

CHAUCER:

The Middle and the End

By PAUL G. RUGGIERS

GOFFREY CHAUCER's reputation persistently has been that of England's finest comic poet, a reputation that rests for some readers upon the zeal with which when as first-year collegians, they lighted upon certain boundlessly energetic, enthusiastic, and bawdy stories that form a segment of the *Canterbury Tales*, one of Chaucer's finest creations. Needless to say, their limited point of view, however much it vindicates indirectly the range of a poet's interest and license, fails to make available to them the greater scope of a poet's art, and surely prevents them from coming to see how and why he should be so revered and acclaimed by writers of every age and nationality since his time. This brief essay attempts to define the thought and structural power that came to maturity in the finished poet of the Christian era of which he was a representative spokesman.

Every literary work, whether long or short, attempts to impose a form upon life; or to put it another way, every literary work seeks to define a portion of experience, to elicit meaning from human involvement and interrelationships. The utterances of Chaucer's youth quite naturally reveal either an insubstantially validated moment of existence or a clumsy phrasing and an unconvincing rhetoric, while in his finest pieces, written after his talents had been tried by years of experimentation and exercise and emulation, the rhetoric has become moving and persuasive, the emotional context is poignantly clear, the philosophical uncertainty has given way to what, if it is not dogmatic, is an ironic acceptance of the world on its own terms.

It is difficult to define Chaucer's total view. Unfortunately we have not, from his hand, a poem of the magnitude and scope of Dante's *Divine Comedy*, in which the didactic and the aesthetic coalesce into a tremendous intellectualized vision of man in every phase of his physical and spiritual life, a poem to which the reader may come assured that the views expressed in it are, by and large, the convictions the writer carried with him to his grave.

Further, one may appraise Dante's literary pieces not only in terms of chronology; there are also some connections of a

philosophical nature between the earlier and the later works. Each work takes on the proportion of a fulfillment of the past and a prefigurement of the future artistic development. What Dante has felt in his various phases about love, government, evil, and the rest, find their final and complete statement in the texture of the *Divine Comedy*. One is entertained as he reads, but not in the same way that he is entertained by Chaucer; hence we note the profound difference between the two: Chaucer is not primarily concerned with ideas, but rather with the spectacle of man living, laughing, suffering, or in Aristotle's phrase, with men in action. Posterity has called Dante's poem *Divine*, partly because of its concern with man's otherworldly destination; it has called Chaucer's *Human*.

We will better estimate Chaucer's genius by looking at his development in terms of something other than chronology. Since we cannot with certainty date many of the poems, we can with more profit speak of artistic periods of his life. Most important for our purposes is the period of Boethius and *Troilus and Criseyde*, which, while it looks back to the period of apprenticeship, looks forward as well to the period of the *Canterbury Tales*. By such designations we call attention not so much to the time of life when they were written, but rather to the aura of associations and to the capabilities of the writer in the various stages of his thought and interests.

From December 1, 1372, till May 23, 1373, Chaucer was in Italy: he was to negotiate with the Genoese about an English port for trade; but as a traveler, the poet, not necessarily as an agent of the king, visited the great city of Florence. That Chaucer seems already to have had a knowledge of Italian is indicated by the choice of him to carry out the assignment. And in Florence where very shortly Boccaccio was to deliver his first lecture on the *Divine Comedy* of Dante, Chaucer came into the rich treasury of the work of these two writers, and perhaps that of Petrarch, the three crowning glories of early Italian literature.

IT IS HARDLY possible to estimate the impact these poets made upon Chaucer.

The works of Dante and Boccaccio he seems to have read with the zeal of a miner who has struck a vein of pure gold. The results are clearly seen in virtually everything he wrote thereafter, both directly and indirectly. The discovery of these writers could not have come at a better time for us; Chaucer's earlier literary career had followed the tradition of certain French poets, the authors of the allegorical *Roman de la Rose*, a truly encyclopedic poem, Froissart, Deschamps, Machaut. Under their influence he wrote some lyric poems on conventional themes, and eventually the first poem of any real account, *The Book of the Duchess*, 1369. It reveals, in addition, a love of Latin antiquity, a mark of the finest medieval poets, being written clearly under the guidance of a theme from Ovid. Without going into a summary of the action of the poem, we can say with some critical pleasure that in spite of the prevalence of the machinery of the dream vision of the Middle Ages and a certain child-like transparency, its chief virtues are those of a beautifully handled delicacy and pathos, a humor devoid of malice, and best of all, a structure so organically unified as to vie with that of any poem of its type in the Chaucer canon.

