, Poems, p. 316.

Dryden an opportunity which is both welcome and improved.

And the merchant's simple gibe at his friend,

I sette not a straw by thy dreminges,
For swevenes been but vanitees and japes.
Men dreme al-day of owles or of apes,
And eke of many a mase therewithal;
Men dreme of thing that nevere was ne shal,

becomes in Dryden's hands a piece of Lucretian exposition:

Dreams are but interludes which fancy makes;
When monarch Reason sleeps, this mimic wakes;
Compounds a medley of disjointed things,
A court of cobblers, and a mob of kings.
Light fumes are merry, grosser fumes are sad;
Both are the reasonable soul run mad:
And many monstrous forms in sleep we see,
That neighte were, nor are, nor e'er can be.
Sometimes forgotten things long cast behind
Rush forward in the brain, and come to mind.
The muse's legends are for truth received,
And the man dreams but what the boy believed.
Sometimes we but rehearse a former play;
The night restores our actions done by day,
As hounds in sleep will open for their prey.
In short the farce of dreams is of a piece,
Chimeras all.⁴⁷

Finally, the episode of the brother murdered at the inn is excellently and swiftly told; and the brief digression on freewill gives Dryden a "ratiocinative cue which he takes half in the spirit of Religio Laici and half in the spirit of the Nun's Priest's Tale itself."⁴⁸

⁴⁷Van Doren, op. cit., p. 226.

⁴⁸Ibid., p. 227.

Dryden's The Cock and the Fox, although not so greatly extended as the story of Palamon and Arcite, has been considerably altered in the modern version. And the story itself is, in many ways, inferior "to many of the branches of the old tree," but it has not a few merits, and the story of the two friends is one of the very best of the kind. To this Dryden has done ample justice. But in the original poem one of the most attractive parts is the solemn profusion of learned names and citations characteristic of the fourteenth century, which Dryden for some reason has thought it better to omit. It may not be quite clear whether Chaucer, who generally had a kind of "satirical undercurrent of intention in him," was serious in putting these into the mouths of Partlet and Chanticleer or not, but still one misses them. On the other hand, Dryden had made the most of the astrological allusions; "for it must be remembered that he had a decided hankering after astrology, like many of the greatest men of the century."⁴⁹

Why Dryden selected the Wife of Bath's Tale among his few translations from Chaucer, is difficult to say. It is a thoroughly harmless fabliau, but it cannot be said to come up in point of merit to many others of the Canterbury Tales.

⁴⁹Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 159.

Dryden's enemies would undoubtedly say that he selected the poem because of the unfavorable opinions of womankind which it contains. Of course, those same enemies would doubtlessly find it difficult to explain why he did not choose instead the scandalous prologue to the Tale, which unites opinions of womankind at least as unfavorable with other matter of the sort "which hostile criticism supposes to have been peculiarly tempting to Dryden." Actually, there is in the tale as presented in the Fables some evidence of this sort of thing, but certainly nothing which could have been shocking to the age. The length of the story is in proportion more amplified than is the case with the others.⁵⁰ For instance, the twenty-five lines with which Chaucer began the story of the Wife of Bath have grown into forty-five in the Fables. "Dryden has drawn upon Shakespeare's Romeo and Juliet and Midsummer Night's Dream, Spenser's Faerie Queene, and Milton's L'Allegro to enrich the text of the Canterbury Tales:⁵¹

I speak of ancient Times; for now the Swain
 Returning late may pass the Woods invain,
 And never hope to see the nightly Train:
 In vain the Dairy now with Mints is dress'd,
 The Dairy-Maid expects no Fairy Guest,
 To skim the Bowls and after pay the Feast.

⁵⁰Ibid., p. 162.

⁵¹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 228.

