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Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* in Context

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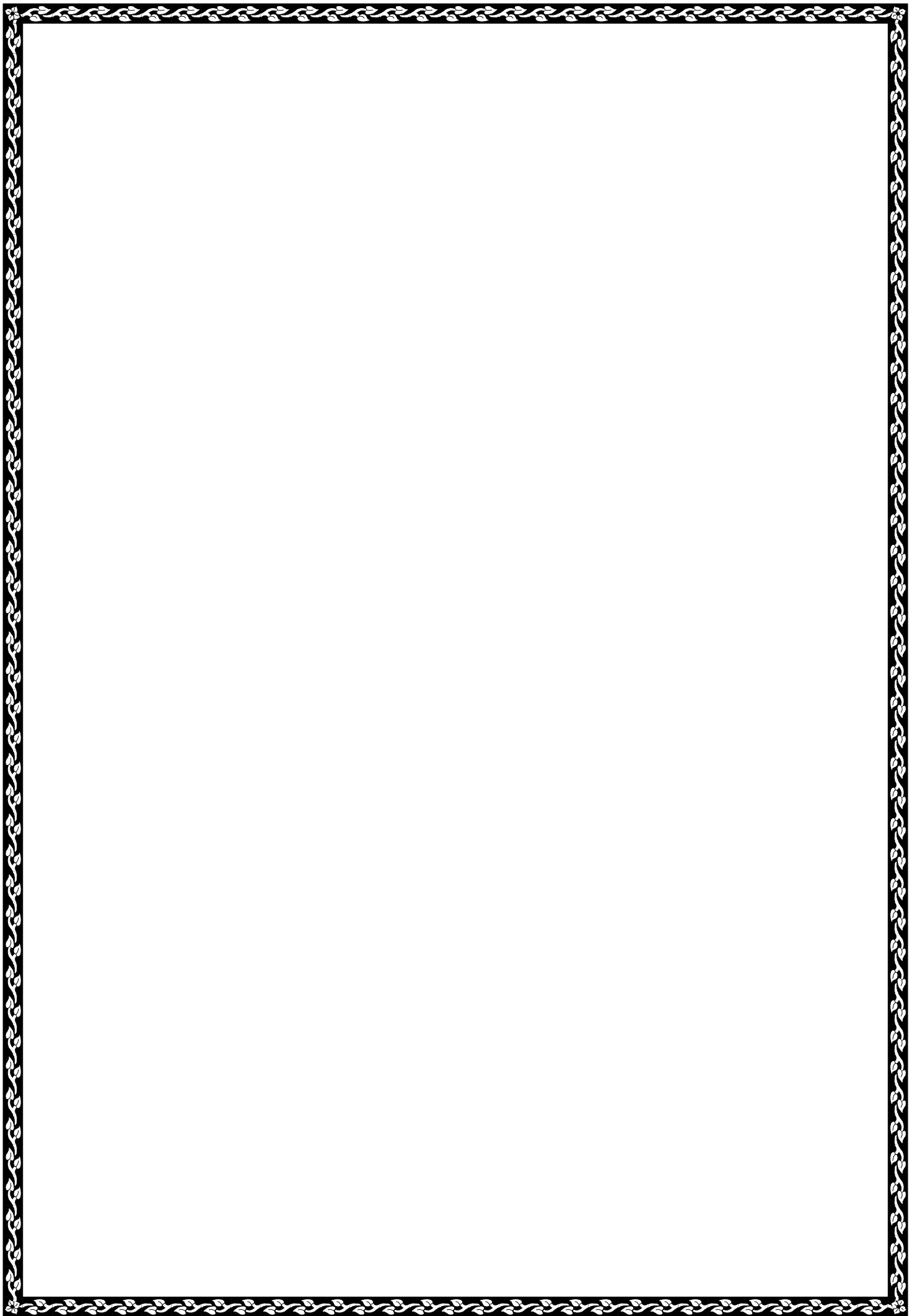
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Abstract

All what is known about the Middle Ages and its aspects are related in official documents or historical one. This thesis intends to explore that turbulent period with another source of reference which is literature. In fact many historians believe that literature is the byproduct of its time. Starting with this idea, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* can be regarded as a patchwork or mosaic that holds underneath the humorous and ironic tone of its stories, more issues of the fourteenth century, especially in relation to different areas of life: socio-historical, religious and literary aspects. Throughout this pertinent analysis of the medieval period and Chaucer's work, this thesis explores and analyzes the contexts of Chaucer's work, and answers some fundamental questions: how did Chaucer picture social life in his famous work, *The Canterbury Tales?* Did religion affect deeply the Middle Ages and medieval literature, especially *The Canterbury Tales*? And also, how did Romance find it place in medieval literature like *The Canterbury Tales*?

Keywords: Middle Ages, Medieval Literature, The Canterbury Tales, influence of history, contexts, Religion, romances.

Dedication

I dedicate this modest work to all the people who know me well, starting bymy family, DRIAS.

- ❖ For tribute to my father.

- ❖ To my beloved mother, who is the one who helped me while conducting this research.

- ❖ To my brother Lyes, who always provides me with courage and support.

- ❖ To all my friends and classmates, especially: Johayna, Hanane, Soraya, Rebiha an Ibtissam with whom I share good memories.

- ❖ To all the teachers who taught and educated me the real sense of knowledge.

- ❖ All the persons who encouraged me to succeed in my studies as well as in my personal life.

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- ❖ I am equally thankful to all the members of the panel of examiners, Mr Farid Kaci and Ms. Sabrina Slimi who have accepted to examine and evaluate my humble work. Their comments are warmly welcomed. I would also like to thank all the people who have indeed helped me with their support, prayers and encouragements, especially my schoolmates.

- ❖ I am really grateful to all those who helped me to achieve this modest work.

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General Introduction

After the fall of the Greek and Roman Empires, significant changes took place in the world. The European continent and England in particular entered a period of tumultuous time called "The Middle Ages". Many issues emerge to foreshadow the bad conditions of the whole society. The Middle Ages are described as a period of religious tyranny, during which the Church is the sole authority in the Western part of Europe. The total control of the Church upon the society is clear as the Pope was the absolute power to rule the secular life of the citizens. It was a period in which knowledge and accomplishments were overwhelmed by ignorance and violence.

England faced uncountable hardships; it was the era of failure with the spread of contagious diseases such as the Black Death, which affected the third of the population. The whole country also came to know severe economic troubles; landowners lost their staples and became poor, and many people died of starvation. Moreover, education restricted only to the royal family and the wealthy families. In fact, the process of teaching and learning was available for the minority. Indeed, the clergymen were the only person to promote education, since they were the sole intermediate translators of the Bible.

The medieval era was typically foregrounded by the gloomy atmosphere of various abuses of the clergy. It is the worldly life and political interest that blinded the Church and its bishops and monks; they considered themselves secular rulers rather than Church's servants. The social life of the citizens was overpowered by the Church; the citizen were forced to pay unbearable taxes to the Church, in addition to this the church imposed itself to the medieval literature to conform the Latin tradition that was preserved in monasteries

In the twelfth century, however, literature started to prosper in England with vernacular languages instead of Latin. A great amount of works were produced to initiate the flourishing era after the morose time of ignorance and waste dead of the ancient civilizations. Among the types of literature that bloomed there was *The Chanson De Geste* which are poems that honors the heroic adventures of warriors, and the most remarkable poem, *The Romance of the Rose*, which details how men may seduce their beloved.

In the fourteenth century, a writer like Geoffrey Chaucer in England is influenced by these humorous tales. The high development of the English medieval literature is due to Chaucer's contribution. He is considered as the father the English literature. In 1368 Chaucer travelled in Europe for diplomatic missions, where he acquainted with the Italian literature, in particular with the works of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio. When he left the political field, he took a house in the garden of Westminster Abbey, where he worked on his chef-oeuvre *The Canterbury Tales*. In the latter, Chaucer uses used for the first time the heroic couplet and the iambic-pentameter in which he achieved his fullest artistic power.

The Canterbury Tales is an unfinished poem about 17,000 lines. It is the one of most brilliant works in all literature. The poem introduces a group of pilgrims who are journeying from London to the shrine of Thomas à Becket at Canterbury. The pilgrims meet at the Tabard Inn Southward, London, where the host, Harry Bailey, proposes a storytelling competition. These pilgrims represent the wide-cross section of the fourteenth century English lifestyle. To unveil the social class division in the country, Chaucer uses several characters including: monk, knight, drunkard, and some priests.

The tales are a kind of interlinked stories. Every tale paves the way to the coming one by the prologue in which the storyteller speaks about himself. However; the themes of the

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tales vary from the spiritual to the earthly matters via the humorous aspect to mock the corruption of the society within its people especially the Church. Also, the characters are often portrayed rude and quarrelsome. In doing so, Chaucer attacks the abuses of the Church and the vices of the monastic orders, and presents the wretched standards of the ordinary people who try to survive in contrast to the prosperous rank.

As Chaucer's work is thought to be to a certain extent the mirror of the lifestyle of the medieval period, it is quite impossible to well understand it without taking into consideration the Middle Ages background. The author mingles several elements to depict as well as satirize the wrong-doings of the medieval period and its conditions. He introduces some characters to point out the flaws of the Church and display the immoral traits so that to reveal the dark side of society.

This thesis intends to treat, three different stereotypes of the Middle Ages, such as the age of skepticism caused by the political and economic turmoil, the corrupted religion, and how medieval literature has evolved in this suffocated era, especially the Romance one with it multiple forms (courtly loves and fabliaux). Divided then into three questions, this thesis takes into consideration medieval history, religion and literature as a prefect tools to understand his work and to show how really history is linked with literature, the first one will be on what are the influences of historical events on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*? And since religion played an important role on medieval history and literature, and also was a central theme of many literary works, then the second question will be on how is religion viewed during the medieval era?

In fact, through Chaucer's Tales of Canterbury, a deep exploration will be done in order to give a satisfied respond about one of leading theme of the era, which was love, and

how it is the source of great pleasure in the end. For this reason the third and the last question of this thesis will be on how romance is seen in the Middle Ages and in *The Canterbury Tales?*

For this reason, the topic of this study cuts across more than one substantive area. Its framework is premised on a strong thematic organization based on Chaucer's description of social life, religion and even some literary genres. In fact, to study *The Canterbury Tales* of Chaucer, we need to know more about the time of the author as an environment that shaped this magna opus.

After his death, Chaucer was only known as a skillful poet of the medieval time, but short after in the lamentation of Thomas Hoccleve for this missing author in 1412, he refers to Chaucer in his book, *Regiment of Princes* as "flour of eloquence" or even "universel fadir in science", famous for his "philosophie" and "excellent produence". According to Hoccleve, Chaucer has followed the path of his predecessor such as Ovid Lindgate, since it felt some similarities on writings. Later on, William Dunbar also fell under the spell of Chaucer's works, especially when he cited him as "a rose of rethoris all" in his book *The Golden Targe*, published in1503.

Even, William Caxton considered as the first man who introducer the print machine in England and printed *The Canterbury Tales* (Proem, 1484), declares that "by hys laboour enbelysshed, ornated and made faire our enblisshe".

Like Robert Henryson two centuries earlier, John Dryden the creator of *The fables, Ancient and Modern* in 1700 soon recognizes also the genius of Chaucer after he translated

some of the tales of Canterbury, as he pertinently says in his preface that he admires Chaucer's realism on *The Canterbury Tales*:

> He must have been a man of a most wonderful comprehensive nature, because, as it has been truly observed 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 single character has escaped him. All his pilgrims are severally distinguished from each other; and not only in their inclination, but in their very physiognomies and persons…there is such a variety of game springing up before me, that I am distracted in my choice, and know not which to follow. (J.A. Burrow, *Geoffrey Chaucer: A critical Anthology*, 1969: 66-67)

Throughout the present dissertation, we are going to answer some questions that are directly linked to the thesis statement. Furthermore, dealing with *The Canterbury Tales* the reader's attention is directly drawn to the beauty of the style and bewildered by such an adorned language that describes perfectly the characters who stands for the whole society. Also, the integration of these characters is meant to point out the flaws of the church within its elements and display the immoral traits so that to reveal the dark side of society. Thus, the author mingled several aspects to depict as well as satirize the wrong-doings of the medieval period and its conditions.

We intend to give pertinent answers to these questions and unfold the truth. First of all, the influences of historical events on Chaucer's work, *The Canterbury Tales* through different characters. Second, how religion is viewed during the medieval era through satire and irony. Finally, the subtle exploration of love through the fabliau of The Miller's Tale and the courtly romance of The knight's Tale.

In analyzing any field of study or knowledge, there are different orientations to follow in order to attain our goal. In our research we have to select the appropriate theory to interpret our work. In the analysis we have chosen the theory of New-Historicism to approach the chef-

oeuvre of Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales*. This method is the compatible theory on which we can rely on, since it assesses how the work is impacted by time in which it was written; this theory gives importance to history as an archive. Furthermore, it analyses the social milieu of the writer, the background, and even the books that may have influenced him.

Consequently, this approach relates both the textual and contextual background; the text and the context are intricately bounded, it forms an inseparable whole and connects literature with history because they are coined together and mirror each other.

Around the 1980's New-Historical Criticism appeared as a significant theory that strives to examine literary works with their historical context. Briefly, literature is seen as a pure reflection of the historical world, in our case Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* which is composed as well as a satire of its conditions. In fact, "*The Canterbury Tales*" is written at a time when Chaucer wanted to highlight the corruption of church through the portrayal of the characters' devilish inner.

This research will be divided into three parts. The first chapter is devoted to the methodologies on which we will rely, to give the readers a fuller understanding of this research, in fact by using the socio-historical, economic and political aspects of England during the fourteenth century as the environment that shaped the author's individual, and his literary work; the audience being targeted or the specific reader will discover a subtle interconnectedness between both history and world literature.

In other words, this first chapter deals with the early medieval history with all its features, starting from the Norman Conquest in 1066 to the period of the crusades, Black plague and even its results on the church (the self-seeking churchmen). According to new

historicists who consider literature as a reflection of the author's time, these events which are regarded as the author's environment, affect directly Chaucer and shape pertinently his work.

Starting with the evolution of Chaucer's period (medieval era) as a tool to appreciate and fully understand *The Canterbury Tales*, this research will entirely discuss the question of how medieval authors like Chaucer have succeeded to give such a perfect depiction of his pessimistic age through the crafty use of irony in his well-known work, *Canterbury Tales.*

Then the second chapter focuses on studying this pessimistic age of religious corruption, and then the way it was pictured in *The Canterbury Tales* through his Christian characters such as the Friar, the Pardoner, and at last the poor parson.

Concerning the last chapter, the focus is being laid on the literature of the Middle Ages, where the question of love and desire will be completely exposed through the clashes between courtly romances and fabliaux.

The first section is devoted to the analysis of the elevated style of romance as well as its influence on literature, especially Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, and his famous Knight's Tale that describes the way pure love should be. The second one, examines and explores Chaucer's intention of showing another face of love through the fabliau of the bawdy Miller; despite the fact of being drunk most of the time, this pilgrim succeeds in expressing his own vision of love through his pseudo-romance and highly moral story.

Chapter one
Socio-Historical context of The Canterbury Tales

It was an age that we would have hated much had we been living in. We would have hated its opinions, customs, superstitions, cruelty, and its disfigured intellect…England's great poet of gentleness and compassion walked everyday in a city were the fly bitten, bird scarred corpses of hanged criminals-men and women, even children-draped their shadows across crowded public squares (Mohammed & Raji: *Chaucer's Religious Skepticism*: 199).

To study the work of Geoffrey Chaucer, we have to know that there is more than one practical approach to examine the medieval literature. For that, it will be crucial to give information about the literature and the history of the Middle Ages. The pertinent vision depicted by some authors in their works such as *The Canterbury Tales* by Chaucer or Homer's *Iliad* reveals that the major values of each society are sketched through their literary works. In fact, their stories that are written in a crafty way strongly expose the most sacred aspects of their culture, particularly in terms of social classes, political conflicts and even religious doctrines.

According to W. Lawrence Hogue, English professor at the University of Houston and the author of *Postmodern American Literature and Its Other*: "there are no universal values for literature; value can be expressed as having only within the boundaries of a valuing community" (41). Subsequently, new historicists take over this concept by making it their creed and applied it to their theory, and for this research we will apply to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* as a tool to understand and analyze this work. Consecutively, a further understanding of the current work with its environment is highly needed to fully appreciate the subtle irony of Chaucer.

With this context, scholars and critics have considered some medieval literary works such as *The Canterbury Tales* and *Troilus and Criseyde* as a simple object that are set in the midst of some period of history. However, scholars of New Historicism admit that this kind of literary art is only influenced by its author's times and circumstances, which in turn influence the literary work by his environment, beliefs, or even prejudices.

