

THE CAMBRIDGE



# CHAUCER

COMPANION

## 乔叟研究

PIERO BOITANI & JILL MANN 编



上海外语教育出版社  
SHANGHAI FOREIGN LANGUAGE EDUCATION PRESS

剑桥文学指南

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# *The Cambridge Chaucer Companion*

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*Edited by*

PIERO BOITANI *and* JILL MANN



**CAMBRIDGE**  
**UNIVERSITY PRESS**

## 图书在版编目 (CIP) 数据

乔叟研究: 英文 / (意) 伯以塔尼编. —上海: 上海外语教育出版社, 2000

(剑桥文学指南)

ISBN 7-81046-983-5

I. 乔… II. 伯… III. 乔叟, G. (1343~1400) - 文学研究 - 英文  
IV. I561.063

中国版本图书馆CIP数据核字 (2000) 第74713号

图字: 09-2000-504号

出版发行: **上海外语教育出版社**

(上海外国语大学内) 邮编: 200083

电 话: 021-65425300 (总机), 65422031 (发行部)

电子邮箱: bookinfo@sflep.com.cn

网 址: <http://www.sflep.com.cn> <http://www.sflep.com>

责任编辑: 汪义群

印 刷: 深圳中华商务联合印刷有限公司

经 销: 新华书店上海发行所

开 本: 889×1194 1/32 印张 8.625 字数 331 千字

版 次: 2000 年 12 月第 1 版 2000 年 12 月第 1 次印刷

印 数: 5 000 册

书 号: ISBN 7-81046-983-5 / I · 107

定 价: 17.30 元

本版图书如有印装质量问题, 可向本社调换

Published by the Press Syndicate of the University of Cambridge  
The Pitt Building, Trumpington Street, Cambridge CB2 1RP  
40 West 20th Street, New York, NY 10011-4211, USA  
10 Stamford Road, Oakleigh, Melbourne 3166, Australia

© Cambridge University Press 1986

First published 1986  
Reprinted 1993, 1995, 1997, 1998

Printed in the United Kingdom at  
the University Press, Cambridge

*British Library cataloguing in publication data*  
The Cambridge Chaucer companion.  
I. Chaucer, Geoffrey – Criticism and interpretation  
I. Boitani, Piero II. Mann, Jill  
821'.I PR19Z4

*Library of Congress cataloguing in publication data*  
Main entry under title:  
The Cambridge Chaucer companion.  
Includes Index.  
I. Chaucer, Geoffrey, d. 1400 – Criticism and  
interpretation. I. Boitani, Piero II. Mann, Jill  
PR 1924.C28 1986 821'.I 86-1293

ISBN 0 521 30422 9 hardback  
ISBN 0 521 31689 8 paperback

This edition of *Chaucer Companion* is published by arrangement with  
Cambridge University Press.

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仅供在中华人民共和国境内销售。

## 出版前言

《剑桥文学指南》是上海外语教育出版社从海外引进的一套研究、介绍外国文学的丛书，内容涉及作家、作品、文学流派、文学史等诸多方面。作者均为在该领域有着较深造诣的专家、学者。

《乔叟研究》是该丛书中的一本。

乔叟是英国具有人文主义思想的作家中最早的一个代表人物。他的代表作是脍炙人口的《坎特伯雷故事集》。另外还有根据薄伽丘的长诗《菲洛斯特拉托》改写的《特洛伊勒斯和克瑞西达》。《坎特伯雷故事集》由 24 个短篇故事组成，通过一批从伦敦到坎特伯雷大教堂去朝圣的香客所讲述的种种故事，形象地反映了当时的社会风貌和世态人情。故事有的取材于民间传说和口头文学，有的取材于骑士文学和宗教文学。故事中的人物来自社会各个阶层，有骑士、侍从、农民、地主、商人、市民、僧侣、艺人、海员、大学生、手工业者等，呈现出一幅幅绚丽多彩的 14 世纪英国社会的画卷。