But if it had not been for the influence of the Italian poets, who brought home to Chaucer certain philosophical matters and pointed the way to new literary creations of his own, he may very well have continued a court poet, untouched by poignant realities, shackled by the allegory of love and the dream vision. As a matter of fact, he continued throughout his life to employ the forms he had learned from the French poets, but he has earned the undying gratitude of the world for the works he produced as a poet of an entirely different sort. For under the influence of the Italian poets of the fourteenth century he seems to have gone back to the philosopher who dominated them, to Boethius. Once he had read and translated him, his mind, which had been steadily dilating and deepening its capabilities, resolved certain controversial matters which had plagued him and his contemporaries. Thereafter, the conventional definitions that he held of comedy

and tragedy were amplified, given new meaning, and life itself took on a pattern and a rationale, so that what had been before haphazard and capricious now acquired the form, function, and intention of God's divine providence itself.

We cannot appreciate the transforming power of this philosophical advancement in Chaucer's artistic growth without some understanding of the views accepted by Chaucer and his age about the love that rules the universe and about the free will of man apparently in conflict with the foreknowledge of God. The Church Fathers had weighed very seriously indeed the question whether an omniscient God's providence in any way limited the power of man's will to choose freely between good and evil. In Chaucer's own time, the well-known bishop Bradwardine had written his *De Causa Dei*, in which he examined the problem anew; in general the orthodox view was that man certainly had as God's supremest gift to him the power to make choices. He was responsible for his actions and for the consequences of his choices.

This opinion Chaucer found magnificently handled by Boethius in the justly praised *Consolation of Philosophy*. In the work, Boethius, a prisoner facing death, bemoans his hapless state. He is visited in his cell by the Lady Philosophy who leads him by the powers of reason to spiritual satisfaction. She reminds him that the rewards of this world, such as fame, family, riches, etc., are gifts of Fortune; Fortune, a demigoddess of sorts, a handmaid of the Deity himself, who has entrusted to her care the dissemination of all temporal goods. These gifts of the world she distributes without a method or system discernible by man. Fortune's one unchanging characteristic is her variability, her mutability; what she gives one day, she may take away the next. Further, the man who makes himself a slave to Fortune worships perishable goods; this worship accounts for the unhappiness of mankind. True happiness, Philosophy apprises Boethius, lies elsewhere in man himself, in raising one's mind and heart to the source of all good, God himself.

But why, asks Boethius, if God is good, do evils exist? Why is virtue punished and vice rewarded? Philosophy argues that this is not so: evil actually has no existence, that vice is never unpunished nor virtue unrewarded. She then clarifies the meaning of Providence and Fate, insisting that the temporal order as it is grasped by man's incomplete vision may be called Fate, while the unified view of all that Fate sets in motion in the mind of God, is Providence. "One thing is certain, namely that Providence is the one unchangeable direct power

which gives form to all things which are to come to pass by the direct disposition of God."

THE LAST PROBLEM that must be resolved is the knotty one of man's free will and God's foreknowledge. These two are not inconsistent with each other: God is a foreknowing spectator of all things. What He sees in His eternity of vision accords with the actions that man chooses to perform. Thus there is no such thing as chance. As for God's foreknowledge and man's free will, it is true that God knows in advance that a man will perform specific actions at specific times in his life: he will choose to take a walk, or sit down, or run. Because God foresees the choice, it will inevitably come to pass, but the decision to walk, sit down, or run, is man's and his alone. The fact that God foresees an act of man's will does not mean that God wills the choice made by that will.

Chaucer and other thoughtful men were fascinated by these ideas. With Chaucer and his age, the whole discussion and the attempt to fathom the ways of God in a world apparently dominated by circumstance and capricious chance were a part of the theological direction given their minds by Church writers and brought into focus by the *Consolation*. It gave depth to Chaucer's mind, provided him with the new definitions of tragedy and comedy, gave his writing in the years after he had translated the treatise its atmosphere of irony and subtlety; the finest passages of at least three of his later, long works are dominated by the essential dignity and beauty of Boethius' thought. His essentially noble view, Chaucer rephrased in five short poems, to

which the casual reader may conveniently turn to see the new poet that Chaucer had become under the influence of this insensating explication of the way the world runs.