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Consequently, the new Historicism approach that will be applied to this first chapter will send our attention toward a series of philosophical and practical concerns that highlight the interconnectedness between history and the world literature, in order to redefine both text and history while simultaneously redefining the relationship between them. In addition to this, New Historicists look at medieval literature through its historical context, examining together how the writer's times affect the work, the language, the structures and even the styles of the literary text as it is shown through Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales.*

The historical context of the medieval period is vital to make the reader believe in what is said throughout the numerous stories of Chaucer. In this light, we think that using the theory of new historicism will in fact fit our objective while conducting this research, as it will be a fruitful mean of learning both ancient literature and history.

In fact, all the stories of medieval literature could be considered as a part of European cultural that can improve and influence everyone's life in many ways. As it could be regarded also like a funny entertainment, informative lecture, or even meaningful tragedy that permits us to draw descriptions and metaphors of dead poets' society as it usually does by T .S .Eliot. in fact, this poet who has created *the waste land* in 1922, and which is now considered by many to be the most influential poetic work, had also his proper way of describing and interpreting his society by making it new, exactly as Chaucer did with his proper society

In other words, everything that each author did and will do is influenced by poets of olden pasts, and everything each author did would influence the poetry that will come to existence. This is true not just for poetry, but for all literary styles, as well as for any form of art. Art forms are always evolving into new forms that are still influenced by the past. As one of the best example we have Kate Chopin's book: *The Awakening,* indeed when it was canonized as early American feminist literature, some people disagreed whether or not its

intent was really to purport feminist ideals. Whether its intent revealed feminist thought or not, it was still a part of the evolution of literature, and whether canonized or not, it still had a place in that evolution.

As a result, all literature, good or bad, known or unknown, fits into the evolution of literature as a whole, and takes us beyond the limited experience of our life through lives of men and women that no longer exist; These beautiful experiences that we may not face in our current lives will be pertinently discussed in our current research in order to have a general overview of all the medieval society.

For more than seven centuries, people have felt the need to express their opinions on events that happened to them and around them; they felt the necessity to show their own position through time and place as does Chaucer within his works. This is why, new historicism is the appropriate approach for this investigation on Chaucer's era, without forgetting the religious sides and culture, which permit us at the end to share his original vision about the surrounding world. For instance, the great work of Chaucer in *The Canterbury Tales* starts when he vividly describes a bunch of people going on pilgrimage with their proper historical accuracies and social perspectives. Due to this, *The Canterbury Tales* has become a central English collection of writings that all historians should be familiar with, since Chaucer's works offer a large insight into fourteenth century with its religious controversies and social changes, but this sensible theme will be discussed further in the second chapter.

Accordingly then, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is reviewed to be a perfect and original literary work which completely mirrors and echoes reality through time, in our case, the reflection of medieval struggles during the late fourteenth century. Phillip Tew asserts in his praising of Chaucer's work: "Novels both rationalize and engage dialectically with our

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historical presence, playing their part, however provisionally at times, in our understanding of and reflection upon our lives". (*The contemporary British novel*, 2007: 7)

Again, in Phillip Tew's book, there is a hidden connection between the different periods of history with literature as the bridge. For example, in the historical era of Middle Ages, there are some literary works that reflect perfectly what is said such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*. In other words, the association between history and literature in both ways affects people, and people affect literature with their history in turn.

As a fundamental part of literary understanding, the historical context plays an important role in shaping and influencing literature in every novel or poem. Therefore, *Canterbury Tales* is indeed considered as an ideal combination of these fundamentals and a plausible source of culture that we would like to purposefully explore in depth.

According to Professor David Ian Hanauer at Tel Aviv University, Israel: *"Literature is a valuable source of cultural knowledge precisely because it presents a personal interpretation of values and life experienced by some authors in their literary works"*. (Focus-on-cultural-understanding: literary reading in the second language classroom, 2001: 396).

In fact, many scholars are directly inspired by this point, and the idea that have emerged, is called "the cultural poetic"[1]. According to Stephen Greenblatt, the most notable critic on historical studies of the world literature and the coiner of this term, there is a new way of reading and interpreting literary texts of the olden times such as the Shakespearian's and the Chaucerian's works by using cultural and historical studies.

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1 *Cultural Poetics:* also known as the New Historicism in America and Cultural Materialism in Britain is a form of literary analysis whose purpose is to discover the original ideology behind significant historical and biological facts about writers, resources, and the art they create.

This fascination with medieval history and its authors has soon caught on other historical periods, which led to the increasing popularity of cultural and historical studies. Consequently, how can we consider analyzing literature without understanding or even knowing the cultural environment that shapes the work or influenced it?

As a foundation that characterizes medieval era with its literature, Chaucer has written *The Canterbury Tales* as a sketch that portrays Middle Ages, offering to his modern audience a sight of the previous seven hundred years of the British History in selective and highly compressed account that will be discussed on this following chapter. In fact we could understand better the aspect of Chaucer's society that he describes through his tales, with some changes which took place at that time such as social classes, traditions, and religion.

These issues of the Middle Ages are important to understand this research on *The Canterbury Tales*, this is why it is valuable to give a brief introduction to medieval history to be able to well know Chaucer's work. Indeed, the author's use of the religious themes for example in *The Canterbury Tales* highlights the influence of the Church on the individual's life at that time.

1.1 Exploring The Medieval Era and Its Influences

1.2 Social and Political Context of *The Canterbury Tales*

Around the fifth century up to the period of renaissance, Middle Ages according to the Italian humanists[2], is a meaning which serves to highlight the humanist's works and their ideals. In fact, they were engaged in a revival of Classical learning and culture, and the notion of a thousand year period of darkness caused by wars, and ignorance separating them from the ancient Greek and Roman world. In a sense, the humanists invented the Middle Ages in order to distinguish themselves from it.

After the fall of The Roman Empire, the humanists have dismissed the term "Middle" or even "Dark" in which no scientific accomplishments had been made. No great leaders were born also. Consequently, in this chaotic environment which has given birth to Chaucer and his famous work *The Canterbury Tales*, people had wasted the advancements of their predecessors and ultimately devastated themselves instead of preserving or cultivating their own arts. However, today's intellectuals deduce that the complexity of the period with its changes and influences remarked pertinently by Chaucer in his works was as vibrant and effervescent as any other era.

During the Fall of Rome, there was no single state or government which united the people of the European continent. Instead, the Catholic Church became the most powerful and influential institution of the medieval era. Some leaders of that time, Kings and Queens, derived much of their power from their alliances and protection of the Church like it was proved through history when the Frankish King Charlemagne became more powerful king, as he had be named the Emperor of the Romans by the Pope Leo III.

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2 *Humanism:* term freely applied to a variety of beliefs, methods, and philosophies that place central emphasis on the human realm. Most frequently, however, the term is used with reference to a system of education and mode of inquiry that developed in northern Italy during the 13th and 14th centuries and later spread through continental Europe and England, alternately known as Renaissance humanism.

Over time, Charlemagne's realm became the Holy Roman Empire, and one of numerous political entities in Europe, interested only to align with those of the Church; as an event that marked the ages, this interfused relationship between state and religion highly affected people in the Middle Ages; people, for instance, were highly influenced by the salvation and the afterlife, and had to pay 10 percent of their earnings to the Church.

Chaucer has managed to set this anecdote in his *Canterbury tales* as a veiled subject, in which he has depicted his society with all its religious changes. In fact, during Chaucer's Lifetime, these policies helped the church to amass a great deal of money and power, and at the end of the eleventh century, the Roman Catholic Church has authorized military expeditions or crusades to drive out Muslim "infidels" from the Holy Land. The Crusaders, who wore red crosses on their coats to advertise their status, believed that their service would guarantee the remission of their sins and ensure that they could spend all eternity in Heaven; as saint knights against the evil, this idea of true honor, freedom and chivalry was greatly appreciated during the Middle Ages literature. These concepts were greatly hailed by Chaucer, when he has incorporated them ironically in his knight's Tale, while he gives a "full" description of this charismatic pilgrim as it follows:

> He never yet had any vileness said,
>
> In all his life, to whatsoever Wight.
>
> He was a truly perfect, gentle knight.
>
> But now, to tell you all of his array,
>
> His steeds were good, but yet he was not gay.
>
> (*The Canterbury Tales:* the knight: 11-15 line)

Referring to history, the Crusades began in 1095, when *Pope Urban* summoned a Christian army to fight its way to Jerusalem, and continued on and off until the end of the fifteenth century. No one *"won"* the Crusades; in fact, many thousands of people from both

sides lost their lives. They did make ordinary Catholics across Christendom feel like they had a common purpose; they inspired waves of religious enthusiasm among people who might otherwise have felt alienated from the official Church. They also introduced Crusaders to Islamic literature, science and technology exposure that would have a lasting effect on European intellectual life.

During the eleventh century, a cultural and economic revival took place, and shiftedthe balance of economic power from the region of the eastern Mediterranean to Western Europe. In the same way, rural life in Medieval Europe was governed by system call feudalism. In a feudal society, the king granted large pieces of land called fiefs to noblemen and bishops. Landless peasants known as serfs did most of the work on the fiefs: They planted and harvested crops and gave most of the produced to the landowner. In exchange for their labor, they were allowed to live in the land. So far, they were also promised protection in case of enemy invasion.

However, feudal life began to change also when Agricultural innovations such as the heavy plow and field crop rotation made farming more efficient and productive, so fewer farm workers were needed. But thanks to the expanded and improved food supply, the population grew. As a result, more and more people were drawn to towns and cities. These events cited were key moments in medieval Europe that affected deeply the majority of people and influenced them.

Moreover, Black Plague was one of the turning points in the history of medieval Europe that influenced badly people's way of thinking when they have faced the pestilence. It greatly undermined the people's faith in the Roman Catholic Church and destabilized the church's hegemony over Western Europe in different fields of economy, religion or even literature.

However, there were two other major occurrences that definitely compete with this causality. One would be the invention of the printing press in 1450 ACE, which has enabled the dissemination of information to many more people, particularly Bibles. Besides, there was another event that is not well known but that led also to a massive influx of classical influences into European literature and arts which led to forge the personality of numerous authors and poets, in our case Geoffrey Chaucer, and it was the Fall of Constantinople to the Ottoman Turks in 1453 ACE. Many of the intellectuals and important people escaped from Constantinople to the cities of Italy bringing with them a tremendous amount of literature and art objects from the classical eras of Rome and Greece.

In facts, all the events mentioned previously led to massive changes that opens an era of economic, social, intellectual, political and even spiritual changes in Europe. Besides all these events and their effects that shape the environment of medieval authors, Geoffrey Chaucer has perfectly played his role in describing them in his well detailed work of art called *The Canterbury Tales,* which is an estate satire that emphasize on medieval society and its struggles.

1.3   **Mythical Context of *The Canterbury Tales*:**

Written in 1387, *The Canterbury Tales* is considered as the most prominent work of Geoffrey Chaucer, ranked as one of the greatest epic poem of world literature. Extending to 17,000 lines in verse and prose of various metres, this literary work let infuse the reader's imagination through his various tales and characters, especially by giving a symbolic image of the fourteenth Century with all its struggles.

Besides these struggles, religion and social order are reflected in Chaucer's epic poem. Rather than focusing on issues beyond the good and evil like conflicting point of views

between gods such as in Homer's *Iliad*, this fragmentary work of Chaucer deals with issues that expose medieval society in a satiric way; via the crafty use of this literary genre, Chaucer administers how he really see the Middle Ages starting from social changes to religious corruption.

In fact, religious influence which is corrupted has stifled the society, even though Chaucer's metropolis was a Catholic country. Consequently, some authors of the time seems to be pessimistic in their wittings, as they were affected by the hundred years war, the black disease, and even the abandonment of the clergymen who have gave them moral support.

According to new historicists, both literature and history have an interrelationship, with each affecting the other. For example in Chaucer's society, both the Bible and literary background had a deep impact on medieval Englishmen's values; that in its turn affected literature with its way of thinking or new vision.

In other hand, medieval literature like *The Canterbury Tales* and its historical background have a double meaning relationship; in fact, history does not simply provide this literary work of Canterbury with just a simple context but many contexts. Its historical environment in turn can affect history in numerous and unpredictable ways, especially when Historical literature reflects the culture and society of the time, which then supports in shaping the culture of the future by giving pertinent examples of both the victories and mistakes of European ancestors, which we then learn from.

In fact, it is through Chaucer's works that we could be introduced to several themes pertaining to the Middle Ages literature, such as the emergence of different positions regarding wars or peace, divergence between intellectual freedom and the controlled one,the growing emotions between secular and religious culture, and at last changing gender roles. In fact these themes are always cited as references to Middle Ages, especially in medieval

literature such as *The Canterbury Tales*. Hence, at this juncture, we may ask the question of what kind of impact they had ?

It is also interesting to examine the influence of Chaucer's work on English history, and see how the author intertwines these themes in *the Canterbury Tales* through his high sense of irony and speech-making. Thus, it is important to think about the themes cited previously as fragments of history and English culture, to gain a better understanding of medieval society with its literature.

1.4　Lifetime of Geoffrey Chaucer:

In the opening lines of Donald Howard's book, he expressively shows us a portrayal of Geoffrey Chaucer and his influential life as he said:

> Fighting in two wars, endless travels in Europe, personal dealings with the kings and leading nobles of his time, and literary relations with most writers of note. Shakespeare, the only English writer who surpassed Chaucer, fought no wars, was never out of England, and for the most part confined his relations with people of power carefully to the theatrical sphere. It is not that Shakespeare's world was void of violence, but Shakespeare evaded angry events as best he could. We have comprehensive legal records concerning him, and they are virtually all commercial. There is nothing like the somewhat sensational document in which one Cecily Champain released Chaucer from legal actions concerning her rape: Chaucer doubtless had disbursed a large cash settlement.(His Life, His Works, His World, 1987: 10)

According to the most trustworthy authentic evidences, Geoffrey Chaucer was born in 1328, in London, England. He was the son of a prosperous wine merchant and deputy to the king's butler. Little is known of his early education, but his works show that he could read fluently French, Latin, and even Italian. It is likely that young Chaucer attended school at St. Paul's Cathedral, where he apparently was introduced to great writing and the poetry of Virgil (70–19 B.C) and Ovid (43 B.C) that became latterly the central sources of his works.

The first historical record of Chaucer reveals that few years later, in 1357 he became a young boy in the service of a knight as a page in the household of the Countess of Ulster, the wife of Prince Lionel. During the period extended from 1359 to1360 Chaucer was in France with Prince Lionel (1338–1368) during the period of the Hundred Years' War (1137–1453) between England and France. Chaucer was taken prisoner in Reims and the King Edward III (1312–1377) paid a ransom for his release. Little is known of Chaucer for the next six years. Documents indicate that in 1366 he was traveling in Spain on a diplomatic mission. Soon after his return he married a lady of the queen's chamber, Roet Philippa the daughter of Sir Payne Roet. Moreover Chaucer has developed close ties with John of Gaunt (1340–1399) the Duke of Lancaster, and other people of high status (nobility). In 1368 Chaucer was promoted from page to squire, a position of status above a page and below a knight.

The year 1369 marked a turning point both in the fortunes of England and in the career of young Chaucer. John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, asked Chaucer to compose a memorial poem, written in English, to be recited at the Mass for his deceased wife. Chaucer wrote the poem in English, while the poets were used to producing their literature in French. The latter was the natural language of both the king and the queen. It is possible that he had written his English devotional poem, *An A B C* which is a translation from a French source, for the queen at some time before her death. The theme of his poem, *The Book of the Duchess,* which was written for intellectual and sophisticated people, was a fitting memorial to one of the highest ranking ladies of the English royal household.

Chaucer was sent abroad on diplomatic missions in 1370 and again two years later. The latter mission took him to Florence and Genoa, Italy. There he may have deepened his acquaintance with the poetic traditions established by Dante (1265–1321) and Petrarch (1304–1374).

Times were good for Chaucer and Philippa Roet because they were economically secured, especially, when John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, gave Chaucer a yearly salary of ten pounds, the normal income for a squire in an aristocratic or distinguished household. The king appointed Chaucer as a chief accounting officer of taxes on wools, skins, and hides in the port of London. This position brought ten pounds annually and a bonus of ten marks that granted Chaucer a free residence above Aldgate in the city of the same port. He remained at Aldgate until 1386, though he went abroad several times on diplomatic missions for King Edward, who died in1377, and for King Richard II (1367–1400). In 1382 Chaucer was made controller of taxes on wine and other goods with the right to employ a deputy.

Between 1387 and 1400, Chaucer have essentially devoted much of his time to the writing of his most famous work, *The Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, he uses his legendary humor in subtle way retelling stories from the classical treasury of poetry and myth in order to make his journey more attractive. And it was for this reason that his numerous works have been widely praised and considered among the best historical literature. Indeed his use of Ovid, Homer, and Vergil's Tale of *Dido* as references was deeply felt through his different works, and the conclusion of *Troilus and Criseyde* affirms the idea:

> But litel book, no making thown' envie,
>
> But subgit be to alle poesye;
>
> And kis the steppes, where as thow seest pace
>
> Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.
>
> (*Troilus and Criseyde* V, Lines: 1789–1792)

Despite the fact that French Kings ruled England after the Norman Conquest of 1066, Geoffrey Chaucer is recognized for having set the style for Middle English literature when French is still an official language. His first works are translations of French originals. After

that, Chaucer's writings picked up a French and Italian taste through his diplomatic visits there.