She sighs, and shakes her empty Shoes in
 vain,
 No Silver Penny to reward her Pain:
 For Priests with Pray'rs, and other godly
 Geer,
 Have made the merry Goblins disappear;
 And where they plaid their merry Pranks
 before,
 Have sprinkl'd Holy Water on the Floor:
 And Fry'rs that through the wealthy
 Regions run
 Thick as the Motes, that twinkle in the
 Sun,

.
 The Maids and Women need no Danger fear
 To walk by Night, and Sanctity so near:
 For by some Haycock or some shady Thorn
 He bids his Beads both Even-song and Morn.
 A lusty Knight was pricking o'er the Plain;⁵²

Dryden follows soon after with an open attack on the court,

Then Courts of Kings were held in high
 Renown,
 E'er made the common Brothels of the
 Town;⁵³

Then the tale, Van Doren tells us, "proceeds without especial distinction. The story is generally a satire on womankind, centering around that old query "what does a woman like best?" A knight of King Arthur's court, condemned to lose his life if he does not find the answer, hunts far and near, and finally agrees to marry a poor, ugly old hag,

⁵²Dryden, Poems, p. 335.

⁵³Ibid.

who in return tells the knight that all her sex aspires to
"Sovereignty,"

The Wife affects her Husband to command;
 All must be hers, both Mony, House, and
 Land.

.
 A blunt plain Truth, the Sex aspires to
 sway,
 You to rule all; while we, like Slaves,
 obey.⁵⁴

The poem concludes with a long speech by the loath-
 some old lady, greatly expanded from Chaucer. The unhappy
 knight accepts his fate, and seals the "Bargain with a
 friendly Kiss," only to see his ugly old wife throw off her
 mask of ugliness and appear as a "creature heav'nly Fair."
 It is probably the argumentative gifts of the old hag, who
 turns out not to be an old hag, which attracted Dryden to
 this least pleasing of the Canterbury Tales. As we have
 noted previously, Dryden is at his best in the argumentative
 speech. He must have recognized this when he turned his
 efforts toward the Wife of Bath's Tale. That certain desul-
 toriness which is often to be found in Chaucer is changed by
 Dryden in this instance into an elegantly compact, and sur-
 prisingly convincing argument, and as Professor Saintsbury

⁵⁴Ibid., p. 338.

adds, "it is much less surprising in the translation than in the original that the knight should have decided to submit at once to such a she-lawyer."⁵⁵

But we might add in conclusion that the "wife" herself has something to complain of in Dryden. Her fancy for widowhood is delicately enough put in the original:

Sende grace to overlive them that we wed.

Dryden characteristically makes it much blunter:

May widows wed as often as they can,
And ever for the better change their man.⁵⁶

Dryden says of his Character of a Good Parson that it is "imitated from Chaucer and enlarg'd."⁵⁷ And, indeed, the termination has been extended to some forty lines which are wholly original with Dryden, and it makes special references to the circumstances of the time.⁵⁸ Ainger says of this piece that Dryden has removed from it every trace of its original individuality. In this tale we see Dryden himself perhaps more clearly than in any of the preceding translations.⁵⁹ To this character, Professor Saintsbury tells

⁵⁵Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 163.

⁵⁶Ibid.

⁵⁷Dryden, Poems, p. 342.

⁵⁸Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 163.

⁵⁹Ainger, op. cit., p. 140.

us, "there is a pleasant little story attached":

It seems from a letter to Pepys that the diarist had himself recommended the character in the original to Dryden's notice. When the verses were done, the poet told Pepys of the fact, and proposed to bring them for his inspection. The answer contained a sentence which displays a much greater antipathy to parsons than that which, if we may believe Lord Macaulay, who perhaps borrowed the idea from Stillingfleet or Collier, Dryden himself felt. Pepys remarks that he hopes 'from your copy of this good parson to fancy some amends made me for the hourly offence I bear with from the sight of so many lewd originals.'⁶⁰

We are not certain just what particular trouble Pepys had to bear at the hands of the "lewd originals," but, time-server as he had once been, he was in all probability sufficiently Jacobite at heart to relish the postscript in Dryden's Character of a Good Parson. This transfers the circumstances of the expulsion of the Nonjurors to the days of Richard II and Henry IV. "Nor," says Saintsbury, "had there still been a censorship of the press, is it at all probable that this postscript would have been passed for publication."⁶¹

The following verses are sufficiently pointed:

Conquest, an odious Name, was laid aside,
Where all submitted, none the Battle try'd.