The other matter with which we must have some converse in order to see Chaucer's poetry in a just light is the matter of Love. We must consider, for example, that the medieval world up to the eleventh century is almost entirely without what may be identified as a romantic attitude. Save for a few hints of conjugal affection in extant Anglo-Saxon poetry (many pieces dealing with love may be lost), both the Latin and the vernacular literature of well nigh a thousand years, are without passionate avowals of undying love, without the exaltation of the beauties of a beloved, indeed, without the whole system of relations generally attributed to the goddess Venus. Nevertheless, there comes about in Europe thereafter, whether through the rediscovery of Ovid, the classical poet who even codified a system of finding, wooing, and abandoning a sweetheart, or the general veneration of Mary as the paragon of female virtue, or through the infiltration of a spiritualized Platonism into Europe from Arabian scholars,—there comes into existence an attitude towards love which adopts in its literary manifestations so elevated a tone as to become a rival religion to Christianity and hence a heresy condemned by the Church in 1277. Its influence was greatest in the work of the troubadour poets, from whom it passed into the mainstreams of European poetry.

The view of Love that pervades the work of poets may be summarized somewhat simply: The universe is held in a harmoni-

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Notes, January 1954. The University of California Press published his edition of Michele Barbi's Life of Dante in 1954; and The Mathematical Treatises of Boethius; De Arithmetica and De Musica is now in the process of publication. During 1953-54 he was on leave of absence, having been granted a Faculty Fellowship from the Fund for the Advancement of Education. At the present time he is at work on a book dealing with Chaucer.

ous balance by a force called love, and the God that rules the universe is a God of love. The duty of every human being is to do the will of God, which is to love. Love, like grace, is irresistible. The result of loving, that is, doing the will of God, is the attainment of virtue. It follows, then, from the irresistibility of love that true morality consists of loving; or, to put it another way, nothing done under the influence of love can be immoral; hence the justification on philosophical grounds that sensuality, adultery, are forms of virtuous action, provided that the persons engaged in such acts be faithful to each other. Otherwise, their acts are acts of lust alone, and not the acts of true love. The most dire implication of this code is that marriage cannot be the vehicle of true love. According to the code, marriage becomes a debt mutually held by both partners of the contract, the debt implying the propagation of the race. In short, in marriage the love relationship is a matter of necessity, not free giving; where there is necessity there is no freedom, and hence no love.

Needless to say, Christian morality was totally opposed to the morality of the Court of Love, and the opposition between the two views is oft-repeated in the poems of the Middle Ages in the questions: If love is good, why should it be forbidden by religious authority; if it is bad, how can it be the source of virtue?

In several pieces, written probably within the same decade, Chaucer handles the problem, not only of the code of the Court of Love, but of the implications of that problem within the philosophy of Boethius who, it will be remembered, insists upon the free will of man, the responsibility for his acts, and the happiness that comes only when a man gives up the gifts of this world and turns his humble prayers directly to God. The work in which the two moralities are superimposed one upon the other, is the long poem called *Troilus and Criseyde*. In this narrative borrowed essentially from Boccaccio's *Il Filostrato*, the philosophical atmosphere is that of Boethius; that is, the world is harmonized by the universal law of love; all humanity is bound to obey the law, and from their adherence and obedience to it stem all their virtue and happiness. As Criseyde sings, "This is the righte lif that I am inne, / To flemen alle manere vice and synne"; and she adds: "Now woot I wel, ther is no peril inne"; and she recites the excellence and worth that accrue to those who love.

THIS IS THE BACKGROUND of thought that pervades the pathetic tale of two lovers who, doing the will of the God of Love,

enter into a relationship regarded by Chaucer and his Christian audience as perilous and sinful. The poignant plight of the young hero when he discovers that he and his sweetheart must separate and that he can do nothing to prevent their separation, is pointed up with a long soliloquy in a temple, where he asks the question much debated throughout the Middle Ages: In the light of God's foreknowledge, how can man have a free will, and hence any responsibility for his actions? But Chaucer's point of view is unmistakable: the love ends unhappily in separation, betrayal, and death; the love that the courtly code would have us believe is the source of all good is only blind passion. Chaucer thus passes a most subtle judgment upon the whole system by showing its failure in the pagan world. Such love is a gift of fickle fortune, and he cannot resist the impulse to prevent his audience from misunderstanding his motives; he therefore sets side by side all the loves of this world and the love of Christ:

O yonge, fresshe folkes, he or she,
In which that love up groweth with youre age,
Repeyreth hom from worldly vantage,
And of youre herte up casteth the visage
To thilke God that after his ymage
Yow made, and thynketh al nys but a faire
This world, that passeth soone as floures faire.

