

Introduction

‘The craft so long to lerne...’

C.W.R.D. Moseley

As I write, it seems to many that we are living at a time of unprecedented social, political, moral, epistemological and environmental uncertainty. And that was before the Coronavirus hit. It seems we are moving into – or are already in – what some historians call a General Crisis. That term was first used of the seventeenth century,¹ but that time of radical upheaval is not the only one in human history that can be documented and so described. Chaucer was himself living through just such a period,² when ancient certainties and assumptions seemed fundamentally unstable, when society seemed to be sliding into irresolvable war and chaos, and the weather was reliably unreliable as climate worsened across the entire globe. Gaunt Famine stalked every happy harvest. Dame Fortune seemed to be at her most unpredictable – indeed, Helen Cooper’s essay in this collection on the single word ‘hap’ and its cognates demonstrates beyond argument how much this issue, and what it might mean, mattered to Chaucer. Perhaps ancient voices from that anxious time may have something to say which we might find helpful in our own.

Notes for this section begin on page 11.

Tot homines, quot sententiae: like the birds in *The Parlement of Foullys*, readers of Chaucer over the long centuries have argued many things about his work, and about him, often wholly consistently in themselves, but frequently from incompatible standpoints. As in that poem, we know there is something to learn, but we cannot be sure we know how to do it. There have been many different ideas of Chaucer as poet, and indeed of what a poet is. The many images, in every sense, of Chaucer himself that have been constructed³ often tell us as much about the constructor as about the constructed. Simon Meecham-Jones' essay below suggests that the lack of early witnesses for *The Book of the Duchess* may be indicative of some family embarrassment, even disappointment, with it as a conventional elegy that could be used in the yearly commemorations of Blanche which John of Gaunt instituted. But its eventual appearance, and the company it keeps, in three mid-fifteenth century MSS, all of which are anthologies and two of which are also the earliest witnesses for the *Hous of Fame*, suggest that perceptions of 'Chaucer' as well as of his work are being actively qualified, for collecting poems into a MS for, or as specified by, a patron is an act of choice. Indeed, this essay suggests that the compilation of one of the MSS may be a symptom of dynastic rivalries in those turbulent years of Henry VI. If so, it is a material example of people adjusting their Chaucers to fit their own agendas. Later, more brashly, the radically anti-fraternal 'Plowman's Tale', originally from around 1400, was printed as Chaucer's in 1532⁴ by Thynne, with a new prologue linking it to the Canterbury pilgrimage. This deliberately suggests that Chaucer, now effectively central in a new *English* (as distinct from Latin or French) canon,⁵ held the impeccable proto-Reformist views that would now be expected of one in such a position. He is now too important to be left to the opposition, and the challenges he would surely have posed to the certainties on either side of the religious divide are simply ignored. John Speed's engraving 'The Progenie of Geffrey Chaucer' in Speght's *The Workes of our Antient and Lernet English Poet, Newly Printed* (London, 1598) seeks to claim both historical accuracy for the portrait⁶ and also to insert Chaucer into an aristocratic lineage which includes Henry VII and his own great-grandson Edmund de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk – an interesting gentrification of a writer and his craft which would have mystified Chaucer's diffident, de-authorising, *persona*, and perhaps the poet himself as well. Just how diversely readers over the centuries have conceptualised Chaucer's writing and the man behind it is admirably

demonstrated in Caroline Spurgeon's and Derek Brewer's work.⁷ More publicly-visible instances which both reflect and in turn affect ideas of the man might be Burne-Jones' 1864 stained glass panel,⁸ which mediates the varying sunlight into a pensive poet, straight out of a sort of 'Legend of Good Poets', contemplating a daisy in a fashion just short of the greenery-yallery,⁹ or, some decades later (1900), the serious figure with the steady gaze in the memorial window by Charles Eamer Kemp in the north aisle of Southwark Cathedral.¹⁰