⁶⁰Saintsbury, op. cit., pp. 163-164.

⁶¹Ibid., p. 164.

The senseless Plea of Right by Providence,
 Was, by a flatt'ring Priest, invented since:
 And lasts no longer than the present sway;
 But justifies the next who comes in play.
 The People's Right remains; let those who
 dare
 Dispute their Pow'r, when they the Judges
 are.⁶²

Thus, we see the "character" of Chaucer's "poure Persoune of a toun" very much enlarged; so much so that the original can only be said to have furnished the "heads for it."⁶³ Indeed, Chaucer's 50-line original has been expanded by Dryden into 140 lines. Some of the additional material is simply the ornamental elaboration which is characteristic of Dryden's paraphrastic style of translation; but, as already noted, the greater part of the new descriptive detail, especially towards the end of the poem, delineates a clerical character who has more in common with the non-juring Anglican clergy of Dryden's own day than he has with Chaucer's parish priest. Since the early eighteenth century it has been commonly supposed that Dryden elaborated Chaucer's sketch to fit the character of Thomas Ken, the non-juring Bishop of Bath and Wells. Professor Noyes, Dryden's most recent editor, is content to notice this identification with the comment that "external evidence is lacking." The details

⁶²Dryden, Poems, p. 344.

⁶³Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 164.

of Dryden's portrait, however, make it more likely than has hitherto been realized, that the poet is paying an oblique tribute to Ken.⁶⁴ However, I am inclined to agree with Professor Saintsbury when he remarks that whatever Dryden's intention, he has "done few better things."⁶⁵

The Fables of Dryden are recognized today as perhaps the best example of his talent as a narrative poet.⁶⁶ Dryden's rendering of Chaucer is a totally distinct operation from his "Englishing of Virgil—Homer—Lucretius—Juvenal—Ovid. And you are satisfied that it should be so." Dryden knew that he could not transfer these poets, accomplished in art, using their language in an age of its perfection, with too close a likeness to themselves. He translates the work of these men because their language is unknown to his presumed reader. This is but half his motive with Chaucer. The language would be more easily got over, but the mind is of another age, and that is less accessible—more distant from us than the obsolete dialect. Most of us are content to have the style of that day translated into the

⁶⁴James Kinsley, "Dryden's 'Character of a Good Parson' and Bishop Ken," The Review of English Studies, Oxford, April, 1952, vol. III, no. 10, p. 155.

⁶⁵Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 164.

⁶⁶Scott, op. cit., p. 85.

style of our own. Nor is this a dereliction of poetic principle. The spirited and splendid verse and language of Dryden have given us a new collection of poems. "Why," asks John Wilson, "should our literature have foreborne from so enriching herself?"⁶⁷

The age of Chaucer was widely and variously different from that of Dryden. Knowledge, taste, art had advanced with gallant strides between the two dates; and the bleak and stormy English political atmosphere of the fourteenth century had changed, notwithstanding the commotion of the later civil war, into a far milder and more settled element when the seventeenth century drew towards a close. Genius, likewise, in the two poets, was distinguished by marked differences. Strength, simplicity, earnestness, human affection characterize Chaucer. Dryden, on the other hand, has plenty of strength, too, but it shows itself differently. The strength of Chaucer is "called out by the requisition of the subject, and is measure to the call. Dryden bounds and exults in his nervous vigour, like a strong steed broke loose." We feel that an exuberant power and rejoicing freedom mark Dryden's verse—a smooth flow, "a prompt fertility, a prodigal splendour of words and images." Therefore, as previously stated, "old Chaucer, having passed through the

⁶⁷Wilson, op. cit., p. 204.

hands of Dryden, is no longer old Chaucer—no longer Chaucer." But, the well-chosen and well-disposed, and well-told tales, full of "masculine sense, lively with humour, made present with painting—for all this Chaucer brings to Dryden—becomes by nothing more than the disantiquating and the different hand, a new poem."