本书是一本论文集，由一组既独立成篇又互为参照的论文构成，撰稿者均为国际知名的乔叟专家。论文大致可以分为两大类别：一类着眼于一首或多首乔叟的主要诗作，探讨其主题、风格，确定

其情绪、氛围；另一类则从更广阔的视野着手，或追溯乔叟创作的文学渊源和历史背景，或剖析诗人色彩多样的诗作在风格和结构方面的尝试和实验，或将其置于中世纪文学样式与文学传承这一语境中进行全面考察。在介绍单篇或多篇作品的过程中，论文作者们不断提出各种新颖有力的问题，鼓励读者进行深入的思考和进一步的理解、引申，并将思考的结果置于其自身的阐释框架之中。总之，该论文集体现了西方研究乔叟的最新成果，是一本具有范本性质的参考读物。

本书的读者对象为大学外语教师，外国文学研究人员，外国文学专业的研究生、博士生，以及具备了较高英语阅读能力的外国文学爱好者。

上海外语教育出版社  
2000年12月

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## Preface

This book is intended for students approaching Chaucer for the first time, at whatever stage in their lives – school, university, or beyond. Its main aim is to provide a helpful and stimulating introduction to Chaucer's text, to suggest approaches, furnish necessary explanations, provide contexts, and offer first-hand literary criticism, by means of which students may test their own responses to the works of one of the greatest English poets. The views offered in each essay are individual and to a large extent original ones; they are not intended to be résumés of the current state of Chaucer scholarship or criticism, although due account is taken of critical opinions at relevant points. We feel the student is best served by a clearly pursued line of argument, which may set off his or her own thinking, rather than an exhaustive survey of the field.

About half the essays in the collection are focussed squarely on one or more of Chaucer's major works, identifying their themes and styles, moods and tones, in such a way as to help the reader to an appreciation of Chaucer's aims and artistry in each case. Alongside these essays are others of a more general kind – focussing on literary or historical background, on style or structure – which not only present the major works in ever-different lights, but also explore their links with many of the minor poems and with other medieval literature. We hope that the combination of the two types of essay will not only give a sense of a larger context for discussion of the individual works, but will also make clear that there is no 'definitive' interpretation of, say, *Troilus and Criseyde* – rather, it can be constantly re-approached via fresh lines of enquiry.

Paul Strohm's essay sketches the general scene, both social and literary, in fourteenth-century England, and David Wallace traces the impact on Chaucer of his reading in French and Italian literature. Piero Boitani leads the reader through Chaucer's early development in the dream-poems, in which books are not just the sources but the subject of his poetry. Mark Lambert discusses the densely textured narrative style of *Troilus*, while Jill Mann focusses on its philosophical themes, on the questions of chance and destiny which Chaucer encountered in Boethius. The last section of this essay, on the *Knight's Tale*, introduces a series of contributions on the

*Canterbury Tales*: David Benson first discusses the tales in relation to the pilgrimage-frame, and the four succeeding essays, by J. A. Burrow, Derek Pearsall, Robert Worth Frank Jr, and A. C. Spearing, then examine selected tales grouped by mode or genre. The four final essays, by Morton W. Bloomfield, Barry Windeatt, Dieter Mehl and Derek Brewer, range widely through Chaucer's works, using comparison and contrast to illuminate larger questions of style or structure. In these essays, as in Paul Strohm's and David Wallace's, the reader will find much discussion of those of Chaucer's works which are not given separate treatment.

Because this book has an introductory function, notes have been kept to a minimum, and it has not been possible to give exhaustive documentation of the history of every critical view presented or discussed. The Guide to Chaucer Studies provided by Joerg Fichte will lead the interested student to the important works in this field whose influence has helped to shape the individual discussions in this collection, and will also clear several pathways through the dense forest of modern Chaucer criticism. The contributors to this book are the inheritors of a long and rich tradition of Chaucer scholarship, to which they feel themselves indebted. Yet in order to write freshly and freely on works which have been read and written about for six hundred years, they have inevitably had to banish from their texts and their notes many of the very works which have done most to create their own enjoyment. We hope that the final Guide to Chaucer Studies will stand as an acknowledgement of our gratitude to the labours of others. We hope also that this new volume, the joint effort of an English and an Italian editor, and the product of an international team of scholars, will help to foster in new generations of readers in all countries a love of Chaucer and an interest in Chaucer studies.