Canonisation, moreover, not infrequently detaches the myth of the man from his work completely. As time passes that myth may well become dominant outside the academy. For there is an ineradicable (it seems) legend (perhaps first evidenced by Pope's juvenile 'Imitation of Chaucer')¹¹ of the cheerful roly-poly poet who went on pilgrimages and left merely a fund of stories, mostly memorable for the risqué ones – ignore everything else more demanding.¹² This myth can, moreover, sell. First staged in March 1968, a musical, *The Canterbury Tales*, with Neville Coghill's lyrics and music by John Hawkins and Richard Hill, played for over 2000 performances on the London stage to many to whom 'Chaucer' was only a name, a signifier, for a certain vision of England, like advertisers in that same decade using a picture of a hail-fellow-well-met actor dressed up as Henry VIII waving a half-eaten chicken drumstick in order to sell mass-produced oven-ready chickens. The musical was considered, for the time, very bawdy: the Lord Chamberlain's censorship of the theatre had just ended. *Plus ça change*: Richard Lloyd Playscripts¹³ currently offers a script for

The Canterbury Tales... Six of the best, funniest, and bawdiest of Chaucer's tales... There's nothing quite like *The Canterbury Tales* to put the present-day observer in touch with the ordinary lives of our medieval forbearers... These stories convey the gritty reality of life in Medieval England, combining into one boisterous and hilarious portrait of ordinary folk preoccupied with petty jealousies, mundane squabbles, and simple pleasures – all conveying really how little the English people have changed during 600 intervening years.¹⁴

Well, six hundred years is not a long time in human history, and we need not bother too much about the semantics.

'Engaging' in this book's title can have the sense of 'enter into conflict with',¹⁵ and certainly Chaucer offers many challenges to the way people think and to their assumptions. He has never lacked serious readers, and writers, engaging with his work and making space for themselves in what they saw as a high tradition stemming

from him. This is both challenge and, to use Harold Bloom's word, anxiety. For example, in *The Prelude, or, Growth of a Poet's Mind* (1805), 278ff., Wordsworth subtly links himself, now a poet claiming a high calling, but then an undergraduate in Cambridge, to the canonical authority of Milton, Spenser, and

Beside the pleasant Mill of Trompington
I laugh'd with Chaucer, in the hawthorn shade,
Heard him, while birds were warbling, tell his tales
Of amorous passion

His interest lasted, and his respect broadened. While Dorothy read aloud 'The Miller's Tale' to William and Mary by the fire at Grasmere on Boxing Day 1801 – a domestic scene of some interest – William was currently working seriously on modernisations of tales from Chaucer and part of *Troilus and Criseyde*. We ourselves still read, write and argue about Chaucer. Why? After all, the crass neophilia that rules so much of our culture would readily dismiss as of no importance – 'relevance'? – to us the work of someone who lived in a world of assumptions and behaviour immeasurably and unknowably different from ours, and was, moreover, white, male and very dead for over six hundred years. What is it about him? The simplest answers to my question may be the best: he is fun – very important, for rational pleasure is one of the proper pursuits of mankind; and because he is fun – I do not mean funny – he draws us into engaging with his thoughts, with the many voices he uses, and thus challenges our intelligence and questions our certainties, just as his were challenged and questioned by what he read. His journey of unknowing and ours join up. For it is a truism that great writing – great art of any kind, indeed – transcends the conventions and contexts of its time, and Chaucer, indeed, has outlasted many -isms, his work silently criticising those who blunt their critical tools on what he wrote. By any standards his was a coruscating intellect, and he was also a meticulous craftsman, as Ad Putter's essay in this volume demonstrates. But in addition his poetry can also be immensely moving in that inexplicable way that defeats all analysis. He gives us a line, if we will listen to him, on this puzzle of being human, and despite the long time between the light he saw and ours, he articulates the human imperatives. Dryden remarked, in his Preface to the *Fables* (1700): '...mankind is ever the same, and nothing is lost out of nature, though everything is altered.' Even so: making out of quotidian normality poetry that lasts is an art

that requires the agile processing skills of a great poet as well as the skills of his attentive readers. Both are worth exploring.