And loveth hym, the which that right for love
Upon a crois, oure soules for to beye,
First starf, and roos, and sit in hevne above;
For he nyl falsen no wight, dar I seye,
That wol his herte al holly on hym leye.
And syn he best to love is, and most meke,
What nedeth feynede loves for to seke?

This marked the end of Chaucer's dalliance with the Court of Love, for by the time he had completed the poem, he is full of the new idea for a literary work of a greater magnitude into which he could pour all he knew of life, of men, of passion, of the love of women and the love of God. He would take a group of recognizable and representative Englishmen and women, put them on a pilgrimage, bound by their common bond of a visit to the shrine of St. Thomas Becket, allow them to talk and act dramatically in accordance with the reverberations and repercussions of their personalities upon each other. They would tell tales according to a plan proposed by an umpire in an effort to while away the tedium of travel. The scheme, obviously, is a vast one; before he is through enumerating the types of men on the journey, they would number "wel nyne and twenty," the number of tales proposed, two on the outward way, two returning, somewhere in the vicinity of one hundred and twenty. He would be able to try his hand at virtually every kind of fiction known to his age: the

medieval sermon, the exemplum, the romance, the fabliau, the saint's legend, the moral treatise, the Breton lai, and even moral allegories or romances that support interpretation on various levels of meaning.

The possibility of our coming to an appreciation of the total intention of the *Canterbury Tales* is remote. Chaucer falls far short of his initial project. What we have left is a magnificent fragment to tantalize us with what might have been. We take some faint hope from the recent discovery of a manuscript bearing Chaucer's signature that somewhere in English or European libraries may be found hitherto unknown tales of the Canterbury groups, although we must confess that it is extremely unlikely. The task Chaucer has set for himself was so vast, so replete with problems that could be resolved only when the artist meets them in the actual creation that the result is an opus imperfectly planned. Everywhere are the signs of a poet at work, shaping his materials, making changes here and there, adjusting the parts to each other. But so many questions are unanswered that scholars have proposed solution after solution for difficulties which only Chaucer could overcome. It is extremely probable that Chaucer intended to solve the perplexities when he got around to them; many he simply did not. The most lamentable fact that the order of the tales as Chaucer meant eventually to arrange them seems never capable of final determination.

UP TO THE VERY END of his life, although he knew definitely how he would begin and end the *Canterbury Tales*, so much of the remainder of the *Canterbury Tales* was in process of preparation or revision or reassignment that we are forced to conclude that Chaucer was not ready to master obstacles which as yet did not exist: for example, where a certain group of tales would fit into the whole pattern.

There are, however, passages in which we see intimately the mind of the artist exerting a plastic stress upon his intractable materials; as when the Man of Law tells us that his tale will be in prose, only to carry out his tale in the stanza pattern; or when the Shipman uses pronouns that refer to himself as a woman, indicating that the tale was originally intended for a woman; or when the Second Nun refers to herself as an "unworthy son of Eve"; or when the Merchant speaks certain lines that indicate that he is a member of a religious order. We learn a good deal about the creative process from witnessing what seem on the surface to be outright errors or defects. We

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tery; he searches for the truth in the soul of things, but it fades away cloaked in the paradox of simultaneous unity and plurality. Thus speak the centaurs:

Abantes: Glory be to sacred Nature, to the entrails of the earth, and to the germ which, within the rocks, within the wood of the trees, and within human flesh constitutes a single secret and a single norm, potent and subtle; a universal synthesis of supreme power and of the virtue of Intelligence.

Quirón: Glory be! Things possess a vital being; things have rare and mysterious aspects; each thing is a gesture, a unit, an enigma of its own; each atom contains an unknown stigma; each leaf of each tree sings its own song; and there is a soul in each drop of the sea.

The "Catholic terror," however, brings him back to the realization that death alone holds the clue to the eternal mystery. Thus speaking to his own soul in "Alma mía," the poet admonishes it "Do persist in thy divine ideal; all things are governed by a supreme destiny; pursue thy path; follow on to the final horizon upon the trail leading to the Sphinx."