Finally, he has succeeded to mix perfectly between these languages (French, Latin, and Italian) into a truly English style within his most emblematic works: *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Canterbury Tales*. In fact, Chaucer's works were a real source of hope. Especially, when the continuous publication of *The Canterbury Tales* after his death has inspired many other writers and artists. In reality the joy, the fear, the sense of humor and irony felt through Chaucer's works have absolutely influenced our states of mind, so that we could learn how to avoid or even repair the mistakes of the past.

1.5   Influence on Geoffrey Chaucer's Works:

Geoffrey Chaucer is considered as the creator of English literature, and the language that he used is called Middle English. Although many other poets have written poems in English, Chaucer is known to be the first who has used the vernacular on English poetry at that time.

In Seven Hundred Years, the English language had changed significantly since the time of *Beowulf* (Old English) to the Chaucerian time (Middle English). It is much easier to read Chaucer's works than to read something from the Old English. In fact, his inner life is recorded in his various rhyming poems that have taken the place of Old English alliteration.

He was a great poet and extraordinary man who at his debut was soldier, household, and also travelled diplomat. He also had a high range of experiences and interests, from common

life to religion, moving through passionate love to an equally obsessive interest in philosophy and science as it will be shown in the next chapters. Through his entire existence Chaucer knew all sorts of people from different countries (France, Italy, German, Flemish), and of diverse stations (Soldiers, Scholars, Merchant Financiers, Monks, Priests, Ladies, Servant girls).

Thanks to Chaucer's well-education, he maintained an active career in the civil service as a bureaucrat, courtier and then diplomat. Among his many works which have made his fame, we can mention *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *The Legend of Good Women* and *Troilus and Criseyde* including *Parliament of Fowles*, a poem of 699 lines which is considered as dream vision for St. Valentine's Day that makes use of the myth that each year, precisely on that day the birds gather before the goddess Nature to choose their mates. In fact, these works of Chaucer were heavily influenced by his favorite authors, Boccaccio, Petrarch, and Dante.

Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde* was influenced by *The Consolation of Philosophy*[3], which Chaucer himself translated into English. Influenced by this literary work, Chaucer took some idea for his last literary work from the plot of *Troilus,* in Boccaccio's *Filostrato*[4]. This 8,000 line rime royal poem[5] recounts the love story of Troilus, son of the Trojan king Priam, and

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[3]*The Consolation of Philosophy* is a short work of literature, written in the form of a prosimetrical apocalyptic dialogue (a dialogue with a mythical, imaginary, or allegorical figure). It contains five Books, which are written in a combination of prose and verse. The dialogue is between Ancius Boethius, a prominent and learned official of the Roman Empire, and the person of Philosophy.

[4]*Il Filostrato* is a narrative poem on a classical topic written in "royal octaves" and divided into eight cantos. The title, a combination of Greek and Latin words, can be translated approximately as "laid prostrate by love". The poem has a mythological plot: it narrates the love of Troilus, a younger son of Priam of Troy, for Criseyde, daughter of Calcas.

Criseyde, widowed daughter of the deserter priest Calcas, against the family of the Trojan War.

However, *Canterbury Tales* remains one of his well-known works that transcends the historical and literary context. G. K. Chesterton has remarked that:

> Chaucer's irony was too formless to be noticed. Chaucer is sublimely sly, whether in expressing his own pathos, or in acknowledging his authentic literary precursors, Dante and Boccaccio. Boccaccio particularly made Chaucer possible, in some of the same ways Chaucer enabled Shakespeare to people a world.Chaucer's tales are about tale-telling; because Boccaccio had perfected the kind of fiction that is aware of itself as fiction. Stories rhetorically conscious that they are Rhetoric behaves very differently from stories that mask such consciousness. Clearly, Chaucer's heightened sense of story has some relation, however evasive, to the *Decameron.* Chaucer likes to cite imaginary authorities, while avoiding any mention of Boccaccio, but that returns us to Chaucerian irony (*Bloom's critical views: Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2007: 11).

His original plot for *The Canterbury Tales* is that each pilgrim will tell two stories in the way to Canterbury Shrine, an two other stories in the way back. He later modified the plan to write only one tale from each pilgrim on the road to Canterbury, but even this plan was never completed. The tales survive in groups connected by some introductions (prologues) and conclusions (epilogues), but the proper arrangement of these groups is not altogether clear. In fact, the story is introduced vividly in brief sketches at the beginning of *The Canterbury Tales: the General Prologue* to describe the pilgrims and their Tales in short dramatic scenes as he says:

> Bifel that in that seson on a day,
>
> In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
>
> Redy towenden on my pilgrimage
>
> To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
>
> At nyght was come into that hostelrye

5*Rime royal poem:* A stanza of seven 10-syllable lines, rhyming ABABBCC, popularized by Geoffrey Chaucer and termed "royal" because his imitator, James I of Scotland, employed it in his own verse.

Welnyne and twenty in a compaignye

Of sondry folk, by aventurey fallen

felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,

That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.

(*The Canterbury Tales: the General Prologue*, 1387, Lines 20–27)

In fact, this literary text could fully be understood when we only read a verse in its context; indeed we must deal with the verse in light of what the rest of its own context is saying. In the case of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* the socio-historical context is very important, because it's clarifying the sense of the work. And it is very hard to see the meaning of a text if we do not understand how the author depicts his own society intensely. In fact, it was also remarked by E. Talbot Donaldson, one of the best Chaucerian critics that: "The extraordinary quality of the portraits is their vitality, the illusion that each gives the reader that the character being described is not a fiction but a person, so that it seems as if the poet has not created but merely recorded". (*Bloom's critical views: Geoffrey Chaucer*, 2007: 7)

We may ask the question of how *The Canterbury Tales* is built, or how it is shaped by his author. For this reason, a brief introduction of Chaucer's work will be done in order to have a clear overview of the work with all its forms and structure.

2   Introduction to *The Canterbury Tales:* Structure and Form

The story starts when Harry Bailey, the host and the owner of the Tabard Inn, suggests to join thirty pilgrims as a guide and that each of them should tell tales, whoever recounts the best tale will win a supper at the other pilgrims 'cost when they return. Sadly, the surviving manuscripts leave some doubt about the challenge and the exact order of the tales that remain. However, the work is sufficiently complete to be considered a unified book rather than a collection of unfinished fragments, as it was said previously.

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Hence, the milieu of the story is set when Chaucer the pilgrim has joined a group of others pilgrims at the Tabard Inn, across the Thames from London, on their way to Canterbury cathedral. In the modern translation of *The Canterbury Tales: the General Prologue*, the description of all the company is made. Practicing a different trade, often dishonestly, these nine and twenty pilgrims add until thirty one on the road which unfortunately is not finished.

The Canterbury Tales then is a mixture of a different stories told by travelers from all aspects of England society. Among all these literary genres, we can include some variety of courtly romance, fabliaux, saint's biography, allegorical tales, beast fables, and medieval sermon. In reality, *The Canterbury Tales* is likely popular due to the fact that the tales were written in Middle English or to the fact that Chaucer's landscape is accessible to all types of people, especially for those living in the countryside thanks to the flourishing trade of London, since there are some hints in the first opening lines which refer to this fact:

> Whan that Aprill with his shoures soote
>
> The droghte of March hath perced to the roote,
>
> And bathed every veyne in swich licour
>
> Of which vertu engendred is the flour;
>
> Whan Zephirus eek with his sweete breeth
>
> Inspired hath in every holt and heath
>
> The tender croppes, and the yonge sonne
>
> Hath in the Ram his halve coursyronne,
>
> And smale fowles maken melodye,
>
> That slepen al the nyght with open ye
>
> (So priketh hem nature in hircorages),
>
> Thann elongen folk to goon on pilgrimages.
>
> (*The Canterbury Tales:the General Prologue*, 1387: Lines1–12)

Other writers and printers soon recognized *The Canterbury Tales* as a masterful and highly original work. The literary devices give to Chaucer the opportunity to paint a series of vivid word portraits of a cross section of his society, from the knight and the prioress to a much married wife of bath and a bawdy miller.

In fact, this storytelling is seen as a perfect combination between satire, irony and realism that characterize lively his pilgrims, and the tone of their tales that balances from pious to comic, with humor veering between erudite wit and good honest vulgarity. Taken together these tales offer a fascinating insight into English social life during the late fourteenth century.

Interestingly, *The Canterbury Tales* is a story within another story, structured with huge number of characters that tell stories at their turn. Generally, this kind of literary device is called a frame story which can be used in all types of narration such as novels, short stories, poems, songs and even philosophical essays. But Chaucer' frame story serves also as a companion to a story within a story, whereby the main story is presented to us, at least in part called the general prologue in the case of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, for a more. In fact, the frame story leads readers from a first story into another, several ones within it. The frame story may also be used to allow readers to understand a part of the story, and then jump to another part that can now be understood.

According to the general prologue that represent a part of the main story, *The Canterbury tales* takes place when the narrator tells us that a bunch of pilgrims have all gathered in the Tabard Inn, in the south of London, and says that it is the perfect time for making pilgrimages.

Initially, there are a lot of pilgrims which could confuse the reader, and they are all totally different from each other. And in order to have a coherent unity, the narrator decides to

just describe them. In fact, they have got very different personalities. He identifies them by their occupations; but his descriptions are interesting because, he frequently tries to show their differences between what their job is. He generally praises everybody ironically. To cite an instance among many others, it is when Harry Bailey the Host, had proposed a scheme in the General Prologue whereby each pilgrim was to narrate two tales on the way to Canterbury and two more while returning. In the course of the journey the Canon and his Yeoman join the pilgrims.

However *The Canterbury Tales* is incomplete. There should have been a hundred and twenty tales in all according to the original plan but Chaucer only completed twenty-three tales. Out of these, the Cook's and the Squire's Tales are unfinished.

Aside from the high literary standard of *The Canterbury Tales,* the work stands as a historical and sociological introduction to the life and times of the late middle ages. During Chaucer's time, regardless how brilliant and talented one might be; there was no way for a commoner to move from his class to the aristocracy. Chaucer, however, made that leap as well as anyone could.

Hence, *The Canterbury Tales* then is ranked as one of the greatest epic narrative works of world literature, and Chaucer made it as a crucial contribution to literary world by using English at a time when much court poetry was still written in Anglo-Norman or Latin; Extending to various metre sin prose and verse, and in form of the rhyming couplet for the majority, the tales of Canterbury are grouped into ten fragments, and each fragment is numbered as a separate whole, obviously the general prologue comes first and the parson's prologue and tale come at last for sure. But arranging the tales is really hard and complex in between if we do not have a clear end-link that connects with another head-link in the tales;

these so called "links" are the best evidence for grouping the introductions, prologues, and epilogues to various tales into fragments.

There is much debate about the order of the tales. The manuscripts of the work suggest several different orders and different scholars have also suggested several structures. The tales are usually divided into 10 fragments. The order within these fragments is usually considered to be correct. But the order of the fragments themselves is often under debate. What is given below is the commonly accepted order of the tales that will be respected during our characters' analysis:

Fragment	Tale
Fragment I	# General Prologue # The Knight's Tale # The Miller's Tale The Reeve's Tale The Cook's Tale
Fragment II	The Man of Law's Tale
Fragment III	The Wife of Bath's Tale # The Friar's Tale The Summoner's Tale
Fragment IV	The Clerk's Tale The Merchant's Tale
Fragment V	The Squire's Tale The Franklin's Tale

Fragment	Tale
Fragment VI	The Physician's Tale # The Pardoner's Tale
Fragment VII	The Shipman's Tale The Prioress's Tale Sir Thopas' Tale The Tale of Melibee The Monk's Tale The Nun's Priest's Tale
Fragment VIII	The Second Nun's Tale The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
Fragment IX	The Manciple's Tale
Fragment X	# The Parson's Tale

- #: The tales that are going to be analyzed in the current research.

We have to admit that with the end of The General Prologue, the narrator describes how "the cut fell to the knight", as we can see in line 845, and therefore we have to link The General Prologue to The Knight's Tale. In addition we have also another link at the end of The Knight's Tale which describes how the Miller breaks in to tell his story, and after that the Reeve, and then the Cook. The General Prologue, The Knight's Tale, The Miller's Tale, The Reeve's Tale, and The Clerk's Tale are thus linked together to make up Fragment I. But The Cook's Tale, on the other hand, breaks off with no indication in the text as to what comes next.

Nevertheless, other tales could be clearly linked to one another while few stand on their own with no explicit links to any other tale. Editors of the tales should, therefore, decide how to put these fragments into a whole. The recent arrangement that is given in Larry D. Benson's *The Riverside Chaucer* (1987), and which bases on *the Ellesmere manuscript* by Herbert Clarence Schulz (1966) is the most common and the best surviving manuscripts of the tales but is not the only one since 81 other manuscripts had survived also.

In other words, the connections between these links that compose the framing narrative of *The Canterbury Tales* are always open to the same sort of objections that show more clearly than the individual tales and the unrevised state in which Chaucer left his work. But it does not prevent it from being recognized as the English literary canon and his author as being the father of this literary canon according to the poetry critic George Puttenham during the English Renaissance. Thus, through his poetry, Chaucer gives us a masterpiece of narration and description to history and literary sphere. Even after his death, *The Canterbury Tales* remains one of powerful works that depict a vivid portrait of the fourteenth century life and social orders with its costumes, persons and struggles.

According to John Matthews Manly: "This method of opening a window upon life and letting the reader see the persons and events of the writer's vision is habitual with Chaucer". (*Light on Chaucer*, 1926: 295) At this point, we may ask the question of how did Chaucer describes and satirizes social orders through his various characters in *Canterbury Tales*?

In fact, Chaucer has used the Literature of the estates which is the most comprehensive form of literature that analyses the social classes and classifies them by group, function, status and others. More commonly known as "The Estate Satire", the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* relies heavily on this genre of the estates.

Actually, this literary genre includes most commonly literary works from the fourteenth century, the best known example being Chaucer's Wife of Bath's Tale. Estates satire praised the glories and purity of each class in its ideal form, but was also used as a window to show how society had gotten out of hand. The *Norton Anthology of English Literature* describes the duty of estates satire: "They set forth the functions and duties of each estate and castigate the failure of the estates in the present world to live up to their divinely assigned social roles" (Greenblatt: 242).

Considered then as medieval estate satire, the author's of *The Canterbury Tales* mocks his current society by presenting to the audience a bunch of pilgrims who fail to perform their duties. Unconventionally, he does this without any "overt moral judgement" (243).

Among the fourteenth century English authors, John Gower, William Langland, and Chaucer were three of the most prominent writers of the time to include estates satire in their works. Although Gower was more aggressive in his approach, Chaucer was more subtle and more successful, making himself to be the fool of the joke and subverting may of the conventions of the genre (Mann, *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire, 2009*).

For a long time these classes represented the majority of England population and Geoffrey Chaucer has used it to define the personality of his pilgrims in The *Canterbury Tales*, many of Chaucer's characters do not fit to any of the estates, but are actually a part of the middle class that portrays medieval life.

Even though Chaucer wrote *The Canterbury Tales* as an estates satire, the majority of the characters actually belong to the emerging middle class. During Chaucer's time, the middle class was an emerging phenomenon, and many people did not know how to make sense of this new and categorically anti-feudal social class. As a result, the travelers that actually do belong to one of the three traditional estates stand out in sharper relief.

In the same way, the General Prologue of *The Canterbury Tales* is also an estates satire in the Host's portrayal of the pilgrims; he takes the first steps by showing the Role of each estate, particularly the churchmen, those of the Church who failed to meet their duties according to the medieval standards. By the late fourteenth century, the unequal organization of these three estates had begun to collapse after this, and merchant class had begun to rise quickly, gaining money and power all the way through secular society like it was represented by the son of wine merchants and clerk to the king in *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chaucer has put in his canvas called *The Canterbury Tales* the entire society on parade, and no one escapes his skewering, from the aristocrats and those with pretensions toward nobility like the Knight, Prioress and the Friar, until the immoral lower class such as the Parson, the Reeve, the Summoner and the Pardoner who tells the last moral tells.

The social satire that the Host sets up in the General Prologue continues through the tales that the pilgrims tell. The Nun's Priest's tale satirizes courtly love by putting chivalry in the setting of a barnyard. Supposedly pious religious figures are shown to be corrupted and greedy just under the surface. In her Prologue, for instance, the Wife of Bath presents a parody of religious logic, giving her own readings of Scripture to back up her view that experience is the only way to affirm her authority.

Even though the tales are fictitious, Chaucer draws directly on real people and real events in his satire of social life. Chaucer presents The *Canterbury Tales'* characters as a conventional or standard conception in order to depict the stereotype images of fourteenth century men and women that clash each other in their professions and sexes, as it was shown all along the stories through the greedy Pardoner, the hypocritical Friar, and somewhat tyrannical leadership of the Host. However, he presents them as Real and individual who exist and reflect the world around him which affect them in pessimistic way. The most famous

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example of this is [Chaucer](#) himself. The author of the Tales does not remove himself from his own satire. On the contrary, Chaucer depicts himself as a bumbling, clumsy fool.