The vagaries of critical fashion, New or not, have taken us on tours of various Fallacies, Intentional, Authorial and even perhaps Narratorial; they have taken us through long arguments proving that arguments prove nothing and that all language can discuss is itself. What was intended as a lens can easily become a filter. Yet the whirligig of Time seems now to have brought some of us to believe in the Resurrection of the Author¹⁶ – though not without a wholly welcome re-emphasis that the different stances and capacities of readers affect the poem that they see. In the welter of critical cleverness, it is so easy quietly to forget that authors, real people, existed, and they wrestled with the intractability of language: we are dealing with a unique vision of one person in one temporal context. Writers developed different ideas and perspectives as they grew older, they read books, and sometimes they misunderstood them – or saw what they wanted to see. And they said what they wanted to say in that serious game with an audience or reader – whose taste they understood and with whom they could leave a lot unsaid.

So Chaucer speaks to us with peculiar sharpness in our confused and conflicted post-modern world with news from that other country we call the past. This might be one reason why it is high folly *not* to teach him to the young, and why, when you do, they respond so enthusiastically. The Middle Ages had much more in common with modernism, indeed with our own uncertainties, than with the confidence of the nineteenth century when so much spadework was done in recovering and re-examining many of the materials we now value. The mediaevals shared our itchy unease about what constitutes truth in statement, or the reliability of knowledge; they anticipated the non-naturalistic representation of time in the polychronic conventions of some visual art; the sophistication of *entrelace* makes the narration of Scandi-noir TV series like *The Bridge* seem like child's play. In the Luttrell Psalter horses climb (apparently cheerfully, to judge from their expression) out of one plane into the side margin. As Helen Cooper has remarked, the mediaevals 'delighted in Picasso-esque clashes of perspective', and in playing with aspectuality,¹⁷ where contradictory things can both be true. Chaucer delights in de-authorising the act of authorship, as in *Troilus and Criseyde*, or in presenting us with unreliable *personae* as guides to his problematic fictional worlds. He has no trouble in Sternely moving between different storytelling/narratorial

levels, or different implied audiences, even within the same tale.¹⁸ Just so the Man of Law can be sniffy about the poems by his own author he has ‘read’ – but that author is also a fictional character in the same narrative space/time as himself (*Canterbury Tales*, II 46ff.); just so Justinus cites the Wife of Bath, or the fictional Parson condemns fiction: ‘Thou getest fable noon ytold for me...’ (CT X. 31ff.)

Chaucer’s poems remain, challenging the effectiveness of whatever tools we bring to them, and ultimately, like all great art, they remain inexhaustible and beyond the categorising and diminishing reach of changing fashion or taste. Just as Chaucer implies the provisionality of his poetry, so we accept the provisionality of our reading. The poems read us, one might say, as well as the other way round. All we can do is hope one day ‘to fare / The bet, and thus to rede [we] nyl nat spare’.¹⁹

Chaucer the real Author had real people who were real readers, and he released his poems, as he himself says (e.g. *Troilus and Criseyde*, V. 1786ff.), into a future he knew would be different from the mental and physical world in which he lived. Robert Henryson in the opening stanzas of *The Testament of Cresseid* allows us a glimpse of one of those new worlds. Sebastian Sobceki’s chapter reminds us forcefully not only of the nexus of relationships, even the minutiae of place, within which Chaucer himself worked, but also the dynamics of the early circulation of his work. For if it be true, as suggested above, that poems ‘read’ the readers, how readers read – both physically and conceptually – are important concerns and ones to which Chaucer himself seems to have been alert. My own essay on the form and structure of *The Parlement of Foulys* argues for Chaucer being quite aware that the poem as it might be heard – indeed, performed – and the poem as read are quite different things, and that he makes that tension, contradiction even, part of the issues the poem discusses. If there be any force in this argument, it suggests that other poems, and not only of Chaucer, might also be fruitfully re-examined on these terms.