PIERO BOITANI

JILL MANN

*Cambridge, July, 1985*

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## *Note on the text*

The text of Chaucer used throughout for quotation and reference is *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. F. N. Robinson, 2nd edn (Boston/London, 1957). References are normally to individual works, with Book- and line-number; for the sake of concision, however, references to the *Canterbury Tales* are occasionally given by Fragment- and line-number (e.g. I, 3450 = *Miller's Tale*, 3450).

### *Abbreviations*

EETS *Early English Text Society*

PMLA *Proceedings of the Modern Language Association*

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## Contents

|                                                                                                                                                        |          |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------|
| <i>List of contributors</i>                                                                                                                            | page vii |
| <i>Preface</i>                                                                                                                                         | viii     |
| <i>Note on the text</i>                                                                                                                                | x        |
| 1 The social and literary scene in England<br>PAUL STROHM                                                                                              | 1        |
| 2 Chaucer's Continental inheritance: The early poems and<br><i>Troilus and Criseyde</i><br>DAVID WALLACE                                               | 19       |
| 3 Old books brought to life in dreams: The <i>Book of the<br/>Duchess</i> , the <i>House of Fame</i> , the <i>Parliament of Fowls</i><br>PIERO BOITANI | 39       |
| 4 Telling the story in <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i><br>MARK LAMBERT                                                                                     | 59       |
| 5 Chance and destiny in <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i> and the <i>Knight's<br/>Tale</i><br>JILL MANN                                                      | 75       |
| 6 The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> : Personal drama or experiments in<br>poetic variety?<br>C. DAVID BENSON                                                 | 93       |
| 7 The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> I: Romance<br>J. A. BURROW                                                                                               | 109      |
| 8 The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> II: Comedy<br>DEREK PEARSALL                                                                                             | 125      |
| 9 The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> III: Pathos<br>ROBERT WORTH FRANK, JR                                                                                    | 143      |
| 10 The <i>Canterbury Tales</i> IV: Exemplum and fable<br>A. C. SPEARING                                                                                | 159      |
| 11 Chaucerian realism<br>MORTON W. BLOOMFIELD                                                                                                          | 179      |

vi      *Contents*

|    |                                                                                 |     |
|----|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----|
| 12 | Literary structures in Chaucer                                                  | 195 |
|    | BARRY WINDEATT                                                                  |     |
| 13 | Chaucer's narrator: <i>Troilus and Criseyde</i> and the <i>Canterbury Tales</i> | 213 |
|    | DIETER MEHL                                                                     |     |
| 14 | Chaucer's poetic style                                                          | 227 |
|    | DEREK BREWER                                                                    |     |
| 15 | Further reading: A guide to Chaucer studies                                     | 243 |
|    | JOERG O. FICHTE                                                                 |     |
|    | <i>Index</i>                                                                    | 255 |

# I The social and literary scene in England

## *Social structure*

MEDIEVAL social descriptions are very conscious of degree, and tend to emphasize the relatively small number of people at the top of the social hierarchy. The thirteenth-century legal commentator Bracton is representative when he divides society into those high in the ecclesiastical hierarchy (the pope, archbishops, bishops, and lesser prelates), those high in the civil hierarchy (emperors, kings, dukes, counts, barons, magnates, and knights), and those remaining (a general category of 'freepersons and bondpersons' or *liberi et villani*).<sup>1</sup>