Place the two side by side and whilst you feel that a total change has been effected, you shall not always easily assign the secret of the change wrought. There then comes into view, it must be owned, something like an unpracticed awkwardness in the gait of the great Elder Bard, which you less willingly believe, or to which you shut your eyes, when you have him by himself to yourself. The step of Dryden is rapid, and has perfect decision. He knows, with every spring he takes, where he shall light. Now Chaucer, you would often say, is retarded by looking where he shall next set down his foot.⁶⁸

This, I believe, implies that the old medieval poetry "thinks out loud," and always in careful detail, cataloging, so to speak, the whole series of thoughts, for an unpracticed reader. If we can assume Chaucer to be the "Father of our English poetry," then let us assume his reader the child. In his paraphrastic translation of Chaucer, Dryden utilized a poetic style which supposes more. "That," says Wilson, "is the consequence of practice. Writer and reader are in better intelligence." Thus, where Chaucer

⁶⁸Ibid., p. 207.

sometimes explains, his translator hints.⁶⁹ This is just one of the delights experienced in a comparison of the two poets' work. We see, "style, as the art advances, gain in dispatch."⁷⁰ At the same time, Dryden often requires more verbiage to hint than Chaucer employed to explain, justifying, to some extent, James Russell Lowell's criticism of the Chaucer pieces. Dryden, according to Lowell, "sometimes smothered the child-like simplicity of Chaucer under featherbeds of verbiage—ceremoniously took a bushel-basket to bring a wren's egg to market."⁷¹ To some extent, then, Dryden's amplifications are not always to be regarded as additional beauties. Further, it has been cleverly said of Dryden that he "scrubbed up" Chaucer—a process, Ward remarks, which "suits fine old plate, but not the total effect of a beautiful old house."⁷² Nevertheless, Dryden's translation of the "Elder Bard" has earned for him the gratitude of all lovers of English literature. For the sake of the spirit of this outstanding tribute, worthy alike of him who paid and of him who received it, Dryden may readily be forgiven some of the

⁶⁹Ibid.

⁷⁰Ibid.

⁷¹Lowell, op. cit., p. 74.

⁷²Ward, CHEL, vol. VIII, p. 58.

blemishes (if they be justly deemed such) in the execution
of his task.⁷³

⁷³Ibid., p. 57.

APPENDIX A

THE FLOWER AND THE LEAF

When he began his modernization of Chaucer, it was necessary that Dryden use as his textual material Speght's edition of Chaucer. The first of these editions was issued in 1602. The second appeared in 1687.* In both editions The Flower and the Leaf was included, and assumed to have been written by Chaucer. Subsequent investigation has proven this assumption to be wrong. However, because Dryden did believe this very fine work to be Chaucer's, it is given brief mention here. Van Doren calls it a "luxuriant," and "spirited representation of fairy worlds." He says further that it

. . . is a singularly pure and magical piece of pageantry in rhyme-royal. Dryden has flushed and accelerated it; its wheels have caught fire, and glowing masses of fresh detail are swept into the race. The splendor

*See Appendix B.

is mostly genuine; few of Dryden's descriptions are less prolix.¹

Saintsbury, equally enthusiastic in his praise, calls it "the most charming" of all Dryden's translations, perhaps because the "original is itself one of the most delightful works of the kind."

The delight in a certain amiable kind of natural beauty, the transference of the signs and symbols of that beauty to the service of a fantastic and yet not unnatural poetry of love, the introduction of abstract and supernatural beings to carry out, sometimes by allegory and sometimes by personification, the object of the poet, are all exemplified in this little piece of some 500 or 600 lines, in a manner which it would be hard to match in Froissart or Guillaume de Machault . . .²

However, the two poems differ from one another considerably in details of machinery and imagery. For example, the unknown poet is happier in his (or her) descriptions of nature, Dryden in the representation of the central personages. "But both alike have the power of transporting." And, although it is not of the Chaucerian canon, The Flower and the Leaf is important for two reasons. First of all, it is a singularly fine piece of poetry; secondly, it is further evidence of Dryden's more than ordinary faculty for recognizing

¹Van Doren, op. cit., p. 227.