Chaucer also draws on real life settings and events to emphasize the social commentary. In the Nun's Priest's Tale, Chaucer compares the climactic battle among all the farm creatures to the Jack Straw rebellion, a peasants' revolt that took place in England in 1381. The clash between the nobility and the peasants is reflected in animals' version through the conflict of the fox and the rooster.

The strict hierarchy of the medieval estates is frequently inverted and subverted throughout the tales. Even though the Host sets forth each of the characters in order, and in a procession in the General Prologue, the whole company of pilgrims is mixed. Pilgrims of all levels of society respond directly to each other. The [Miller](#) jumps in right after the [Knight](#) to tell his tale instead of waiting his place in line. In a pilgrimage, members from all three social classes share the same primary function: all of them, men and women, knights and peasants are going to Canterbury at Saint Thomas Becket with a storytelling challenge to shorten the road.

Throughout his poetry, Chaucer shows us his genius through the language used, principally when he presents the world as he sees it, with his proper idea of human nature:

> Together with Shakespeare and a handful of the greater novelists in English, Chaucer carries the language further into unthinkable triumphs of the representation of reality than ought to be possible. The Pardoner and the Wife of Bath, like Hamlet and Falstaff, call into question nearly every mode of criticism that is now fashionable. (Bloom, Harold. *Civilization, Medieval, in literature, 2007*: 12)

Accordingly, the enjoyment of reading *The Canterbury Tales* is felt through his crafty use of the historical context as a factor which describes something in history and in our case the medieval era which had a deep impact on him. Thanks to that experience, he knew the world from many aspects, his love for his characters is always sensed through his numerous

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works. The mature adult would find it difficult not to like the characters such as *The Wife of Bath* with all her bawdiness or the Miller with his vulgarity that amuses rather than offends refined readers. Indeed, great works of medieval literature become great because they tell fascinating stories while sending hidden messages of some sort in the form of various themes that reflect ethics or emotions felt during that period of time with it influences.

To put it briefly then, medieval history shapes many forms of literature and *The Canterbury Tales* was no exception. We tend to get ideas for literature from things that have happened. Sometimes this comes in the form of non-fiction literature and sometimes it comes in the form of allegories or allusions. We cannot fully understand a literary work such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* unless we understand its historical context and the history of the person who wrote it. Thus, history can also shape the way we view literature. And of course with its double meaning relationship, that works both ways. Literature can also shape the way we view history. It is said that history is often written by the conquerors. For this reason, we do not always get the full story of what happened in our literary histories. Over and over again, history is written down by the conquerors and survivors. We might not see the whole truth of what happened, except in the sight of some author of that time such as Geoffrey Chaucer.

So, hypothetically, *The Canterbury Tales* could be considered as a hidden voice that expresses medieval values and beliefs through its historical and political contexts, and show us in what way people live as a group with their different perspectives of their time, culture and traditions. It is not possible for a modern reader who takes Chaucer's texts for the first time to fully appreciate a middle literary work as its contemporaries experienced it. Thus, the best approach to literary criticism is to take the text with its context and exploring it with its diverse parts.

In conclusion, medieval literature turns out to be the ideal instrument of exploring some literary works and to lead also to the discovery of medieval history through its texts. It gives us a lot of opportunities to increase our knowledge as we will have access to a variety of information about the author and his environment. Consequently, by developing a literary knowledge about English culture, the readers of Chaucer's works will understand and interact effectively with the author's milieu. Moreover, we would also acquire effective linguistic and cultural competences, since the study of the target language is bound to its literature and fine arts; as a result, we can consider the socio-historical context as attractive and sometime as useful environment for literary analysis.

In this light, the objective of our work will be a critical exploration of medieval era through Chaucer's *The Canterbury tales*. We will also examine on the importance of the environment which influences both the author's personality and work. The following research will study the impact of religion on Chaucer's work.

Chapter Two
Religious Context of The Canterbury tales

> Religion is regarded by the common people as true, by the wise as false, and by rulers as useful. (Ira D. Cardiff, *What Great Men Think About Religion*, 1945: 342)

Since the creation of *The Canterbury Tales*, there have been many ways of approaching Chaucer's time and poetry; according to the coiner of new historicism, and Americans cholar S. Greenblatt: "new historicism is the most adequate for exploring and investigating both the social presence to the world of the literary text and the social presence of the world in the literary text" (Greenblatt, *Renaissance Self-Fashioning: From More to Shakespeare*.2007: 5).

By way of pertinent illustration, academic specialists show that there is a great variation between literary work studies like the critical study of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, and the kind of approaches needed when we have to teach his precepts through historical literature in classroom, for instance.

In fact, these specialists in Chaucer's literary works, such as S. Greenblatt, tend to keep an eye on contemporary methods, the most influential of which have recently include discussions of irony in his narration strategies, the exercise of power in society, and even conflicts connected with gender or sexual identity. Nevertheless the question relative to religion is usually not mentioned in medieval literary works except in terms of corruption and oppression, even if the presence of sub-texts referring to Boethius[1] in Chaucer gives rise to some quite metaphysical debates or difficulties on freedom; it gives as well as a certain liberty to some authors to express their emotions, fears or even cultural influences.

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[1]Anicius Manlius SeverinusBoëthius: commonly called *Boethius (*480–524) was a Roman senator, consul, *magister officiorum*, and philosopher of the early sixth century. While jailed, Boethius composed his *Consolation of Philosophy*, a philosophical treatise on fortune, death, and other issues, which became one of the most popular and influential works of the Middle Ages.

As a result of his history, this situation gives Chaucer a perfect subject matter, and an almost stoic attitude in his incredible poetry. Indeed through his various work, we can feel a high sense of critical observation toward his proper society. He believes that there is a profound connection between religion and philosophy which both in turn influence his literary world.

In fact, Chaucer tends to reveal through *The Canterbury Tales* his ideal vision of religion, and also how it was viewed during the fourteenth century. In this second chapter, some question will be asked in order to have a clear overview of the religious aspects of the Roman Catholic Church and its deep impact on Chaucer. Subsequently, to attain our goal, we need to give pertinent answers to these questions. First, how is religion viewed in both the medieval era and its literature? And secondly, has this institution deeply affected history and literature?

Actually, Greenblatt has claimed that we cannot understand English writers like William Shakespeare and Christopher Marlowe or even their predecessor Geoffrey Chaucer without understanding the historical context that shaped them and their works. Therefore, new historicism theory will be central in establishing a meticulous analysis of the religious dimensions, considering its effects on literature as a way to identify all the selective parts of *The Canterbury Tales*.

For example, when the poet tells us that The Knight's crusading experiences include service with the Teutonic Order in "Lettow" (Lithuania), for this, comprehension of the correct sense or denotation of the text requires some background about the fourteenth Century institutions, events and even ideas. More generally, discussions of whether the Knight's crusading activities are being held up for approval or disapproval in the general are likely to

cite the various ways in which the morality of crusading, and in particular of campaigns mounted by the Teutonic Order against the Lithuanians, were regarded in Chaucer's own day.

Roman Catholic Church was so influential in medieval England. It primarily focussed on "the salvation of souls through teaching and the sacraments" (Rigby, S, H.*A Companion to Britain in the Later Middle Ages*: 359) it played a major role on controlling the societal behaviour by setting standards of good behaviour.

It is evident that presenting this information about the Middle Ages and the influential role that play religion are important to Chaucer's studies, in fact at the beginning, the influence of scholars such as David Aers, Stephen Knight, Paul Strohm, Lee Patterson, Peggy Knapp, and David Wallace on Chaucer's works had come to be perfectly read by using socio-historical environment of the late fourteenth century.

2.1 **The Middle Ages and Religion**

At the beginning, the Roman Catholic Church was the only church of the era, and had a monopoly on all religious knowledge. To be more explicit, the Church could control the fate of all who might go Heaven or Hell. This gave it tremendous power over people's lives. The Church did much to determine people's behavior.

Moreover, the Church was also one of the major political forces during this time. In fact, Kings and queens wanted and needed papal approval, particularly when they were in times of conflict over succession. This, among other things, allowed the Church to exercise political power as it could help to determine which claimants to a throne would be judged acceptable. There was a long history of tension between the church and nonreligious authority (secular authority) over political issues and others.

In fact, the Roman Catholic Church controlled a great deal of land, considered as the main source of wealth in fourteenth century; and by owning all the land connected to the monasteries, the Church became a major economic power. Consequently, why is Religion not usually mentioned in the history and literary works, except in terms of corruption and oppression?

One of the reasons why the Church wanted this power was to gain more influence and hence money as it was perfectly shown by Chaucer through one of his most famous characters, The Greedy Pardoner, especially when he said "I wol have moneie, wol, chese, and whete, licour of the veyne, and a joly wench in every toun" (Chaucer: lines162, 166–167).

It would be unfair to not mention some of the causes which led to the church weakness during the fourteenth century, to have a clear understanding of this part of history and then it influence on *The Canterbury Tales'* work, we need to know that there are at least some reasons which explain the misfortunate and piteous condition of the church such as the effects of black disease, "the self-seeking of clergymen", and the fact that the church was influenced by the growing power in political as well as economic forces. Obviously, these causes and effects which have marked history are not the only one.

Black Death of 1348 was considered as the central reason for the deterioration of the church, and the self-seeking[2] of its churchmen who focused only at getting what they want of powers (money and lands) without taking into consideration the victims suffering, and struggling with the pandemic. Moreover, John Wycliffe's reformations have raised the anti-clerical spirit that complains that clergymen are not paying their fair share towards the war effort with France, or at least, helping victims during the pestilence; Consequently, the

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2The self-seeking: concerned only about getting what you want or need and not caring about what happens to other people, according to English Language Learners.

majority of black death's victims demanded the disendowment of others clergy (church officials).

The Church managed to retain its position as the only authority on religious matters at least for some of the time being. But the growing affluence and corruption of the Church has led to internal conflicts due to the fact that, there were too many clergy members in every corner of England who have had different position regarding religion, specifically the Benedictine order, whose popularity has grown during the fourteenth century; As a reaction, the mendicant orders became wealthy, following a little after by the emerging Franciscan and Dominican orders, indeed these religious orders were "bound by a vow of absolute poverty, and dedication to an ascetic way of life" (Labatt, Annie, and Charlotte Appleyard *Mendicant Orders in the Medieval World.* 2004), these orders also protested against the wealthy monasteries. In reality, the mendicant orders wanted to live like the Christ did, in complete poverty and travelling only to preach the good faith. The mendicant friars also have opposed themselves to the wealthy and corrupt institutions of the Benedictine order.

Despite these facts, this last order became corrupt as well, and got criticised themselves. This development was due to the still corrupt nature of mendicant orders as giving money and buying one's salvation led to a redistribution of wealth (Callahan, *New Territories, New Perspectives: the Religious impact of the Louisiana Purchase*. Missouri: 117).

As a consequence, disillusionment, hypocrisy and corruption have had a deep impact on Christian believers. Feeling betrayed by their own brothers of faith, the growing sense of anti-clericalism and anti-fraternalism was felt after this. This is why, we could find nowadays sentiment of anti-clericalism and anti-fraternalism in many literary works of that time such as *cleanness* and *Patience*, written by Gawain Poet, William Langland's *Piers Plowman*, and of

course, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, especially in The Summoner's Tale which is considered to be an anti-clericalism through the Friar John's words.

In effect, the loss of faith causes also doubts about religion and religious doctrines which at last make easier the transition from the "Age of faith" to the "Age of skepticism and doubt in Religion". That is why; this terrible influence of power has affected badly the medieval people who in turn affect medieval literature also. With this mutual influence that affect both religion and literature, we can discover that the method used by the two are comparable, in fact they both stand for the value of the imagination; moreover, religion and literature, adopt similar methods. They both represent the creative side rather than the logical methods of understanding social and personal life.

For more than seven hundred years, religion played a significant role in influencing literature; it becomes thereafter a perfect subject matter for various literary works with harsh themes that dealt with the religious corruption, influenced by their environment, some medieval author like Geoffrey Chaucer agreed to say that if religion belongs to the realm of the sentiments, the will and the heart sensibility that affect significantly medieval people, than literature too could be considered as a product of the author's imagination specially appeared in poetry and prose. It primary role is to intimate, suggest, and seek the interest of the audience. Then, on the basis of this close, what is really the influence of this sacred institution on medieval literature?

2.2 Religion and English Literature

The Roman Catholic Church was an enormously powerful force in medieval society, and extremely wealthy. The elaborate constructions, ornate with gold cathedrals built to enshrine saints' relics were very costly, and the Church also collected regular taxes from its members.

By the late fourteenth century, people had begun to become deeply suspicious of the Church's ostentatious wealth. After the Black Death, which wiped out at least a third of the population, many people no longer trusted the Church's authority. Church official were often seen as corrupt, bribing and coercing people to obtain money for the church under false facades. Since members of the church were not allowed to work for a living, they had to gain money by other means. Friars took a vow of poverty and roamed the countryside, relying on charitable donations for their livelihood. Summoners brought sinners to the church court for punishment. People bought indulgences from pardoners to purchase forgiveness for their sins.

Yet, it is understandable that the religious figures in *The Canterbury Tales* highlight many problems of the medieval Church corruption. The <u>Monk</u>, who is supposed to worship in confinement, likes to hunt. Chaucer's <u>Friar</u> is portrayed as a greedy hypocrite. He tells a tale about a Summoner who bribes an old innocent widow. The <u>Summoner</u>, in retaliation, skewers friars in his tale, satirizing their long windedness and their hypocrisy. The <u>Pardoner</u> openly admits to selling false relics to parishioners. Though the <u>Prioress</u> supposedly wears a rosary in devotion to Christ, her ornate token seems much more like a flashy piece of jewelry than a sacred religious object, and all these struggles give a perfect depiction of religious dimension in prose and poetry.

Despite the Age of skepticism and doubt in Religion, Middle English Literature considered religion as a significant subject which had an important place in social life, since men and women chose living in a religious way as a means to the afterlife. They were constantly in fear of hell and its torments and were vitally concerned with the problems of salvation for their poor souls. For this reason, sacred writings like Testaments, Authoritative Books and Scriptures were an integral part of Middle English Literature, such as the works of Miles Coverdale, William Langland, Julian of Norwich, William Tyndale, john Wycliffe and so on.

Consequently, they also inherited the belief that understanding these religious writing forms were essential to lead good lives and to ensure salvation. Although much of Christianity was still new, Old English poets adapted their own poetic language with its traditional themes to this material, often selecting subjects that would fit the existing conventions. It is not surprising, then, that much vernacular poetry such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is both narrative and didactic, and can be grouped under the general categories like Biblical Poetry, Poems about Christ, and Saints' Lives.

During these years of religious influence, Chaucer was writing *The Canterbury Tales*. His awareness of the events becomes quite apparent when we read his poems, and his own religious doubt and confusion are reasserted in the final moments of the last day of pilgrimage. Probably due to the fact that Chaucer had a clear and accurate idea of the political situation in England thanks to his different diplomatic positions, he allows us to catch a small fragments and images of the medieval Religious life, and the best example was in the story of *The Canterbury Tales* and the various roles that played these nine and twenty pilgrims when they face some struggles on the road. In fact the church and clergymen are shown in way that depicts perfectly how medieval people see these religious men and their church before and after "the self-seeking".

In the first lines and all along of the general prologue, Chaucer manages to introduce some of his pilgrims such as the Friar, the Parson and the Pardoner who seems to be Christians at the first glance, in brilliant and somewhat objective style. The narrator attempts to present their lives and their stories as they are, and not place their Roles based on his own judgment as he says:

Thogh that I pleynly speke in this matere,
To telle yow hir words and his chere;

Ne thogh I speke hir words properly.

For this ye knowen al so wel as I

(The Prologue: lines 727-730)

It is interesting to see in these lines how Chaucer tries to maintain an autonomous representation of the Middle Ages world. Despite his doubt on religion supremacy, without letting his own feelings interfere in the reality of the events, which took place in front of him, it could be argued that Chaucer's way of seeing people, their actions and the church, which completely influenced medieval society, must include some knowledge of the beliefs, practices and assumptions of medieval Catholicism.

Accordingly, the religious context cited previously is a useful tool of approaching some literary works. In fact, the Chaucerian literary text of *The Canterbury Tales* as it was noted in The Tyrwhitt edition, remains relevant since the Middle Ages period; actually, the message expressed behind the lines of *The Canterbury Tales* are still flourish today, certainly then, the events that occurred, conditions, and characteristics of this specific period will have deep impact on Chaucer's reader that permits them to imagine themselves as if they are in medieval England.

The idea of deducing what the author wants to show us is also a useful support as well as new historicism to enlighten modern readers who are no longer familiar with the allusions, words, and contexts used in the plays, and as a caution, it could serve as a notice that scholars can probably never identify the author's intentions. For instance, some poets often do not even know their own intentions in writing, the language and tone used in their literature always contain meanings that go beyond conscious or standard intention.