Bracton's concentration on prelates and magnates is consistent with formal theory in his day, but we must remember that his category of 'freepersons and bondpersons' comprised an overwhelming majority of the fourteenth-century populace. After the cataclysmic Black Death of 1348-9, the population of England levelled off at about 3,500,000, where it remained for the rest of the century and most of the next.<sup>2</sup> Among these persons the 150 lords and 2,000 knights and their families upon whom Bracton concentrates would have totalled no more than 8,000-10,000, or considerably less than one-half of one per cent of the whole.<sup>3</sup> He is undoubtedly correct in his half-stated assumption that most of the remainder were agricultural workers, with many still bound in some fashion to the land, but other groups are apparent to the modern observer. Taken together, ecclesiastical orders probably included some 50,000 members, or just under two per cent of the whole.<sup>4</sup> Esquires and other lesser gentry and their families probably comprised about 30,000-40,000 additional persons. Cities were small and city-dwellers were few by standards of today. London and nearby Westminster had a population of some 40,000, and lesser cities (which we might be more inclined to call 'towns') such as Bristol, York, Norwich, Gloucester, Leicester, and Hull had populations between 10,000 and 5,000. All told, though, we might suppose that about 100,000-125,000 additional persons were 'urban' in some sense of the word.

Latent even within Bracton's commentary is another way of viewing society which encouraged more recognition of such constituent groups. His

division of society into the ecclesiastical hierarchy, the civil hierarchy, and the mass of other persons is based upon the traditional medieval view of the three estates (clerics, knights, and peasants).<sup>5</sup> Even when treated most hierarchically, the estates of society were also seen as interdependent, with each group contributing in its own way to the good of all. This notion of interdependence issued at times in an alternative view of society, as organic rather than hierarchical. This organic view – often conveyed through extended metaphors of the social estates as members of the body politic – permitted recognition of new classes of persons not clearly accommodated in the more traditional tripartite system. It is to be found less in formal statements than in sermons, statutes, ordinances, and a variety of other irregular and occasional documents.

A sermon delivered in the 1370s by Bishop Thomas Brinton of Rochester supplements the hierarchical view of society with a more organic view of the interdependence of its estates. We are all, he says, the mystical members of a single body, of which the head (or heads) are kings, princes, and prelates; the eyes are judges, wise men, and true counsellors; the ears are clergy; the tongue is good doctors. Then, within the midsection of the body, the right hand is composed of strenuous knights; the left hand is composed of merchants and craftsmen; and the heart is citizens and burgesses. Finally, peasants and workers are the feet which support the whole.<sup>6</sup> Similar views of society crop up in other occasional and relatively informal papers of the time. A Norwich gild ordinance of the 1380s, for example, takes note in its opening prayer of a ruling stratum composed of the king, dukes, earls, barons and bachelors; a middle stratum composed of knights, squires, citizens and burgesses, and franklins; and a broader category of tillers and craftsmen.<sup>7</sup>

The middle groupings in Brinton's sermon and the Norwich prayer embrace persons of different social outlook. The knights – and, in the second half of the fourteenth century, the new class of esquires – enjoyed the same *gentil* status as the great aristocrats, though clearly without enjoying the benefits conferred by the hereditary titles and accompanying revenues of the latter group. While non-*gentil*, the urban merchants (whose free status and prosperity entitled them to the titles 'citizen' or 'burgess') often enjoyed wealth considerably greater than that of most knights.<sup>8</sup> And even these distinctions mask variations. Many knights and esquires of the period held no land at all and had few or no military obligations, but earned their status through civil and administrative tasks which we might consider essentially 'middle class'.<sup>9</sup> While not *gentil*, citizens and burgesses were eligible to serve their cities and shires as 'knights' in Parliament, and some were knighted for royal or military service.<sup>10</sup> The ultimate standard for inclusion in these middle groupings would seem not to be rank or title, but simply civil importance and responsibility, however defined.

