



Geoffrey Chaucer : The Father of English Literature

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Abstract : Chaucer wrote in continental accentual-syllabic meter ,a style which had developed since around the 12th century as an alternative to the alliterative Anglo-Saxon metre. Chaucer is known for metrical innovation ,inventing the rhyme royal and was one of the finest English poets to use the five-stress line, a decasyllabic cousin to the iambic pentameter. Now considered the “Father of English Literature,” Chaucer wrote in the English vernacular while court poetry was still being written in Anglo-Norman or Latin. The decasyllabic couplet Chaucer used for most of The Canterbury Tales later evolved into the heroic couplet, commonly used for the epic and narrative poetry in English. Chaucer is also credited with pioneering the regular use of iambic pentameter.

ISSN 2454-308X



Key Words : Father of English Literature

Introduction : Chaucer was well acquainted with all ages and conditions of men. All this trained him for a poet of man as he appeared eventually in The Canterbury Tales. His earlier works are too large, being written upon Italian and French works; but in the Canterbury Tales he fixed up the spirit of his age for upcoming generations to observe and appreciate. He was as truly the unofficial chronicler of England in the fourteenth century as Froissart was the official French chronicler of the military events of the same time. The greatest achievement of Chaucer was that he was the first to introduce the note of modernity in English literature. Until his time literature had been medieval. It dealt either with ancient gods and heroes or with other abstractions of the allegorical romance. Chaucer made a clean sweep of this unrealistic litter replacing by real human beings and handling them in a garb of delicate tolerance and humor, which is the modern way. When a great poet like Tulsidas chose the Avadhi dialect of Hindi for his Ramayana, he uplifted it to the position of a national language. Chaucer did the same for the approval of the East Midland dialect. In a sense he almost created the English language as we know it today. Chaucer discarded altogether the Anglo-Saxon alliterative tradition-“the rim, ram, roff”, as he



calls it and chose the regular, French metre and end rhyme. He wrote in three principle meters : the heroic couplet, the octosyllabic couplet, as its name implies, consists of rhyming lines, each of eight syllables with four accents. The Rhyme Royal stanza contains seven decasyllabic lines rhyming ababbcc. His work in every sense is an introduction to English literature and he well deserves the title of FATHER OF ENGLISH POETRY.

In Chaucer's first narrative poem The Book of The Duchess, the interest lies less in the celebration of the dead duchess than in the life given to the poem by the current of psychological curiosity that runs through it. The octosyllabic couplets move easily enough, though without the combination of control and variety that characterizes Chaucer's nature verse, and they begin by presenting a picture of the poet suffering from insomnia, reading the story of Ceyx and Alcione to while away his sleepless night. But the world of the poem is trancelike and its forms and colours heraldic.

In The House of Fame we move out of the trance, though the framework is still the dream. The versification has a sureness and flexibility that the Book of the Duchess lacks, while the handling of the dialogue would itself justify the claim that the House of Fame is one of the important transitional poems in English, pointing forward to far-reaching developments in the presentation of character and conversion in fiction:

*With that this egle gan to crye,
"Lat be", quod he," thy fantasye!
Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?"*

The Parliament of Fowls is in the dream convention. The verse form is the seven-line stanza, rhyming ababbcc, known as "Rhyme Royal". Chaucer handles it with a poise and a liquid flow of language that is something new in middle English:

*The lyf so short, the craft so long to lerne,
The assay so hard, so sharp and conquerynge.
The dreadful joye, alwey that slit so yerne:
Al this mene I by love, that my felynge
Astonyeth with his wonderful werkyng
So sore iwis, that when I on hym thynke,*



Nat wot I wel wher that I flete or synke.

In Troilus and Criseyde the metrical technique, storytelling and human character is triumphantly displayed. The end of the poem is religious, an appeal from human love to divine love, with a sonorous devotional stanza from the paradiso to conclude in the Legend of Good Women, the prologue which exists in two interestingly different versions-has a melody and viableness that the body of the work lacks. It opens with a sprightly discussion of the relation between written knowledge and experience:

*A thousand tymes have I herd men telle
That ther ys joy in hevene and peyne in helle,
And I accorde wel that it ys so;
But, natheles, yet wot I well also
That ther nis noon dwellyng in this contree,
That eyther hath in hevene or helle ybe,
Ne may of hit noon other weyes witen,
But as he hath herd seyde, or founde it written.....*

By his choice of images, by the limpid flow of the characters, by his deft distribution of pauses and emphasis, Chaucer endures new life and conviction to this conventional stuff. With The Canterbury tales, Chaucer's aim and practice as poet underwent a sea change, here, to quote an opinion," the fantastic world of romance and allegory melts away; Troy and Thebes, palaces made of glass and temples of brass, allegorical gardens and marvelous fountains evaporate, and in the place we see the whole stream of English society in the fourteenth century."In the Canterbury Tales nature herself became Chaucer's model. His record of the minute details of the appearance, dress and behavior of the pilgrims makes their portraits disarmingly convincing. Another relevant point to keep in view is Chaucer's broadmindedness, his lack of prejudice and his real sympathy with all classes and conditions of peoples. His all-embracing human sympathy prevents him from standing between the portrait and the spectator.

Conclusion : The phrase" Courtly Love" refers to a set of ideas about love that was enormously influential on the literature and culture of the middle ages. Courtly love motifs first appear in the Canterbury Tales with the description of the squire in the general prologue. The squire's role in



society is exactly that of his father, the knight. The characters whose roles are explained by their religious or economic functions join the cultural ideals of courtly love into their dress, their behavior and the tales they tell in order to give a slightly different twist to their roles. Overall, the narrator seems to harbor much hostility for the ecclesiastical officials than he does for the clerics.

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