For this reason, the central focus of this academic work is not only exploring medieval history through this literary genre, but also studying the socio-historical background as a tool

that shaped Chaucer's poetry and affected it deeply, while deducing the author's intention. In other words, we will explain the hidden use of Chaucer's poetry in order to have a profound insight toward the Middle Ages history and religion changes.

2.3 **The Role of Religion in *The Canterbury Tales'* Pilgrims**

Geoffrey Chaucer seems to have respected and even admired honest Christians and the fact that he was himself one of them. Obviously, the reader of *The Canterbury Tales* should not be confused with Chaucer's attitude toward the church and his attitude toward Christianity, even when he recognizes that his era is full of venal and corrupted doctrines.

In the general prologue of this Mangum Opus, Chaucer criticizes the Church and insinuates that the Catholic Church is corrupt. Chaucer sketches some characters like the monk, the summoner, and the friar, who would traditionally be considered as holy men, as heavy sinners. In fact, Chaucer's critical view of the church is not subjective; he fights against all kind of hypocrisy.

The Canterbury Tales, as previously mentioned, expresses Chaucer's criticism towards different classes and their behaviour, duties, and particularly towards clerical whispers and their corruption. Indeed, all these conflicts between the religious power and secular one are represented in details through Chaucer's series of stories told by his favorite pilgrims. In fact, seven of these pilgrims were chosen for their detailed description, mainly through his skillful use of styles of speaking and gesticulating, such as the Prioress, Monk, Friar, Clerk, Parson, Summoner, and at very last the most distrust of them, the Pardoner that had actually deep connection with the Church, while the fourteen Remainders such as: the Knight, Squire, Yeoman, Merchant, Man of Law, Franklin, Cook, Shipman, Doctor of Physic, Wife of Bath, Ploughman, Miller, Manciple and the Reeve represent the secular figures.

A brief exploration will be done by analyzing selective parts of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales,* and its relationship with history through discussing three tales of three members of the regular clergy who are the Friar, the pardoner and the last that was no other than the most pious and trustful of all them, the parson.

2.3.1   The Friar's Prologue and Tale

In feudal society, friars were vagabonds or beggars who could not work but depended on the charity of others. Although they were supposed to be humble and modest, the Friar in Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is cheerful and wants to lead an easy life. Instead of ministering to lepers and beggars, as friars are supposed to do, this one cultivates relationships with rich men in order to make profit; in fact Chaucer used this description to illustrate how hypocrite these religious men were. Rather than the simple robes of a beggar, the Gluttonous and sinful friar wears expensive clothing.

Brother Hubert the Gluttonous Friar offers to tell the following story for the company, as a response to the Lady of Bath's Tale, it will be instead of others a funny story about a corrupt Summoner and mysterious Yeoman. The Host scolds the Friar to tell something else, but the Summoner interrupts and says that, if the Friar tells an offensive tale about a Summoner, he will in turn tell an offensive tale about a friar. The Friar's Tale is, indeed, offensive.

Thus, The Friar begins his Tale with a Summoner who works for an "erchedeken" who boldly carried out the Church's laws against fornication, witchcraft and lechery. Lechers received the greatest punishment, forced to pay significant tithes to the church. The archdeacon had a Summoner who was quite adept at discovering lechers, even though he himself was immoral.

The Friar points out violently the office of Summoner instead of the man, and he hides behind his own office, saying that the Summoner "han of us no jurisdiccioun" (Chaucer: line 1330), and at this point the Summoner interrupts the Friar's Tale, disagreeing. The Host allows the Friar to continue his tale, and he immediately continues to attack Summoners through his tale, and the fact that the character of the Friar's Tale would only summon those who had enough money to pay the Church, and will take half the charge himself, but he was also a thief enlisting the help of prostitutes who will reveal their customers to the Summoner in exchange for their own safety (and offer of sexual services).

The Friar continues his story about this lecherous Summoner. When he is traveling to issue a summons to an old widow in order to swindle money from her, The Summoner meets a Yeoman on the way. The Summoner claims to be a bailiff, knowing that his actual profession is so detested. The Yeoman offers hospitality to the Summoner. The two travels together and the Summoner asked where the Yeoman lived, intending to later rob him of the gold and silver he claimed to possess. The Summoner asks the yeoman how he makes money at his job, and the yeoman admits that he lives by extortion and theft; and the Summoner admits that he does the same.

The two reveal to each other their villainy, until The Yeoman reveals that he is in fact "a feend; my dwellyng is in helle" (Chaucer: line 1448), sent on business to his town. He tells The Summoner he could collect anything that is given to him. The Summoner agrees to be friends and split any earnings they make on their journey. The Summoner asks him why he is on earth; receiving the reply that sometimes devils are God's instruments. The devil claims that The Summoner will meet him again someday and have better evidence of hell than Dante or Virgil.

On their travels they find a carter whose wagon, loaded with hay, was stuck in the mud. "The devel have al, bothe hors and cart and hey!" (Chaucer: line 1547), cursed the carter, and The Summoner, taking the carter literally, implored the devil to take all of the carter's belongings. The devil comments that, although that is what he is literally saying, that is not what the carter means: "the carlspakoo thing, but he thoghte another" (Chaucer: line 1568). On the devil's encouragement, the carter prays to God, and beholds the horses pull the wagon from the mud.

They arrive finally at the old woman's home, and The Summoner begins to work his games, trying to swindle money from her. In her defense that she has done nothing wrong, with heartfelt the poor widow cursed the Summoner to Hell unless he repents for his false accusations. When he refuses to repent for his accusations, the devil hears this and tells The Summoner that he shall be in hell tonight. Upon these words, The Summoner and the devil disappeared into hell.

The Friar is the narrator of the story and his feelings towards the job of Summoners are very negative. In fact, there is a long hatred status between Friars and Summoners during the Middle Ages. And to envenom the situation, Summoners believed that Friars were corrupt and were not in their jurisdiction. And as a reaction, the Friars also believed the Summoners were corrupt and had no power to do anything. But in reality, Chaucer depicts the true problems in the church and the corruption that it contains through The Friar's Tale.

Moreover, Brother Hubert believes that Summoners and the Archdeacon are corrupt and some actions are needed to be taken against the corruption, claiming that The Summoners are worse than the devil, because the Devil has limits with his job, while the Summoner was none.

Through this brief introduction to the prologue and the tales of The Friar, Chaucer's reader could easily distinguish the typical figure of the Middle English Friars embodied by Hubert, the friar himself and the summoner of his tale, indeed, these angry and gluttonous characters are the perfect stereotype of corrupted churchmen, tricking people into giving them as much money and gifts as possible. In reality, Chaucer didn't mean to criticize or to comment on the immorality of all people through the Friar's story, but just to highlight some sensitive problem.

Accordingly, friars are similar to monks, but they live in the community among the people. These religious men were known for their corruption in the Middle Ages. As officials of the bishop, The Summoner's job was to summon people for sins they had committed against the Church. They often trumped up false charges to allow him to be bribed, and throughout the voice of The Friar, Chaucer's religious background is shown through the example of the lecherous summoner embodied in the tale. Actually, The Story is simply written with a basic language of that time, there are also few symbols or deep meanings, and this shows how Brother Hubert compensated his lack of intellect with his wittiness.

Moreover, the Friar's Tale, like the Reeve's Tale, appears to subsist for a single purpose which is the humiliation and degradation of certain members of a certain profession. Despite the fact that The Friar's tale exposed the means, by which summoners force people and blackmail them. In fact, Chaucer does not attack the church system that tolerated this to happen, on the contrary, lack of morality is demonstrated when the church allowed these pseudo-men of faith to represent the system, and exploited these effectives for the sake of the church.

Since he is a friar, he has vowed to renounce the world and commit himself to preaching to the poor and sick, this description further demonstrates the Friar's hypocrisy,

using religion only to gain money or making benefits with a possible salvation for rich sinners. For example, Brother Hubert is defined as a conventional Franciscans who takes vows of poverty, chastity and obedience by renouncing the material world and promising himself to preach the poor and sick, but while walking to Canterbury shrine, he reveals to be a skilful speaker, and a proven singer who can also play on rote, which is a thread musical instrument, like is shown on these lines:

> And certeinly he hadde a murye note:
>
> Welk oude he synge and pleyen on a rote
>
> Of yeddynges he baaroutrely the pris.
>
> (The friar Prologue: lines 235-237)

This portrayal of The Friar's Tale demonstrates how hypocritical he is all along the road. The narrator quickly turns from his severe criticism of the Friar's religious practices to talk about the Friar's ability of well-playing a musical instrument. He follows this with a list of the Friar's other attributes, all of which make him good at pleasing others socially and bad at being a Friar.Additionally, in medieval literature performing with musical instruments has an erotic connotation and Chaucer used this as allusion to interact on many incidents or events that take place in *The Canterbury Tales*. Through this reference the poet reveals the growing of the anti-clerical emotions in the fourteenth century.

The leading character of The Friar's Tale is an objective picture of all Summoners and Friarsthat give the impression to be good orators with charming voices, something that certainly benefits him when soliciting donations, in fact, this attention to detail about the way in which the Friar communicates, suggests that the Friar cautiously constructed this aspect.

The narrator claims that this lisp makes the Friar's English more sweet, suggesting that he speaks in this way to more effectively seduce those who might give him money. The Friar

is therefore not only hypocrite, but intentionally manipulative. As it described in these following lines:

> In alle the orders foure is noon that kan
>
> So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage
>
> He hadde maadful many a marriage
>
> Of yonge wommen at his owene cost.
>
> Unto his ordre he was a noble post,
>
> (The friar prologue: lines 210-215)

While sweet and pleasant seems positive at the first sight, The Friar characteristics are actually a biting criticism against all medieval clergymen. In the medieval era, the capacity to give a true confession was directly linked with someone's ability to get into heaven. The confessing people are forgiven by The Friar, they will not doing true repentance for their sins and will not get into heaven. Thus, the Friar's pleasant behavior actually makes them harmful;

Thereby, it will be easier for us to understand *The Canterbury Tales'* imagery that depict the medieval people's attitude toward ecclesiastics, who only care about retaining their rich friends and their wives than purging their souls of sin, and the next quote illustrates perfectly how Chaucer use this metaphors to rise people awareness:

> For many a man so harde is of his herte,
>
> He may natwepe, al thogh
>
> hym soore smerte;
>
> Therfore in stede of wepynge and preyeres
>
> Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres.
>
> His typet was ay farsed ful of knyves
>
> And pynnes, for to yeven yonge wyves.
>
> (The friar prologue: lines 228-234)

Finally, The Friar's Tale reminds us of being vigilant on what we ardently desire. The devil seems to take words literally, and whether you mean them or not, can decide to act upon them as he pleases, as long as they have been. As Chaucer's Tales look dangerously close to blasphemy, the Friar's Tale warns that anything said can be used against who said it and Chaucer himself was no exception.

2.3.2 The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale

Considered as the most significant character in *The Canterbury Tales*, The Pardoner is the lively proof that church representatives were also corrupt in the late fourteenth century. Going around the towns and getting money for selling their fake relics and absolution for sinners, this secular clergy man is dishonest and does not respect the rules of Catholic Church. Indeed, The Pardoner described in lines 689-734 of the General Prologue, only encourages his clients with a story that illustrates the dangers of the love of money, often saying it repeatedly in Latin "*Radix Malorum Est Cupiditas*[3]", and also exploiting peasants' faith to make wealth. In fact throughout this character, Chaucer illustrates how avarice and the desire for money lead to corruption and other wrongdoing, such as drunkenness, abuse of trust, gambling, and blasphemy, and so on.

In practice, many Pardoners of Middle Ages sold their pardons, which were documents from the church to grant indulgences and forgiving people's sins. Pardoners were in theory supposed to grant them only to people who showed great charity, not to make wealth for themselves or the Church. But this last one preaches only because he is able to make money for himself. In this final description of the Pardoner, the narrator seems to move away from his pertinent criticism of the Pardoner's hypocrisy to praise his preaching methods. In fact, He doesn't apologize for what he does wrong, but he admits that he's very good at it because he

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3 The love of money is the root of all evil.

makes a lot of money by doing it. He tells us that the Pardoner sure knows how to give a speech and win over the crowd in these following lines:

> He moste preche, and welaffile his tonge
>
> To wynne silver, as he fulwel koude;
>
> Therfore he song the murierly and loude.
>
> (The pardoner's prologue: 714-716 lines)

Before The Pardoner begins telling his tale the Physician tells his, and which is a sad story leaving the host so upset that he asks the group for a happier one. The Pardoner agrees to tell the next tale, which he promises to be happier and it will have both literal symbolic meaning about what is right and wrong in human behavior.

To begin with, the Pardoner informs the company about what he does for existing. He says that he is a church officer who travels the countryside by selling pardons and false relics in order to make money, and not for saving the souls of those he preaches to, as it follows:

> Myne handes and my tonge goon so yerne
>
> That is joye to se my bisynesse.
>
> (The General Prologue: 398-399)

Also, he tells the others that he uses narratives with morals to swindle people of their wealth. Subsequently, the theme of this story is greed, one of the seven deadly sins that Chaucer treats as a reflection of wider condemnation of the medieval Church. he repeats that his theme is always "love of Money is the root of all evil" (Timothy, *The Bible 6:10*, King James version) because, with this text, he can denounce the very vice that he practices, greed. And even though he is guilty of the same sins he preaches against, he can still make other people repent. The Pardoner admits that he likes money, rich food, and fine living. And even if he is not a moral man, he can tell a good moral tale with an allegory exemplum in order to make a point.

Therefore, the pardoner starts his telling about three rioters; and all they ever really do is drinking and gambling. Here there is a long rage by The Pardoner about the evil power of greed, drunkenness, and gambling.

The rioters' story takes place during the time of the Black Plague, and they are still in the tavern in the morning when they see a funeral procession go by. They ask who has died, and a man in the tavern tells them it was one of their friends. When they ask who killed him, they learn from the bartender that he was Death, so these three drunken rioters resolved to destroy death thereafter an old man tells then where death is, but instead of finding the death, they find a golden treasure.

One of the rioters sends the second away for bread and wine, and plans with the third to kill the second. Meanwhile, the second buys poison to kill the others, ironically, he was the first to die. Exactly as second had planned it, they killed him on his return, and sat down to enjoy the wine before burying his body, as it happened, the two remainders drank the poison and died. The tale ends with a short sermon against sin, asking God to forgive the trespass of good men, and warning them against the sin of avarice.

At the end of the tale, the Pardoner suddenly remembers that he has forgotten one thing that he is carrying relics and pardons in his "male" and begins to invite the pilgrims forward to receive pardon. In fact this story is a perfect example that stresses the danger of the sin of avarice and love of money that can conduct to total destruction.

Chaucer uses here the secular clergy to demonstrate how the major representatives of the Church are also corrupt in late fourteenth century; in fact, this pardoner is undoubtedly one of the most analysed and academically discussed pilgrims from *The Canterbury Tales*. Ironically, this character represents in some ways all the hidden desire of wealth and the pursuit of worldly pleasure that Contemporary medieval Church strongly disapprove.

Yet, it is comprehensible that through the behaviour of this pilgrim, Chaucer gives us a perfect representation of how corrupt was the Catholic Church during his time.

Hypothetically then, *The Pardoner's Tale* could be interpreted by Chaucer's to show how avarice is the root of all evils, and is at the opposite ends of Christ.the Church accumulation of wealth in fourteenth century leads to corruption of churchmen. This subject became the central themes in the literary arts such as *The Canterbury Tales.*

2.3.3   The Parson's Tale

In *The Canterbury Tales*, except some characters like the Clerk and the Parson, all the pilgrims who have relation to Church, have lives far detached from what might be expected in people of their vocation as it was seen during the fourteenth century. In fact their lives are full of greed, lechery, and all other manner of sins. But at the end of the tale, we encounter an honorable character, The Parson. Chaucer intends to use this sixteenth character to give a moral message to the reader.

In contrast to the characters cited above, Chaucer portraits The Parson as an ideal of Christianity, that must serve as a good example to his parishioners. Indeed through the lines of *The Canterbury Tales*, this pious figure is actually pleasing his vows and obligations as it should be for all corrupt clergymen of medieval era. He provides also a point of comparison for the previous figures of religion and their tales, like The Summoner, The Friar and The Monk, who appear to be not. While The Parson lives the mandatory life of poverty and behaves holy and virtuous in all things, The Friar is living the high life. As the Parson gives to the poor out of his own meager salary, the Friar takes the last penny from everyone, even poor widows who do not even have shoes, as it is mentioned in these following lines:

For thogh a wydwe had enoght a sho,

So plesaunt was his "In principio"

Yet wolde he have a [ferthyng](#), er he wente;

(The friar prologue: 255-257 lines)

In fact, The Parson pays careful attention to the words of the Gospel, applying them to his own life; whereas the Monk disregards scriptures declaring them valueless. And so it goes. Actually, each character is highlighted by his opposite side as the antagonist for the protagonist in order to have full effect on Chaucer's reader, and develops some awareness toward several and often neglected Tales that includes Chaucer's own Tale "Melibee", and above all, the final Parson's Tale and Chaucer's Retraction that concludes it.

