

**THE POETRY OF CHAUCER:
A GUIDE TO ITS STUDY
AND APPRECIATION**

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The Poetry of Chaucer: A Guide to Its Study and Appreciation by Robert Kilburn Root

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APPRECIATION

BY

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REVISED EDITION



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PREFACE

DURING the last twenty years, the poetry of Chaucer has been attaining an ever increasing popularity. Not only in our colleges and universities, but among the lovers of good literature at large, the discovery has been made that the difficulty of Chaucer's language is by no means so great as at first appears, and that whatever difficulty there may be is richly compensated by the delights which his poetry has to offer. Meanwhile the scholars of Europe and America have been busy at the task of explaining what needs explanation, of investigating the problems of Chaucer's sources, and of determining the order in which his works were composed. It is the purpose of the present volume to render accessible to readers of Chaucer the fruits of these investigations, in so far as they conduce to a fuller appreciation of the poet and his work. For the benefit of those who wish to go more deeply into the subject, rather copious bibliographical references are given in the footnotes. Of Chaucer's biography we know little that is really significant; and that little has been frequently retold. It has, therefore, seemed better to omit any connected account of Chaucer's life, and to give in the discussion of the individual poems such biographical details as serve to illuminate them.

From the very nature of his task, the author's obligations are manifold. From Tyrwhitt down, there is hardly a Chaucerian scholar by whose labors he has not profited, as a glance at the footnotes will show. To Professor Ten Brink, to Professor Lounsbury, to

Professor Skeat, and to Dr. Furnivall and his collaborators in the work of the Chaucer Society, his debt is particularly large. In making quotations and citations, Skeat's *Student's Chaucer* has been used; and the order in which the several works of the poet are taken up is, with one slight exception, that in which they are there printed. This has seemed, on the whole, the most convenient order; but the reader may take the chapters in any order he pleases. To my friends, Professor Albert S. Cook of Yale University and Professor Charles G. Osgood of Princeton University, I am indebted for much valuable criticism.

R. K. R.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY
May 25, 1906.

PREFACE TO REVISED EDITION

It is now fifteen years since this book was first published, and these years have been extraordinarily fruitful of Chaucerian study. Important contributions have been made to our knowledge of Chaucer and of his relations to the literature and prevalent ideas of the Middle Ages, contributions which, it is pleasant to note, have been in large measure the work of American scholars. To Professor Kittredge and Professor Lowes of Harvard and to Professor Tatlock of Leland Stanford the debt of Chaucer-lovers is, and will remain, a large one. In some cases this new knowledge has led to a considerable revision of our earlier understanding of the essential purport of Chaucer's poetry. This is particularly true of the work of Chaucer's middle period — the *House of Fame*, *Troilus*, the *Legend of Good Women*, the translation of *Boethius*.

It was the original purpose of this book to render accessible to readers of Chaucer the fruits of scholarly investigation in so far as they conduce to a fuller appreciation of the poet and his work. If it is to continue to render this service, a thorough revision is now necessary. Such a revision is presented in the present volume. Where the new information is so fundamental that it essentially alters an earlier interpretation of the facts, the passage concerned has been rewritten, and new pages substituted for the old; where it is rather in the nature of additional light, which clarifies but does not alter, the new information is given in an appendix of 'Notes and Revisions' at the end of the volume. Chapters VI

and VII, which deal with *Troilus* and the *House of Fame*, have been rewritten in their entirety. In addition, the pages numbered ix, x, 18, 40, 84, 85, 140-144, 167, 168, 184, 238-240, 291, 292 have been rewritten and substituted for the original pages. These changes have made necessary a new index; but the pagination of the volume has been so little disturbed that most references to the original edition will apply also to this. More than one quarter of the present volume is, therefore, new. It is hoped that with these revisions the book may continue to fill the place which has been accorded to it in the past. With it and with Skeat's *Student's Chaucer*, or better with Professor F. N. Robinson's edition soon to be published in the Cambridge Poets Series, the student or the general reader will have in his possession all that is essential to an understanding and appreciation of Chaucer's poetry.

It is a pleasure to record my gratitude to my friend, Professor Gordon Hall Gerould, for his help and counsel in the preparation of this edition.

R. K. B.

PRINCETON UNIVERSITY, }

October, 1921. a

A CHRONOLOGICAL SURVEY OF CHAUCER'S LIFE AND WORKS

(The few significant facts of Chaucer's life given below rest on documentary evidence, and may, therefore, be regarded as certain. The chronology of his works is far from certain; but the dates here given may be regarded as approximately correct.)

LIFE

- 1340 Chaucer born in London. His father, John Chaucer, was a vintner, and was in some way connected with the court of Edward III. (The date, 1340, is conjectural.)
- 1357 Attached, as a page (?), to the household of Elisabeth, Duchess of Clarence.
- 1359 Serves in the English army in France, and taken prisoner by the French.
- 1367 Granted a life pension for his services as valet in the king's household.
- 1372-73 First diplomatic mission to Italy.
- 1374 Appointed Comptroller of the customs and subsidy of wools, skins, and leather for the port of London. (We know that in this year the poet was already married.) Leased a dwelling over the gate of Aldgate in London.
- 1377 Diplomatic missions in Flanders and France.
- 1378 Second journey to Italy in the king's service.
- 1382 Appointed Comptroller of the petty customs. (This office he held in addition to his earlier office in the customs.)

WORKS

[To this general period may be assigned the *Romance of the Rose*, and the 'balades, roundels, virelayes,' referred to in the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*.

1369 *The Book of the Duchess*.

[To the period from 1374 to 1379 may probably be assigned the *House of Fame*, and the poems later utilised as the *Monk's Tale* and the *Second Nun's Tale* of St. Cecilia.

[In the six years from 1380 to 1385 we may place the translation of Boethius, *Troilus and Criseyde* (not earlier than 1381), the *Parliament of Fowls* (1382?) and the story of Palamon and Arcite, known as the *Knight's Tale*, (shortly before 1385?).

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| <p>1385 Granted permission to exercise his office as comptroller through a permanent deputy.
Appointed Justice of Peace for the county of Kent.</p> <p>1386 Member of Parliament for Kent. Gives up his London house (and resides at Greenwich?). Deprived (by a hostile faction at court?) of his offices in the customs.</p> <p>1387 Death of Chaucer's wife.</p> <p>1389 Appointed Clerk of the King's Works at Westminster.</p> <p>1390 Clerk of the King's Works at Windsor, and member of a commission to repair the banks of the Thames between Woolwich and Greenwich.</p>
<p>1394 Granted an additional pension of 20 l. a year. (The poet seems, however, to have been in financial difficulty.)</p> <p>1399 On the accession of Henry IV, Chaucer's pension again increased. He leases a house in Westminster.</p> <p>1400 Chaucer's death.</p> | <p>1385-86 <i>The Legend of Good Women</i>.</p>
<p>[Soon after 1386 were begun the <i>Canterbury Tales</i>, on which the poet probably worked intermittently till his death. Groups D, E, and F, which contain the discussion of marriages, seem to have been written later than 1393.</p>
<p>1391 <i>Treatise on the Astrolabe</i>.
1393 <i>Envoy to Scogan</i>.</p> <p>1394-96 Revised form ('A' text) of Prologue to <i>Legend of Good Women</i>.</p>
<p>1396-97 <i>Envoy to Bukton</i>.
1399 <i>To his Empty Purse</i>.</p> |
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