ANOTHER POEM in which Darío's preoccupation with death enters the realms of *Prosas Profanas* is "La Página Blanca," in which the poet brings out even more emphatically the idea that death alone holds the answer to the great mystery of life. The poem first introduces us to a white panorama expanding over a desert of snow. Against this is silhouetted a caravan of visions and shadows later taking the form of living marble statues which, overwhelmed by ancient sorrows, are slowly escorting across the desert of life the coffin wherein lies the corpse of Lady Hope. At the last there comes, riding on a dromedary in triumphant mood, the Invincible One, Death, clad in her tunic of night. "And man, who is haunted by startling visions, and who sees in the stars of the heavens frightening portents and bewildering signs, looks on the dromedary of the caravan as the messenger bearing The Light across the shadowy desert of life."

The somberness and majesty of the subject matter are most expressively brought out in "La Página Blanca" by the heavier vowel sounds *ä, ó, é, the open vowel ä* being by far the dominant note throughout the poem. The treatment of the lighter Spanish vowels *i (e)* and *u (ō)* is also peculiarly interesting. Though in the minority, they bear from time to time some of the major rhythmic accents of the stanza along with the heavier vowels, all of them so arranged according to their relative degree of openness as to produce crescendo

and diminuendo effects which are of unique beauty.

Darío was a devout Catholic, a great dreamer, and alas! a great sinner, his tragedy being that he did not find it possible to give the flesh to the devil and the soul to the Lord. In later collections he sang poems inspired by undisguised raptures of remorse. In *Prosas Profanas* itself, however, we can already find subtle but unmistakable traces of the dilemma which his religion and his weakness for the flesh constituted for him. In his poem "El Reino Interior" (The Inner Kingdom), at the end of an allegory of the seven virtues and the seven vices, the poet asks his soul to which it feels more attracted. His soul refuses to commit itself, but soon it falls asleep and whispers: "Oh sweet delights of the heavens! Oh rosy earth which my eyes have caressed! Virgin Princesses, shroud me with your veil! Crimson princes, clasp me in your arms!" Other times passion roars, free from fear, as in the "Colloquy of the Centaurs": "Oh aroma of her sex! Flowers and alabaster!"

Now it seems in order to ask: Can there be any connection between the poems in *Prosas Profanas* whose very essence is made up of the poet's sorrows and anxieties, and those minuettish fantasies, apparently free from all worry, as though written in an ivory tower, which characterize most of the compositions in this collection? Perhaps we shall find a direct answer to our question in Darío's own words: "How often have I sought refuge in an artificial paradise, possessed by the prophetic horror of death!"

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must, however, reckon always with the fact that the opus was far from any finished state. Any solutions we supply must be conjectural, at best.

Nevertheless, even as a fragment, it is Chaucer's most mature artistic utterance, and in Lowes' words, a "greater achievement than any single tale," for over and above a certain adherence to literary conventions, the depiction of the pilgrims has the ring of solid truth and the clarity of the most dispassionate observation. And yet there is implicit the most profound sympathy for the plight of man caught between the self-imposed penances and the profane pleasures that this life affords; caught, in short between the demands of his higher and lower natures. The *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales* surely is Chaucer's best known piece, surviving in more than eighty manuscripts. Its springtime setting, the de-

scription of the pilgrims, the plan the Host suggests to them for recounting stories on the journey are familiar to every literate person. Part of the air of reality is lent to the *Prologue* from Chaucer's real presence among them; if we may indulge our imagination, he is like an artist-guide in a picture gallery who wishes to show us his portraits. They shock and provoke us with their vividness; we feel that they are living human beings. They twitch and mutter; we examine their clothes, their distinguishing marks; we speculate with the artist about their motives and professions. And when he has finished his little tour, and the living portraits wait patiently for their creator to finish, he suddenly releases them into a larger framework, and himself with them, from which they cannot escape without paying their dues in the form of a story. If we are not careful, we will conclude that they are, for certain, drawn from living models, and only their stories are fiction; this deceptively lifelike quality is no doubt what makes their creation the highest kind of poetic art. And since he includes himself among their number, we are confused momentarily into welding together the real and the unreal into a new synthesis, into thinking they are all real people because he has given one of them his own name.