At this decisive point, Chaucer gives the last of his tales to this pious priest who is actually seen for a fading person. Chaucer's own doubt is clearly maintained when he keeps the last sitting nearby some village indefinite in *The Canterbury Tales*. The allegorical interpretation behind this intention bears strong evidence to the running dispute between religious doctrines and religious doubt in Chaucer's mind. This is especially true when we come closer to Chaucer questioning how the world is running (Brewer, D, ed. Writers and their Background: Chaucer, London: G. Bell and Sons, 1974: 270).But his doubt is finally vanishing when he gets the answer through the lengthy medieval sermon of the parson, when he explicitly draws attention to the difficulty of how can we expect from simple citizen to live a sanctified life, if saints cannot do so?

While other books may leave the moral of their stories open for interpretation, the lesson in *The Parson's Tale* is abundantly clear: "repent! Before it's too late":

And this [figure](#) he added [eek](#) therto

That if gold ruste, what shaliren do?

For if a preest be [foul](#), on whom we truste,

No wonder is a [lewed man](#) to ruste;

And shame it is, if a prest take keep,

A [shiten](#) shepherde and a clene sheep.

Weloghte a preest [ensample](#) for to yive,

By his [clennesse](#), how that his sheep sholde lyve

(The Parson Prologue: Lines 501-508)

In fact the message that Chaucer tended to give us, is through this sermon which takes place when The Manciple's Tale had finished. The Host turns to this old man and earnestly requires him to "knytte up wel a greet mateere[4]" tell the final story, but the strict aged parson says that the pilgrims will get from him no romance, poems, fable or even funny tale because they are full of sin that, since he is not "textueel", he reply that instead of this, he has a sermon designed for those who wish to make the final mortal pilgrimage to the Heavenly Jerusalem or Celestial City. Everyone agreed that it was the best way to end the project, and asked The Host to give The Parson the instruction to tell the final tale.

The Parson's Tale is not actually a tale, but a sermon which deals with the question of repentance. The first part of his sermon describes the different steps of repentance starting with remorse, confession and ending with the satisfaction when someone confesses the cause of his guilt. The second part of the sermon considers confession, which is the honest revelation of the sinner's sin to the priest. Sin is then explained as the struggle between the body and soul for dominance of a person, and as a direct cause there are two types of sin, pardonable and deadly. The third part of the sermon gives as imagery of the seven deadly sins, considered as branches of a tree of which Pride is the trunk. Pride is the worst of the sins, because the other sins such as wrath, Envy, Sloth, Avarice, Gluttony and Lechery all stem

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4To conclude a huge matter

from Pride. Each sin's description is followed by its spiritual remedy and the Parson shapes the rules for oral confession.

Following this come back to the subject of repentance, the final lines seem to propose, images of the sun and the morning, a kind of revelation of Paradise, bodies which were foul and dark become brighter than the sun, the body formerly sick and feeble becomes eternal, in a place where no one feels hunger or cold. And as an answer to all the corruption of his time, Chaucer's final lines of *The Canterbury Tales* conclude the description of this paradise attainable only by avoiding sins.

The Parson's Tale is one of the longest of all the tales, and it seems even longer because of the boring recital on abstract virtues and vices. Undoubtedly, the Parson preaches with all the force that he had, and he ends with the persuasive image of the goal of man's pilgrimage, that is, heaven and immortality.

It is rather obvious from some of the tales told by the pilgrims, and particularly by some of those connected with the ecclesiastical organization that the church of Chaucer's time had fallen upon evil days and it seems so ironically that a poor parson gave advice for a clergy in order to save their souls. It is appropriate, therefore, that the tales should end with the high moral tone of the Parson's sermon. This sermon can also function as a proper preparation for the visit to the Canterbury shrine, and finally, it seems to lead naturally to Chaucer's *Retraction* "of whos soule Jhesu Crist have mercy".

The narrator then asks the reader to pray for him that Christ has mercy on his sins and forgives him his numerous violation, mainly of his translations of *The Book of Troilus*, *The Book of Fame*, *The Book of the twenty five ladies*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The Book of the Parliament of Birds*, and *The Tales of Canterbury* which are not except worldly vanities.

Actually *The Canterbury Tales* is an estate satire written ironically by Geoffrey Chaucer; in fact Chaucer compiles a mixture of stories on a pilgrimage into allegorical portrayal of the medieval society and its religious doctrines that influence medieval people. Chaucer makes his collection of stories very enjoyable for an average reader who encounters this archetypal medieval writer for the first time, indeed this genius author makes his story more pleasant, especially his crafty use of subtexts and irony. Many of Chaucer's characters are ironic in the sense that they are so far from what we would expect in the roles they portray. Every character has his distinct personality with his own behavioral qualities and defaults. The poet also uses irony in his joking when the events emerge without predictable order and precipitancy. Actually cited for his combination between money and religion, The Friar, beside others pilgrims, is also considered an ironic character in his individuality, or due to his corruption:

In alle the orders foure is noon that kan

So muchel of daliaunce and fair langage.

He hadde maadful many a marriage

Of yonge wommen at his owene cost.

Unto his ordre he was a noble post,

(The Friar's Prologue: Lines 210-214)

Clearly then, the reader will be surprised as he discovers that The Friar actually impregnates women and then marries them to men. This is one of the best quotes that show Chaucer's passion in his *Canterbury Tales*, adding to the appeal of the reader. Frequently Chaucer uses humor ironically to add some interest on the story by pushing the reader to use his imagination and identify himself the author's environment and time.

Generally then, this unfinished pilgrimage becomes powerful with irony, supported then with vivid images and allegories of the fourteenth century, it makes Chaucer's writings more understandable. In addition, the impact of religion during Chaucer's time combined with his legendary imagination by way of irony, humorousness, and intelligence makes *The Canterbury Tales* so interesting to study. For those who have no religious dimension in their lives, it may not seem obvious at first read, but Chaucer's work is not only entertaining, but it is also thoughtful work that takes not only the socio-historical and religion context, but more than that. It also traces the sentimental side of the period by identifying what we call today, the three characteristics of Middle Ages literature which are chivalry**,** magic**,** and romance that deal with a knight's love for a woman. Thus the following chapter will focus on the romantic side of *The Canterbury Tales*.

Chapter Three
Literary Context of The Canterbury tales

Accordingly, every word that we use in our current lives has to have a specific environment; it could be a historical, religious aspect with spiritual goals or even a message that expresses the author's emotions. From different perspectives, these words could be very important in shaping meanings. It's very important that as we read Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, we clew directly in the context of what is going on. Subsequently if we are going to well-read medieval literary work, we need to read it within a specific atmosphere that deals with various elements of the work such as medieval history, religious corruption and even romances.

The religion and ancient literature constitute the environment that paved the way to *The Canterbury Tales*; indeed, this background provides tools to the reader to well understand Chaucer's work. For this reason, *The Canterbury Tales* is used as historical literature which relates history through the author's eyes. Undeniably then, Chaucer has used his particular style of language, ironical tone, and content according to what he knows, in order to attract his own audience. In fact Chaucer's audience is varied since he targets all his society without distinction in contrast to other authors of his time and ours.

As a pertinent illustration of what is said about targeting a specific audience, we have the novel series of Stephanie Meyer, *Twilight,* which targets primarily younger female audiences. Similarly, J. K Rowling and her famous series of *Harry Potter* that became an epic hit, and which also targets young audiences, or adult fantasy fiction lovers. In our case, if Chaucer's readers ignore the cultural context that establishes the basis of medieval literature, they may fail to notice some critical aspects of the story's goal which are the confessions through Tales, repentance of the sinners, and forgiveness at the end of the journey.

Accordingly, this third chapter of our research is devoted to study the literary side of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* and its influences on the reader. Dealing with the sentimental side of medieval era, this Magna Opus confirms us how romance is viewed during that time of history. In fact, by using new historicism approach, we will identify the real meaning of love and desire through his various characters; indeed, there is no complete definition to the word "Romance" but when we see it through the author's vision, we can understand that he was talking about the most popular literary genre of the Middle Ages.

Originally, the use of romance in English poetry goes back before the seventeenth century, where the unique use of this word is only to describe imagination and inventiveness in storytelling and also to characterize scenery and paintings. In fact, a *"romance"* originally is a type of story that was written in a romance language, specifically, the languages developed as offspring of Latin in regions that had once been Roman provinces. From these languages come French, Spanish, and Italian, and other romance languages which have become later a powerful instrument of awareness between the hands of Chaucer.

Since these stories were largely written about love and adventure, the word romantic became associated with them over the years. Moreover, these stories also were frequently set in a scenic area; the phrase "romantic spot" became associated with beautiful settings as opposed to those that were unattractive or ordinary. In modern French the word for novel is still roman, while in English a *romance* is a type of novel.

Actually, the word itself suggests adventure, scenic beauty, improbability, or even love. Conversely, something described as romantic does not necessarily possess all of this distinctiveness. For example, charming beauty is not impossible, and adventures are not necessarily fantasy with all its fairy tales elements which is considered as medieval romance too. Despite the fact that medieval romances were widely popular between the fifth and

sixteenth centuries, and have represented the massiveness of literary production at the time, such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* composed in prose as well as in verse; however in the seventeenth century, the popularity of the genre was already declining, and writers were beginning to explore other possibilities of expression. We may say so that medieval romance literature received its final death in 1615 when the second part of Miguel de Cervantes' book, *Don Quixote* was published.

At this point of the research, it will be prejudicial to not mention the literary definition and the real impact of chivalric romance on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, also called the medieval romance. This kind of literary genre with its fabliaux and courtly love 'stories had a huge influence during Chaucer's time. For this reason, it is imperative to initiate our discussion about the question of love and desire in *The Canterbury Tales* with a meticulous examination of Chaucer's literary genres and influences that conducted him to create his fabulous work. While it is tempting to the contemporary reader to view the collection as a non-changing work of literature, the tales as they are written, were profoundly influenced by the literary conventions which have dominated that period of time. For instance, in the Miller's Tale, Chaucer borrowed the fabliau genre to create a literary piece in the English vernacular; equally important with this idea, The Knight's Tale leans also profoundly on the romance tradition. To explore how these literary expectations are subverted in the tales, we must first examine the conventions of each literary genre which forms a whole in medieval romance literature.

3.1 **Medieval Romance Literature**

It is thorny to define romance when scholars such as C.S Lewis, D.W Robertson, E. Talbot Donaldson and Gaston Paris disagree with both the nature and origin of it. Probably then, Romance is as tyle of writing that modern viewers associate with the medieval period, up till

now, the etymology of the word is obtained from another French word which is "roman a clé[1]", which initially designated the narrative works composed in that vernacular that first emerged in twelfth century France. In fact, the usual Texts that we have described as "romance" is generally associated with chivalric codes, quests, courtly loves, and magic, Indeed, as Mark Girouard asserts in his book, *The Return to Camelot: "Chivalry and the English Gentleman, courtly love and chivalric systems* had a powerful influence not only on the realm of Romantic and Victorian fiction, but on Victorian life and manners as well"(New Haven, Conn.: Yale University Press, 1981).

Definitively then, medieval historicists term the appearance of Romance in England with the Norman settlers, while a single romance in Old English such as *Apollonius of Tyre*[2], survives from the years immediately prior to the Norman Conquest. Many of the earliest romances are written in the Anglo-Norman dialect of middle aged French and some of these are translated into Middle English later on. So, the Middle English romance begin to appear frequently in the midst of fourteenth century, and some of the most famous English romances such as *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* and the romances included in some tales of Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, are in fact, the exact definition of what we called today, the English romance with its struggles.

Actually, the definition cannot be limited to romance in the English language, because so many of the early texts from England are Anglo-Norman productions. Some texts that could readily be characterized as romance were also written in Latin. In addition, Middle French texts were often adapted, and at last translated into English, so the category of "English

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1*Roman a clé:* according to Merriam Webster Dictionary, it is a French term that means novel with a key, is a novel about real life, overlaid with a façade of fiction, or uses fictitious names to present thinly veiled depictions of well-known people or events.

2*Apollonius of Tyre:* chief personage in a medieval romance of unknown authorship, which may be assumed to derive from a lost Greek original. The story enjoyed long and widespread popularity in European literature, and versions of it exist in many languages. The story tells of the separation of Apollonius from his wife and daughter (whom he thinks dead) and his ultimate reunion with them after many travels.

romance" is not necessarily limited to stories that initiate in England itself. Nevertheless, romance of English language also presents certain features or emphases that could be described as unique. The interest in romantic love is generally less pronounced than in French texts. This is why England with its Politic anxiety is the best material of the Arthurian narratives particularly when the tendency is to explore worries and quarrels over political territories and powers.

Usually, the English romance is written in verse and not in prose as it was imagined by many, with over eighty verse romances surviving in Middle English. Vernacular prose romance arrives later in England, and only flourishing in the late fifteenth century. The body of surviving prose romances is relatively small but includes one of the most celebrated of all Middle English texts, Malory's *Morte Darthur* that have illuminated the complexity of the genre as Geoffrey Chaucer does latterly in his period, and making it romance so famous.

Consequently, this term which is originally referred to writing in a "romanz" language is urbanized freely into a literary genre if we may say so; however, it seems that in late Middle Ages, there has been a better understanding of romance as a distinctive mode. In fact, the notions of genre, however, remained much more fluid than our personal interpretation of the literary work. indeed on one occasion, a literary work might be a depiction of misfortune, olden times, and even love stories, as is the work of Chaucer on *Troilus and Criseyde*, or his work on *The Canterbury Tales* when he has sketched the saint's life and fable through the Clerk's Tale and the Man of Law's Tale, or comedy and romance, as is *the Merchant's Tale*.

It is possible to notice this kind of literary genre in Chaucer or Shakespeare; indeed both poets have exploited the theatrical and dramatic possibilities of shifts in genre and irony in tone, language, and subject matter. It is also obvious that Chaucer distinguished perfectly between the genres of romance that we might consider as label metrical or classical romance,

or even Arthurian romance. It is noticed that Chaucer uses the word "romanz" only rarely, and never uses it to describe any of his own literary works.

3.2 Love and Desire in *The Canterbury Tales*

Since the creation of literature, there are always literary works that speak about olden times, social orders, challenges, and passions or even love stories with its good and bad sides.

The owner of the Tabard Inn, "Harry Bailey", who volunteers to travel with the pilgrims, reveals throughout his guidance and arbitration in disputes, the real concept of love that has instigated the majority of desire, melancholy, misery, and even comedy that occurs in *The Canterbury Tales*. considered as a judge of the telling tales, the host highlights through his manners the central theme of all the stories, which reveals at last that love is the leading one; the reader initiates a profound journeys to discover or to gain the real sense of adoration in itself, even if it is avoided in some cases in cause of embarrassments, pains, and constant struggles.

According to the general editor of *The Riverside Chaucer*, Larry, D, Benson, an expert on Chaucer at Harvard University believes that all what esteemed in this love styles of olden times, are not only the themes of pain or constant struggle, and undoubtedly not the obligation of infidelity against the loved one, but to reveal the real sense of respect and adoration.

In other words, love is not only virtuous in it but is the real source and cause of all the other virtues, that indeed one cannot be virtuous unless he is a lover. That idea, as might be expected, comes from one of Chaucer's predecessor that has influenced the majority of his works, Ovid.

In reality, this famous poet of ancient times has used courtly love in his literary work *Amores*, where he teasingly overturns the whole Roman value's system, and one could

understand something of the same light-hearted use of the "world turned upside down" in Andreas and Chrétien 's novel.(*Œuvres de Froissart*, ed. Kervyn de Lettenhove. Reprinted in 1867-1877: 546), especially when L.D. Benson gives us a perfect illustration in his well-known work on *Courtly Love and Chivalry in The Later Middle Ages*, when he depicts pertinently the Countess Marie of Champagne and the younger members of her court who are delighted by the amuse, if improbable, idea of a world ruled by women, in which all the handsome young men faithfully served their ladies for the sake of love, rather than their loutish feudal lords for the sake of plunder. One suspects that Marie's husband, Count Henry, is not amused. Marie is the patron of Chrétien's Lancelot: Henry patronized the composition of the *Vengeance Alexandre*, a good old-fashioned chanson de *geste*, in which religion, loyalty to one's lord, and the smashing of heads are the main concerns:

> I need hardly add, there is no nonsense about love in the *Vengeance Alexandre*. Its author praises Count Henry for his piety, his prowess, and his riches, and he hails him as the new Alexander. That is the sort of thing a great nobleman of the twelfth century liked to hear. One can well imagine what the count would have thought if someone tried to compare him, not to Alexander, but to Lancelot -- a knight who was neither pious nor rich, who was indeed an adulterer, guilty of sin with the wife of his own liege lord. Henry was liege lord of a good many knights, and the idea that Lancelot's way of carrying on was virtuous, was the very source of chivalric virtue, must have seemed to him downright pernicious. (240)

However in the late of Middle Ages, the idea that love is the source of chivalric high merit becomes normal as it is cited by Chaucer through his one of his symbolic pilgrims: The knight that will be discussed lately. In fact, it is seen by many Englishmen that courtly loves and fabliaux are ordinary things in courtly romances genre, and even in the "realistic" genre of literature. Indeed, it seems to be accepted by many as sober fact, rather than consider this type of romances as scandalous love stories that might influence the reader mind by some obscenity.