*Chaucer's own position*

Chaucer himself was a member of this middle social grouping, his place within it secured by various forms of what might be called 'civil service'. He was born in the early 1340s, in a family situation appropriate to a career of royal service.<sup>11</sup> His father, John Chaucer, was not only a prosperous London vintner, but had himself served Edward III in such capacities as deputy chief butler (with responsibility for certain customs collections). Chaucer's own career began in 1357 with his appointment to the household of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, and her husband Prince Lionel. In the service of the latter he journeyed between France and England (and was captured and ransomed during a 1359–60 military campaign in France), inaugurating a series of journeys which would take him frequently to France, twice to Italy, and elsewhere in the course of his career. Like many in his station, he married rather advantageously, to Philippa de Roet, daughter of a knight of Hainault (who had come to England in the service of the queen) and sister of Katherine Swynford (soon to be mistress and eventual third wife of John of Gaunt). In 1367, soon after his marriage, he is listed as *valettus* to King Edward III, and by 1368 he is listed among *esquiers* of the royal household. While remaining an esquire and never entering the inner circle of chamber-knights, he nevertheless continued in respected service of one sort or another until the end of his life. In 1374, he shifted from the precincts of the household to the post of controller of customs in London, assisted both by preferment from Edward III and by a timely annuity to him and to his wife from John of Gaunt. Posts and assignments continued after the accession of Richard II in 1377. The latter 1380s marked a period of comparative withdrawal from London activity, possibly tactical in nature since it roughly coincided with the years 1386–9 in which Richard II was severely challenged by an aristocratic coalition. Richard reasserted his royal prerogatives in 1389, and Chaucer soon after received his next royal appointment as clerk of the king's works. He continued in various capacities – though none of greater lustre – through the 1390s. When Henry IV supplanted Richard II in 1399, a year before Chaucer's death, he confirmed Richard's annuities and added a grant of his own.<sup>12</sup>

Even so spare a summary of Chaucer's civil career suggests several interesting perspectives on his life and place in society.

(1) Chaucer's position as an esquire of the royal household would have conferred *gentil* status, though he was among the more ambiguously situated members of that somewhat fluid group. Lacking the security from possession of lands and rents enjoyed by the great aristocrats and even by some of his fellow knights and esquires, Chaucer depended for his living upon his career in service. In this sense, the posts and assignments which

he held in the course of what Sylvia Thrupp has called his 'versatile' career were not just an expression of his energies or his zest for politics, but were essential to his livelihood and to the maintenance of his station in life.<sup>13</sup>

(2) Chaucer appears to have had a representative career, both as an esquire of the king's immediate household and as a member of the royal party beyond the immediate confines of the court.<sup>14</sup> He would seem to have been rather good at what he did; while not lavishly rewarded, he enjoyed frequent appointments and re-appointments while weathering the extreme and sometimes dangerous factional vicissitudes of his day. His service bridged successfully the careers of three monarchs, and he managed the extremely difficult task of being on good terms both with Richard II and with John of Gaunt and the Lancastrians, even during such points of extreme tension as Richard's clash in 1386-9 with the Appellants, an aristocratic coalition headed by the Duke of Gloucester and including Gaunt's son Henry. In a period of what Thomas Usk called 'confederacie, congregacion, & couyne',<sup>15</sup> Chaucer was necessarily something of a factionalist, allied like Mayor Brembre of London and Chief Justice Tresilian and others with Richard's royal party. Yet – unlike such fellow partisans as Brembre, Tresilian, and Usk, who were beheaded by the Appellants in 1388 – Chaucer seems to have understood the limits of faction, and to have tempered his activity in 1386-8 and possibly in other crucial periods as well.

(3) Patronage based on his literary accomplishments seems not to have been a major factor in Chaucer's civil career. Later we will consider several literary works which may have been written in part to console, compliment, or please his superiors, but most of the facts of his civil career are comprehensible in terms of strictly non-literary talents and exertions. Chaucer's poetry fosters an impression of separation between his public and literary lives, as when the garrulous Eagle in the *House of Fame* chides him for his habitual withdrawal from the world of affairs to that of books and private reading:

For when thy labour doon al ys,  
And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,  
In stede of reste and newe thynges,  
Thou goost hom to thy hous anon;  
And, also domb as any stoon,  
Thou sittest at another book  
Tyl fully daswed ys thy look...

(652-8)

### *The principal communities of readers*

Solitary as Chaucer's own habits of reading and writing might have been, his poetry still shows a notable concern with issues of reception: with situations of telling and listening, of writing and reading, of audience