Just how far we may go in defining the philosophical unity of the Canterbury pilgrimage is difficult to decide, since the work is unfinished, and is indeed only a fragment. Yet the idea dies hard that Chaucer was not a sufficiently careful craftsman to make plans for working out the larger patterns of his finally assembled tales. I should like, myself, to believe that Chaucer knew with greater and greater clarity of purpose the end towards which the work was tending, and that he did, steadily and with purpose, exert upon his heterogeneous materials, a unifying principle that goes beyond the dramatic interplay of personalities. By and large, the broader outline of the *Canterbury Tales* is available to us, and we do know certain obvious matters about its organization: we know how Chaucer meant to begin, and we know how he meant to end. Although we may never fully fathom the meaning of the great middle of his *Tales*, we can scrutinize the beginning and the end and elicit a few clues as to the kind of order that Chaucer was in the process of imposing upon the pilgrimage.

We note, for example, that Chaucer chose to put the *Knight's Tale* first. The story seems to my mind to perform a real function for the entire pilgrimage, on a purely fictional plane. That is to say, it is the most patently philosophical tale of them all. It is relatively untouched by Christian

theology or religion except for a few anachronistic remarks about Purgatory and Hell, and deals with the problems of this life and their solution here in accordance with destiny. The background is drawn for the most part from reliable Boethius; indeed the *Knight's Tale* may be a true Boethian test case in the sense that its principal conflict and its eventual solution are brought about in Boethian terms. It posits a world in which all of man's problems, his fate, his quest for happiness, the necessity of loving (according to the courtly code), the rule imposed by Fortune upon the lives of mortals, find a partial explanation and resolution in the Great Chain of Being and the provisions by God for the immortality of species "by successions and progressions"; for men, God's will is carried out in the institution of marriage.

THE NEXT MORALLY serious tale about whose position we may be reasonably certain is that of the Man of Law. It is a story in which we witness the frightful oppressions visited upon a young Christian maiden. The story has a purely didactic, religious tone: we are dealing with the character and fate of the Christian who puts herself with complete faith and trust within the control of her Maker. The central view enforced by all the episodes of the story is very simple: God's influence transcends all other influences in nature; man is a fallen creature who was redeemed by the crucifixion of Christ; Satan retains his ancient

power to subvert good, by God's tolerance; man may acquire merit through the right use of his will, which is best put to use by surrendering his will to that of God.

What conclusion may we draw about the function of these two stories, philosophically and artistically, in the *Canterbury Tales*? Without attempting to divine Chaucer's intention, we may infer this: at the outset of the pilgrimage we are made aware of a sure order in the universe, an order made available to us through reason and experience, voiced by wise authority. Philosophy is the guide of life. But Chaucer adds, there is a wisdom for the Christian that surpasses the wisdom of learning and experience: the mystery of the redemption, the sublime resignation of the totally loving creature to the will of the totally loving Creator. However much we are aware of Chaucer's ever-present cool wit and faint skepticism, we cannot gainsay the import of the *Man of Law's Tale*. Good humor and Christianity are not mutually exclusive. And this is the way the *Canterbury* pilgrimage opens.

If we pass over to the little-read conclusion of the *Canterbury Tales*, we find that Chaucer has reserved his final tale for the good parish priest, who preaches a sermon on how to achieve the celestial Jerusalem. Here Chaucer is very much a medieval man; he wishes his final utterances to be serious and edifying. In the long disquisition we find virtually all the possible ac-

tions of man reduced to a moral encyclopedia in a systematic exposition of the seven deadly sins. All of the issues raised by earlier stories of the *Canterbury Tales* have their final statement and solution in moral terms here in the hands of the humble person. What he has to say he says with vigor, with a persistent and honest denial of the value of the gifts of this world acquired at the expense of that other. The tale is, however dull to modern ears, the best introduction to Chaucer as a moral being in the entire set of stories. Its closing remarks on despair may well be read in a variety of typical twentieth century settings: the psychiatrist's consulting room and the cocktail party.

Such a beginning and end indicate well enough the philosophical form that Chaucer was imposing upon his last work; it indicates more that Chaucer was moving more and more in the direction of renunciation, skepticism giving way to trust and resignation in accordance with the beliefs of his religion. One carries away from a reading of his poems a sense of the unflagging interest in the affairs of men, in men themselves, in their steady and almost wilful abuse of the institutions and appetites available to them for their happiness or misery, a sense that life is ultimately a mystery dominated by destiny: God sees, but we do not. What he evokes in us as responsive, thoughtful men, must give us pause.

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