Accordingly, in all periods of time, in all forms of literary genres, love has always found its place within the lexis of its authors and influenced them in both soul and writings. In fact,

the dreams that readers create about love could be changed radically from one perspective to another or in our case reading a Chaucerian text to another. However, it is safe to say that when reading romance stories, the type of love is immediately recognizable thanks to the unusual behavior and the intense desires of the characters also called "the love sickness of heroes" according to the famous seventeenth writer, Robert Burton and his book, *Anatomy of Melancholy.*

The understanding of love the characters feel is put to an intense that is unrecognizable to what we know as modern day love. Almost all of *The Canterbury Tales* contain love and lovers who act upon the conventions and standards of courtly love such as the wife of bath, the esquire (the son of the knight) and the first of them, the knight. Indeed, Chaucer was greatly influenced by the courtly romances of his predecessors such as Giovanni Boccaccio; whose famous work *The Decameron* shares some similarities with *The Canterbury Tales*.

At this juncture of this research, we intend to explore the influence of courtly love and fabliaux on Chaucer's *The Canterbury tales*; in fact, among these nine and twenty pilgrims that the reader has learned in the general prologue, we discover also that The Host has created a sort of game among these travelers to kill time; indeed each pilgrim will tell a story, and the best one will be rewarded with a free copious meal upon their return to London. In this section, we will examine some selected tales that deal with the themes of love and desire.

3.2.1   The knight Tale:

There is no other period that discusses courtly loves and fabliaux as frequently as the medieval era. In *The Canterbury Tales*, Geoffrey Chaucer manages to inform the reader about his different tales that trace the lives of human beings, from the beginning of life which

naturally involves with love, until it ends with death, as it was illustrated in these following lines coming from the mouth of the most charismatic pilgrim, The Knight:

> This world nys but aathurghfareful of wo,
>
> And we been pilgrymes, passinge to and fro,
>
> Deeth is an ende of every worldly soore.
>
> (The knight's tale: line 1989-1991)

Before examining the complex shape of love and it complete rejection in The Miller's Tale through the fabliau in the second part of this chapter, it is appropriate to offer an instance of a brief depiction of courtly romance and the ideals of courtly love. In fact, through Chaucer's use of righteous characters such as The Knight and The Squire, he presents to his readers the medieval ideal of the courtly romance. Indeed, Chaucer's description of The Knight embodies many of the aspects of the ideal man in a courtly romance. As he puts it in the general prologue:

> A KNYGHT ther was, and that a worthy man,
>
> That fro the tyme that he first bigan.
>
> To riden out, he loved chivalrie,
>
> Trouthe and honour, fredom and curteisie,
>
> Ful worthy was he in his lords were,
>
> (The general prologue: line 43-47)

The class of Knight is considered as the ideal status associated with nobility, this category had a perfect balance between gentle goodness and masculinity in terms of war prowess for example. Consequently, The Knight described by Chaucer is also well-worn in heroic battle, wise, fair, and gentle. In fact the only idea of acting in the name of a lady loved would make him a braver and better knight. Moreover, his son also meets many of the principles of an honorable noble man of medieval times and also fits the description of a courtly lover perfectly. Chaucer portrays him in these words:

With hymther was his sone, a yong SQUIER,

A lovyere and a lusty bacheler;

With lokkes crulle, as they were leyd in presse.

(General Prologue: line 79-81)

In other words, the knight illustrated by Chaucer in his *The Canterbury Tales* represents one of the chivalric aspect of medieval era, or the moral of courtly love. Each knight of the medieval period was required to follow certain moral codes. Unlike the Knight of *The Canterbury Tales*, who is portrayed as more in terms that are related to his great courage, this is clearly the courtly romantic figure with his soft tresses and focus on courtly love and it morality.

The Knight begins his tale with a courtly love triangle between two knights, who both fall in love for the same lady. As a starting point of his telling challenge, Chaucer starts on his *Canterbury Tales* by attracting the reader with The Knight's Tale, as this last one initiates his narrative with a prince named Theseus, who married Hippolyta, the queen of Scythia, and brought her with her sister, Emelye, back to Athens with him after conquering the Amazon queendom of "Femenye" by virtue of his prowess:

What with his wysdom and his chivalrie;

He conquered al the regne of Femenye,

That whilom was ycleped Scithia,

And weddede the queeneYpolita,

And broghte hir hoom with hym in his contree,

(The knight's tale: lines 7-11)

When Theseus returns home victorious, he encounters women dressed in black, knelt at the side of the highway, screaming. The oldest of them asks Theseus for pity. She told him that she is once the wife of King Cappaneus who is destroyed at Thebes, and that all of the

other women lost their husbands. Creon, the lord of the town, had simply thrownthe dead bodies of the soldiers in a single pile and refused to burn or bury them.

Theseus swears vengeance upon Creon, and immediately orders his armies toward Thebes. Theseus vanquished Creon, and when the soldiers are disposing of the bodies they find two young knights, Arcite and Palamon, two royal cousins, not quite dead. Theseus orders that they be imprisoned in Athens for life. They pass their time imprisoned in a tower in Athens until they see Emelye in a nearby garden. Both fall immediately in love with her. Palamon compared her to Venus, and prayed escape from the prison; similarly, Arcite claimed that he will rather be dead than not have Emelye. The two fight over her, each calling the other a traitor.

This happens on a day in which Pirithous, a prince and childhood friend of Theseus had come to Athens. Pirithous has known Arcite at Thebes, and at his request, Theseus set Arcite free on the promise that Arcite will never again be seen in Theseus' kingdom. He now had his freedom, but not the ability to pursue Emelye, and lamented the cruelty of fate. Palamon, however, envies Arcite, since he does now have the option of raising an army against Theseus to conquer Athens. The Knight asks which of the nobles has it worse: Arcite, who has his freedom but not access to Emelye, or Palamon, who can see Emelye but remains a prisoner?

As one possibility among many others, The Knight's Tale was written before the creation of *The Canterbury Tales*; so it has the curious status of being both a part of the tales as a whole, but also a separate work of literature in its own right. It is a free version of a narrative fashioned by Boccaccio, an Italian writer who seems clearly that Chaucer admired, in fact, by adding some philosophical material as he regularly does, Chaucer shows us in

pertinent way his profound influence by Boethius, his philosophical hero, when the king Theseus speak for the first time in the story.

The Tale is undeniably a "romance". It seems apparently a story of many hundreds of years in the past told by an important and respected figure, in our case The Knight. However Chaucer never simply adopts a literary tradition without commenting on it.For instance, the matter of status has risen at the end of The General Prologue, especially when The Host has picked The Knight as the first teller, in order to directly raise the rank by the progression of the tale. In reality, The Knight starts not with the main characters of the tale, Arcite and Palamon, but instead, he initiates at the top of the society, describing the exploits of Theseus of Athens, working descending until he reaches the less distinguished Theban soldiers. Moreover, the tale is deeply improbable in all sorts of ways, situations, and moral questions it poses seem more important than the qualities of the individual characters.

Again, The Knight set the scene to his love story two years after as he follows his narrative when Arcite, who spends the whole time in Thebes, dreams that he see the god Mercury standing before him one night, requesting him to be free of hope and care, and telling him to go to Athens to relieve his woe. Arcite decides to disguise himself, return to Athens and pass unknown.

Arriving at the court, Arcite offers his services, and takes a post with Emelye's steward under the name of Philostratus. Arcite worked as a page in Emelye's house and is so well loved that Theseus soon makes him squire of his chamber. Meanwhile Palamon had lived for seven years in his dungeon, before, eventually, he escaped from the tower and fled the city, with the intention of disguising himself and making toward Thebes. That morning Arcite goes horseback riding. In the area outside of the city, he dismounts and begins to speak to himself, lamenting life without Emelye. Palamon, overhearing, leaps out and reveals himself to Arcite.

Since neither had weapons, they make a vow to meet in the same place tomorrow and fight to the death over Emelye.

They returns the next day armed for battle. At the same time, and in the same place, Theseus, Hippolyta and Emelye are out hunting, and, reaching the area where Arcite and Palamon are fighting, Theseus stops the battle. Palamon tells Theseus that Arcite is the man who was banished, while he himself is the escaped prisoner. He also tells Theseus that both men love Emelye. Theseus orders the death of both, but the queen and Emelye takes pity on the two men, and beg Theseus for mercy. Considering how much they loved Emelye to risk death by not escaping to Thebes, Theseus asks them to swear that they will never make war against any realm of his. Theseus then decides that the two will wage war on each other, each with one hundred knights, in order to decide whom Emelye will marry.

Here again, the two knights in love, Arcite and Palamon are characterized in the tale as loyal to just one person, that is their lady love Emelye. In fact, this system of love, just as the chivalric one, is a system of knightly behavior, appeared for the first time in French literature, this sang ballads if we may say so, which troubadours sing, are always about the secret and illicit love of knights for noblewomen.

Actually, the lady in a chivalrous love story such as Emelye is always placed and represented as a perfect creature in every way that the knights sensibly worship. Indeed, the love for a fair lady makes the knights stronger and more honorable as it is revealed by Arcite and Palamon. In any case, we have two codes of behavior and two knights that defend these values, chivalry and courtly love; in The Knight's Tale we get to see what happens when the two codes clash. Palamon and Arcite are confirmed brother knights; they should be prepared to do anything to protect one another. But when they both fall into what we call courtly love,

they have to be ready to do anything to win their prize (Emelye), even if they must break their friendship. And that was the question The Knight's Tale wants us to think about;

Through The knight's Tale, Chaucer implants the themes of Order, chivalry, and courtly love in the reader's mind to emphasize and illustrate the romance side of his literary work full, of bravery, honor courtesy, fairness to enemies and respect for women. As the story comes to an end, the reader discovers how really courtly love is viewed by the knight or Chaucer himself.

At the end of the year as it is promised by the king, Arcite and Palamon, each at the head of one hundred knights, return to Athens for the joust. Theseus welcomes them all and entertains them in high fashion. On the evening before the battle, Palamon, Emilie, and Arcite pray. Palamon prays to Venus, goddess of love; Emilie prays to Diana, goddess of chastity; and Arcite prays to Mars, god of war. All receive a vision indicating that their prayers will be answered. The three prayers and resulting promises cause confusion in Heaven until Saturn, god of destiny, promises that Palamon will win his love and Arcite will win the battle.

The battle begins, and after much pageantry and heroic fighting, Palamon is badly wounded and taken from the field. Arcite is declared the winner. Saturn sends a fury from Pluto to make the horse of Arcite shy. Wounded then, Arcite is carried to Theseus' palace. As he lies dying, Arcite recognizes that he knows no person better than Palamon and begs Emelye to accept Palamon as her husband. Arcite dies and Theseus arranges a great funeral for him. After a long period of mourning, Palamon and Emelye are married and live out their lives inconstant love.

At the end of the first tale, Chaucer embodied by the knight's voice has implied that life of man is in all ways influenced by what appears to be chance or fortune, but actuality after this unexpected end, it shows that God's will controls the opportunities of the world; As

for this lady also, at the beginning of the tale lament the severity of destiny. By chance, Emilie walks beneath the prison. Later, again by chance, Duke Perotheus recognizes Arcite. The latter is employed by Emilie and later accidentally meets Palamon. Chance also brings Theseus to the same plot where Arcite and Palamon are fighting. Finally, the destiny decides how the story will be solved.

The universe, then, is not as incoherent and disorderly as might first be expected. Behind all the acts of the universe is logic or controlling purpose, even though man might not understand it, as Palamon Points there:

My heart's own lady, ender of my life!

What is this world? What is it men so crave?

(The knight's Tale: lines 2776-2777)

As a summary of all what is said, The Knight's Tale then, is not at all fabliau, in fact, it represents the courtly love tradition that opens the path for the following tales to develop the same themes in different perspectives such as The Miller's Tale and The Reeve's Tale.

Chaucer does a wonderful job glorifying these two characters of noble status, Arcite and Palamon, who are the best of their type; indeed, he makes certain that his audience knows perfectly how noble, courageous, and beautiful his characters are:

That gretter was ther noon under the sonne.

Ful many a riche contree hadde he wonne,

What with his wysdom and his chivalrie;

(The knight's Tale: lines 863-865)

These characters embody the principles of courtly love; Arcite experiences extreme love pains for Emelye as he has his freedom but does not have access to her. Arcite's suffering is so great because he cannot see Emelye that it physically changes him. Palamon cannot even

recognize him. It is made quite clear that there has never been anyone to feel the pains of love as bad as what Arcite felt. Theseus even recognizes the limits of "love-sickness" when he asks the question: "Who may be a fool but if he love?" (The knight's tale: line 1799). Palamon also suffers from love sickness for his tender Emelye as even if he can see her through the window of his prison, he will never be able to be with her or even touch her.

Actually, both men suffer for their lady, and later in the tale both men perform brave deeds when they decide to fight each other for the possibility of being with Emelye. The language in *The Knights Tale* is quiet excessive and takes all the events into a high sensitive level. For instance, when the Duke Theseus builds a battlefield for the two knights to battle on and show their love to Emelye, and he refers to it as it goes after:

To build the lists. He built them royally,

A theatre so noble standing there

I daresay none was finer anywhere.

(The knight's tale: lines 1885-1886).

According to Andrew the Chaplain whose book *De Amore*, had much influenced Chaucer, claims that:

Love is a certain inborn suffering derived from the sight of an excessive meditation upon the beauty of the opposite sex, which causes each one to wish above all things the embraces of the others" (Capellanus, *De Arte Honeste Amandi*: 40), as it was the case of the two knight in love, Palamon and Arcite.

Moreover, the concepts that Chaucer has used in *The Canterbury Tales*, mainly in The knight's Tale, shows as well how deeply influenced was Chaucer's writing on another poet of the period Guillaume de Lorris' *Le Roman de la Rose*. In this story for instance, the two protagonists suffer deeply for their lady love, Emelye. Actually, throughout the events that take place in this love story, Chaucer shows all the symptoms of "love sickness of the heroes"

as it is penned on the poem, *Roman of the Rose*. At this detail, we can say that many of Chaucer's concepts sketched in *The Canterbury Tales* derived from the courtly ideas of Guillaume de Lorris.

In *The Roman of the Rose*, a young man is wandering in a garden. He leans over and looks into a well of narcissus; this glance into the well causes him to fall in love with the first thing he sets his eyes upon. When they young lover sees a rose, cupid shoots an arrow at him; it enters though his eye and penetrates his heart. The young man removes the shaft from his eye but he will forever have the arrow head lodged into his heart. This idea of love at first sight has held its own place in literature during centuries. Chaucer mirrors this representation of an arrow in the heart in *The Knights Tale,* especially when Palamon is struck by love through the eye, as he said:

> But I was hurt right now thurghout myn ye,
>
> Into myn herte, that wol my bane be.
>
> The fairnesse of that lady that I see,
>
> Yond in the gardyn romen to and fro,
>
> Is cause of al my criyng and my wo.
>
> (The knight's tale: line 1096-1100).

In fact, the literature of medieval era is regularly related to the themes of love and lovers. Both touched by the gods of love, the protagonists of The knight's Tale and the poem of *the Roman de la rose* will probably suffer for their ladylove. As a result, the ideas of Guillaume de Lorris are partially felt in Chaucer's works. We can say then *The Canterbury Tales* then, could be a courtly romance, as well an estate satire and Christian chronicle.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, love is a prominent theme expressed in terms of comedic fabliau, and in the context of courtly romance. Regardless of which form is used to tell a story, Chaucer's tales generally represent romantic love as dangerous that comes only with

trouble. While this trouble could be as serious as is in the case in the Knight's Tale. The case of The Miller's Tale represents the rejection of courtly love through the pseudo-romance among the peasantry. In fact, love in the Miller's Tale is shown through a satire story of the knight's Tale in which is false, bawdy and vulgar.

In contrast to the high principles of courtly love, Chaucer uses this time a fabliau to highlight the difference between a tale told by an upper class (The Knight), and a tale told by a peasant (The Miller). Before going more in depth on the subject matter, we should firstly identify the real meaning of fabliau and it influence on Chaucer.