²Saintsbury, op. cit., p. 160.

good literature wherever he met it, and the quite extraordinary faculty of making other people recognize it too by translating it into the language which they were capable of comprehending.³

³Ibid., p. 161.

APPENDIX B

EDITIONS OF CHAUCER'S WORKS THROUGH 1793

- The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed, with dyuers workes whiche were neuer in print before, etc. [Edited by William Thynne. The preface by Sir Brian Tuke.] B. L. ff. xiii - ccclxxxiii. Thomas Godfray, Lodon, 1532.
- The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed, wyth dyuers workes whych were neuer in print before, etc. [Thynne's edition.] B. L. ff. ccclxxxii. Wylyyam Bonham : London, 1542.
- [Another copy, with a different title page and colophon.] MS. Notes [by Dr. S. Wotton]. [Printed for John Reynes:] London, 1542.
- The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed, with dyuers workes whiche were neuer in print before, etc. [Thynne's edition.] B. L. ff. ccclv. Wylyyam Bonham : London [1545?].
- The workes of Geffrey Chaucer newly printed, with diuers additions, whiche were neuer in print before: with the siege and destruccion of the worthy citee of Thebes compiled by Jhon Lidgate, Monke of Berie, etc. [Thynne's edition, with additional poems appended by John Stow.] B. L. ff. ccclxxviii Jhon Kyngston for Jhon Wight : London, 1561.
- The Workes of our Antient and lerned English Poet, Geffrey Chaucer, newly Printed. In this Impression

you shall find these Additions: 1. His Portraiture and Progenie shewed. 2. His Life collected. 3. Arguments to every Booke gathered. 4. Old and obscure Words explained. 5. Authors by him cited, declared. 6. Difficulties opened. 7. Two Bookes of his neuer before printed. (The Story of Thebes : compiled by Iohn Lidgate, Monke of Bury.) [Edited by Thomas Speght. With woodcuts.] B. L. ff. 394. [Adam Islip;] Impensis Geor. Bishop : Londini, 1598.

— The workes of our Ancient and learned English Poet, Geoffrey Chaucer, newly printed. To that which was done in the former Impressions, thus much is now added. 1. In the life of Chaucer many things inserted. 2. The whole worke by olde copies reformed. 3. Sentences and Prouerbes noted. 4. The Significance of the old and obscure words procued . . . 5. The Latine and French, not Englished by Chaucer translated. 6. The Treatise, called Jacke Vpland, against Friers : and Chaucer's A.B.C. called, La priere de nostre Dame, at this Impression added. (The Story of Thebes, compiled by Iohn Lidgate.) [Speght's edition. With woodcuts.] B. L. ff. 376. Few MS. Notes. Adam Islip : London, 1602.

— The workes of our Ancient, Learned & Excellent English Poet Jeffrey Chaucer . . . To which is adjoyn'd The story of the siege of Thebes by John Lidgate, etc. [Speght's edition. With an advertisement signed : J. H.] pp. 660. London, 1687.

— The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer compared with the former editions, and many valuable MSS. out of which, three Tales are added, which were neuer before printed; by John Urry, Student of Christ-Church, Oxon; together with a Glossary by a student of the same College [Timothy Thomas]. To the whole is prefixed the author's life [by John Dart; corrected and enlarged by William Thomas] and a preface, giving an account of this edition [by Timothy Thomas]. [With portraits of Chaucer and of Urry.] pp. 626.81. Bernard Lintot : London, 1721.

— The Poetical Works of Geoff. Chaucer, etc. 14 vol. London & Edinburgh. 1782, 83. 12° [Bell (John) Bookseller. The Poets of Great Britain. vol. 1-14.]

—— The Poetical Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, etc. See
Anderson (Robert) M. D. A Complete Edition of the
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