3.3 Fabliaux in *The Canterbury Tales*

Medieval literature includes a great mixture of humorous tales in both prose and verse, and also a mixture of more or less different genres with a vast array of characters, including cuckolded husbands, rapacious clergy, and foolish peasants, as well as beggars, thieves, and even whores. In *The Canterbury Tales*, there is a huge variety of literary genres, but the most important of them, is the humorous one, also called the fabliau. In fact, the exact definition of a fabliau varies, but all sources agree that these short tales were popular in medieval France and distinctive for their metrical style and comic subject matter (fabliau, *Encyclopædia Britannica*. 2010). If we should take examples from *The Canterbury Tales*, *Miller's* Tale, Reeve's Tale, Shipman's Tale, Summoner's Tale, and the incomplete Cook's Tale are all fabliaux, and many other tales, counting the Merchant's tale and the Wife of Bath's tale, reveal the influence of this genre. According to Larry Benson and his overture to *The Riverside Chaucer*:

> A fabliau is a brief comic tale in verse, usually scurrilous and often scatological or obscene. The style is simple, vigorous, and straightforward; the time is the present, and the settings real, familiar places; the characters are ordinary sorts… the plots are realistically motivated tricks and ruses. The fabliaux thus present a lively image of everyday life among the middle and lower classes. Yet that representation only seems real… the plots, convincing though they seem, frequently involve incredible

degrees of gullibility in the victims and of ingenuity and sexual appetite in the
trickster, heroes and heroines. (The Riverside Chaucer: 7)

The first manifestation of this literary genre was in French literature, in which it flourished in the thirteenth century, lots of illustrations still exist, approximately 150 fabliaux survive in written form today (Harrison, Robert. *Gallic Salt: Glimpses of the Hilarious Bawdy World of Old French Fabliaux*: 1). However in Chaucer's period, only few fabliaux written in English had survived. In reality, this kind of comic tales were very popular at that period, and the majorities were in sophisticated prose as the influenced literary work of Boccaccio, *Decameron.* Besides, during the Middle Ages, this kind of literary genre was intended for a bourgeois audience, Although Joseph Bédier, who published a study of the genre in 1893, acknowledged that the fabliau stories were not entirely unheard or unwelcome in courtly circles (Kibler, William W. "Fabliaux". Medieval France: *An Encyclopedia*, 1995: 332).

Despite the fact that Chaucer had no English models, his fabliaux are considered in some way his most achieved part in his *The Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, seriousness and wickedness go hand in hand when we start speaking about the Characteristic genre of the fabliaux; these are the common feature of all comedy forms, but it still remains one of the major and almost unchanging element in fabliaux according to Larry Benson:

> The cuckolding, beatings, and elaborate practical jokes that are the main concern of the fabliaux are distributed in accord with a code of "fabliau justice," which does not always coincide with conventional morality: greed, hypocrisy, and pride are invariably punished, but so too are old age, mere slow-wittedness, and, most frequently, the presumption of a husband, especially an old one, who attempts to guard his wife's chastity…The fabliau, in short, is delightfully subversive, a light-hearted thumbing of the nose at the dictates of religion, the solid virtues of the citizenry, and the idealistic pretensions of the aristocracy and its courtly literature, which the fabliaux frequently parody, though just as frequently they parody lower-class attempts to adopt courtly behavior. (The Riverside Chaucer: 8)

In fact, Chaucer has used the fabliaux genre to write one of the funniest tales of *The Canterbury Tales,* The Miller's Tale. The latter is considered by some scholars as an enjoyment which has crossed the ages; Subsequently, The Miller's Tale is the second story

in *The Canterbury Tales* after the knight. It is told by a drunken miller who may be the rube in his own story. Like The knight's Tale, The story of the bawdy miller is a love triangle, but with four people, a common occurrence in the fabliau genre. In this story, Chaucer set the comic scene when a carpenter and his much younger wife decide to provide a boarding room for a scholar in order to make extra money.

In fact, as it will be shown in this last part of this chapter, the story that follows is rude, obscene, and amusingly funny, essentially when all the common characteristics of a fabliau are gathered in the same story which is none other than The Miller's Tale, a story that explores and deals with the themes of social class, religion, and, of course, lust and love.

3.3.1 The Miller's Tale

After the Knight's story, the Host calls upon the Monk to tell a story that will equal The Knight's Tale. But the Miller, who is very drunk, announces that he will tell a story about a carpenter. The Reeve, Oswald, objects because he was once a carpenter. Chaucer then warns the reader that this tale might be a bit rude and vulgar, but he must tell all the stories because a prize is at stake. Thus, the Miller begins his tale whit a person named John, an old and very jealous carpenter who is married to an 18 year aged girl named Alison. In order to make some extra money, this carpenter rents a room to a young astrology student named Nicholas, who can supposedly predict the chance of rain showers. Nicholas soon falls in love with Alison and one day grasps her around the groins and cries: "Lemman, love meal atones, or I woldyen, also God me save!" (The Miller's Tale: line 172-173).At first Alison resists, but the clerk soon overcomes her resistance, and together they conceive a plan whereby they will play a trick on the jealous husband.

At this rate of the story, it becomes more complicated when another admirer of the beautiful Alison named Absalon enters the scene; considered as an effeminate incense swinger

at the church, and also Very delicate and fastidious, Absalon is, in fact, so fastidious that he cannot tolerate people who expel gas in public. Although Absalon demonstrates his feelings for Alison by serenading her outside her bedroom window, she finds him a nuisance and is interested only in Nicholas, who conceives an elaborate plan to get John out of the house for the night.

Nicholas convinces John that the town is soon to be visited with a flood like the one that visited Noah in the Bible and that, to survive, he must build and fasten three boat-like tubs to the rafters and store within them provisions. John the Miller follows Nicholas' instructions, and the evening before the predicted flood, all three, John the carpenter; Alison, and Nicholas climb into the boats. When the carpenter sleeps, Alison and Nicholas quickly descend to Alison's bed where they spend the night together.

Later on the night, Absalon, discovering the Miller's absence, goes to Alison's window. Denied access to her room, he begs for one kiss. Afraid that the bothersome clerk will arouse the neighbors, Alison agrees to kiss him, but instead of her mouth, she extends her rear out the window. The fastidious Absalon "kissed her naked arse, most savorously". As he leaves, Absalon overhears the young lovers laughing at him. Cured of his love sickness, Absalon borrows a red-hot poker from the blacksmith, returns to Alison's window, and tells her he has a golden ring for her: "I'll give it to you for one more kiss". But Nicholas, trying to one-better Alison's treatment of Absalon, opens the window instead and "stuck out his arse, buttocks and all" and farts in Absalon's face. Absalon recovers quickly and thrusts the red-hot poker up the middle of Nicholas' back.

Nicholas yells: "Water, help, Water, Water", alarming John from his sleep. Thinking that the flood is coming, John cuts the rope that holds his boat suspended and crashes to the

floor. The neighbors, hearing the entire disturbance, hurry in, and when they hear of John's preparations for a flood, laugh at his madness.

Central to all the stories that have love and desire for theme as the anecdote above, fabliaux and courtly romances shares some similarities; they both tend to give a perfect representation of the female love object as an idealized, courtly and sometimes funny, beautiful generalization of the human life. In reality, Chaucer highlights two presentations of the female adoration in the medieval era. Through his chef-d'oeuvre of *The Canterbury Tales* Chaucer tends to show how these beautiful creature are seen by the different social classes; starting with The Knight vision of courtly love, and ending with the miller and his pseudo-vision of love and desire.

In fact, The Miller's Tale is abounded in incongruity that requires a full knowledge of traditions of the medieval period, indeed the story of the rich old man married to a voluptuous young girl has been and still is the source of much of the bawdy humor throughout Western literature, and Chaucerian literary works were no exception.

On the contrary to the elegant and the charismatic Knight, with his beautiful love story that embodies the ideal romance and love with its charming protagonists, The Miller's stature fits completely his story, which is crude, and considered by many obscene. He is a heavyset man, "a stout full big of muscle and bone". He has a fearful sight and vulgar manners. If most of the pilgrims are going to Canterbury for religious reasons, the Miller is almost certainly going to benefit from the curative powers which were heralded. He is an awesome fellow, and, like the Summoner cited previously, a person one would not want to meet in the dark, indeed the exact opposite of the knight in all points.

Regarded as the best constructed and comic tale, The Miller's Tale embodies the imperfect ideal of women adoration that turn only around material and physical desires:

Ful sooth is this proverbe, it is no lye,

Men seyn right thus, 'Alwey the nyeslye

Maketh the ferreleve to be looth.'

For though that Absolon be wood or wrooth,

By cause that he fer was from hir sighte,

This nye Nicholas stood in his lighte.

(The Miller's Tale: line 284-288)

These lines suggest that the person nearby to the object of desire is always the one who obtains; it suggests that love is more often a matter of convenience than fortune or true affinity. It is yet one more pessimistic statement about love in a tale that tends to reduce love to just a sexual desire. In fact, this pessimistic way of seeing love by the peasants are perfectly used by Chaucer to demonstrate the contrast between the social classes of both The Knight and The Miller, and also their ways of thinking about various subjects of human life such as game, fantasy, love, desire, and even religion.

Generally, in the entire fabliaux genre, there are always more than one or two themes that reflect the irony of our world, especially through Chaucer's eyes. Cleverness, games, and diversion are essential concepts in reading the Tales that represent humor, fun and frivolousness in *The Canterbury Tales*. However one of the things the Miller's Tale makes clear is that it becomes very difficult to decide what lighthearted fun is? And what is meaningful, moral telling?

In fact, the story of John the carpenter is grounded in reality. The details of the entire story make sense, and it appears to be placed within a credible Oxford that Chaucer might have known. Up till now the story itself is clearly a sophisticated parody of The Knight's Tale in form of fabliau, particularly when the complete story turns around an elaborate trap which is shattered at the end.

Actually, the moral problem of this love story is leaved openly to the reader's imagination. In fact, after Nicholas' elaborate trick stops when John comes crashing down through the roof, Chaucer has focused his oratory skills on John's pain to show how imaginary love is directly replaced with a glorious moment of realism. Personalizing the common fabliau that occasionally ends in funny way, the sophisticated fabliau orated by drunken miller surprisingly ends with an old man, lying pale and unconscious, with a broken arm on his cellar floor, his house destroyed, and his wife cuckolded. Indeed the story in itself treats about seriousness and comical matters equivalently in order to emphasize in the morale side of this fabliau which is, no matter how love could be a true affinity, enjoyment, fortune and human life, precisely in The Knight's Tale, it could be also a source of physical desire that bring only rapacious clergy (Absalon), beggars and thieves (Nicholas the trickster), and even whores (Alison).

The Miller's Tale then as a whole, treads a careful, ambiguity between the serious love story and the comic way of betrayal for the sake of love. The same ambiguity of tone is applied to the Christian theme which runs throughout the different tales like The Pardoner's Tale, the Friar's Tale, and even the pious parson and his sermon.

Consequently, could we even consider this tale as a sacrilegious version of Christianity? In fact, it all depends on how seriously we read it. If we are offended by Absalon's devilish transformation at the end of the tale, or if we recognize the alignment of Alison and Nicholas with Adam and Eve that fall in disgrace, then perhaps we might view this fabliau as intentionally depicting sin.

The reader should remember that one story is sometimes told in relationship to another story, but in the case of Chaucer, the story is always related to a period in the history, or occasionally to traditions in order to depict flawlessly his proper society. Here at the

beginning of *The Canterbury Tales*. We see this relationship between, The Knight's Tale and the Miller's Tale which involve into a triangle love story as a subtle illustration of how the higher and lower classes like the knight and the miller perceive love.

In both tales, the protagonists are two men seeking the love their fair ladies (not necessary one's wife) or possession, in the case of the Miller. It seems that the female role is remained as passive spectator while the men struggle for her. Moreover, the two tales deal with fairness and unfairness. For example, despite of his jealousy and the protectiveness of the carpenter, his wife has cheated on him; and in case of The Knight's Tale, the two protagonists, Palamon and Arcite are obliged to break their chivalric fraternal oaths, and fight one against the other until death for the love of their lady, Emelye.

The majority of the themes dealt cannot be understood, if the various contexts that shaped *the Canterbury Tales* and the uniqueness of the author are not also understood. It is important to comprehend and recognize Chaucer's literary works, not only *Troilus and Criseyde*, but also *The Canterbury Tales* as master pieces written in the time of Black plague, when Europe was ravaged, socially, economically, and culturally.

To conclude, if the themes cited previous all along of our research are not the leading themes in *The Canterbury Tales*, they become the central one that group all the ideas in one pertinent thematic. It seems that Chaucer has something essential to say about what constitutes the real knowledge, experience, wisdom, and even awareness. Indeed, through his provocative and passionate characters, he succeeds to create an incredible world full of his thought and ideas, and experiences.

General Conclusion

A literary work is at the first place composed to mirror human feelings, thoughts, or ideologies. It might as well be regarded as a time machine whose mission lies in enabling the reader to travel back and forth in time having the privilege to explore the previous civilizations, and in our case, the history of fourteenth century and its literature.

In fact, through the study of the first question dealt in the statement, we remark that as a reader, the medieval literary texts such as Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* can express more than a simple journey of nine and twenty pilgrims to Saint Thomas cathedral. But as scholars and through a careful analyzing, we see that Chaucer has managed to depict sarcastically his proper society by using his famous skills in humor and irony, he gives also a realistic image of the inequality in social classes which were redefined by the black death, Due to the fact that so many had died, there were far fewer people to work the land: peasants were therefore able to demand better conditions and higher wages from their landlords. Many advanced to higher positions in society. Thus the Black Death was ultimately responsible for major shifts in the social structure, and it was perfectly represented by some of Chaucer's characters such as The Nun Priest' Tale (The Peasant's Revolt 1381).

Literature as whole can be referred to as a vessel which embraces topics and techniques that differs from era to another. So, as to conform the standards and expectations of readers or audiences. But during Chaucer's time it was just the opposite. The Catholic Church which was considered as the only divine institution had strict and restricted standards concerning literature, the most authoritative literary works which are not considered as heresy must include some variety of courtly loves, fabliaux, saint's biographies, allegorical tales, beast fables, and medieval sermons. Subsequently, did religion affect deeply the Middle Ages and medieval literature such as *The Canterbury Tales*? did Romance find it place in medieval literature like *The Canterbury Tales*?

At these questions, the influence of religion and romance on Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* is subtly shown through some charismatic characters such as The Pardoner, The Friar and The parson that represent perfectly the stereotype of church corruption, and the others: The Knight and The Miller who represent the romance side in high elevated style.

Many scholars agree that medieval literary works, and especially the Chaucerian ones, do nothing but reflect the mindset of the society in which it was written. Moreover, they may serve as a historical document, which records a certain community's beliefs and customs. This is why New historicism brings our attention to the fact that literature enables the reader to get an insight into history as well as define a whole society. Its focal point lies in indicating the intermeshing of history and literature in parallel.

Accordingly then, although the medieval time was an era of several challenges (wars, famines, deaths and plagues), literature managed to flourish and prosper. This literature leaves an impressive legacy like the witty chef-d'oeuvre of Geoffrey Chaucer, *The Canterbury Tales* in which becomes the most significant element of a turning point in English literature that highlights the epoch's most sweeping changes in terms of lifestyle, economy, religion and even literature in itself.

In fact, *The Canterbury Tales* can be regarded as a patchwork or mosaic that holds underneath frivolous themes, serious issues of the fourteenth century resembling Chaucer's society, the influence of religion and the importance romance. Moreover, the tales peppered also mirrors the medieval lifetime, at different levels, economic, cultural and social. Chaucer's masterpiece does not only function as an echo of reality or history but also stands as a satirical book dealing with some of the major ambiguities widespread in The Europe of fourteenth century.

Historicists believe that a literary work is the byproduct of its time (surrounding), Chaucer's stories are full of fragments of the Church's corruption, deception, despair and suspicion, and the characters like The Monk, The Friar, The Summoner work together in order to spotlight the evolution of the age of skepticism; it is a brilliant portrait that unfolds a great deal of the medieval society's stance toward religion. He succeeds in manipulating his characters so that to push the reader of that period to find an outlet for the turmoil of that period. Hence, this proves the great impact of the socio-historical environment on the book.

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Résumé:

Tout ce que l'on sait sur le moyen âge et ses aspects sont liés dans des documents officiels ou historiques. Cette thèse vise à explorer cette période turbulente avec une autre source de référence qui est, la littérature. En fait, de nombreux historiens croient que la littérature est le produit de son époque, à commencer par cette idée, les Contes de Canterbury de Geoffrey Chaucer peuvent être considérées comme des patchs ou des mosaïques qui se tiennent sous le ton humoristique et ironique de ses contes, beaucoup de questions sur le quatorzième siècle, sur tout par rapport a différent Domaines de vie tell que : Les aspects socio-historiques, religieux et littéraires.

Tout au long de cette pertinente analyse de la période médiévale et de l'œuvre de Chaucer; Cette thèse explore, analyse et répond au moins à certaines questions fondamentales de ce siècle qui sont: comment Chaucer a-t-il représenté la vie sociale dans sa célèbre œuvre, les Contes de Canterbury? La religion affecte-t-elle profondément la période du moyen âge et la littérature médiévale? Et si c'est vrai que la littérature a trouvée sa place dans tout le chaos engendré au moyen âge, alors Comment le romantisme est-il vu a cette période ? et dans The Canterbury Tales?

Les mots clé : Le moyen âge, la littérature médiévale, les contes de Canterbury, l'influence de l'histoire, les contextes, l'environnement, la religion, la romance