The whole point about stories, poems, is that they say what cannot be said. Humans are not the only intelligent creatures on this planet, but so far as we know we are the only species that makes sense of the world by telling each other stories about it: *homo sapiens sapiens*, but also *homo sapiens narrans*. A pupil of mine, a mature student who had been a ballet dancer, when once asked what her

dance had meant, replied, ‘If I could say what my dance meant, I would not have needed to dance it’. Exactly. What does *Troilus and Criseyde* ‘mean’? or *King Lear*? To Conrad’s Marlow, ‘the meaning of an episode was not inside like a kernel but outside enveloping the tale which brought it out only as a glow brings out a haze, in the likeness of one of those misty haloes that sometimes are made visible by the spectral illumination of moonshine.’²⁰ The experience is the meaning. To understand – but we never shall – that experience and how it works is one of the tasks of criticism. That must mean that grappling with verbal texture and semantics – the figures in the dance – are important: indeed, they are the only road we have towards apprehending the mystery at the heart. And they can give a pretty fair line on areas of the author’s concern. Ad Putter’s elegant essay shows how what some might see as a very technical exploration of prosody can genuinely illuminate not only Chaucer’s meticulous command of sonic effects, but also the conceptual intricacies of Chaucer’s work, and the way those effects enhance the semantic patterns and structures – and how they are read. Too many people now read poetry with tin ears, and the sophisticated music of Chaucer’s verse is a far more complex and considered thing than most realise. (I try to imagine those two highly competent readers like the Wordsworths reading Chaucer in their strong Cumberland accents.) Readers who do not hear Chaucer’s poetry in their heads, or indeed who do not read it aloud, miss so much of its pleasure and wit. I suspect that Chaucer, when reading aloud himself, was a master of timing and inflection. Ad Putter’s essay reminds us, too, of what we, alas, have not: Chaucer’s youthful ‘enditynges of worldly vanite... many a songe and many a leccherous lay’ presuppose a musical/metrical talent which the verse we *do* have, of his late twenties and after, develops and hones into something bravura.

I have already noted how Helen Cooper’s lucid and thought-provoking exploration across the canon of that single concept, ‘hap’, demonstrates just how intellectually and emotionally charged this issue was for Chaucer all through the intellectual and literary career of which we can have knowledge.²¹ Indeed, ‘Fortune’s sharp adversitee’, the topsyturviness to which things are liable, leads to an extraordinary interest – in *Troilus and Criseyde*, in ‘The Knight’s Tale’ and others of the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Hous of Fame*, for example – in what *can* be relied on: to take the line somewhat out of context, can we be reassured that ‘Trouthe thee shall deliver, it is no drede’?²²

But what *is* ‘trouthe’? That word, and the broadly related concepts it can signify, clearly mattered to Chaucer in the turbulence of his world. In the Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*, ‘The Knight’s Tale’, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer uses ‘Trewē’ 46 times, and ‘trouthe’ 64. But it has many shades of meaning. As something like ‘integrity’, it is the key characteristic of Troilus, ‘trewē as stiel.’ (V. 831) In that poem, moreover, Chaucer rhymes ‘trouthe’ with ‘routhe’ – ‘compassion’ – no less than 18 times, thus setting up a provocative if understated dialogue between the two concepts. Yet ‘trouthe’ also implies certainty, knowledge, reliability,²³ and it could be argued that the whole of *The Hous of Fame* is an essay on how and what we *can* know, and on how ‘true’ that knowledge can be. The *aporia* with which that poem closes – well, what *could* that man of ‘gret auctoritee’ have said, when the poem has subverted all authority and certainty in history, narrative, speech, language? Perhaps the *aporia* of silence is that to which all our knowledge and cleverness, our poems, ultimately lead.

These are not comfortable ideas. We can be quite sure that if we can read Chaucer in this way, his contemporaries and successors could also. (And, after all, we can reach even further back: there is little in modern uncertainties about language, utterance and culture which is not anticipated in, for example, Augustine or Aristotle.) And that worry about authority, knowledge, and interpretation, which seems to run like a *leitmotif* through his work, is also for a long time part of the very long shadow he casts, just as much as is the rhetorical and linguistic dexterity for which his immediate successors praise him. Jacqueline Tasioulas’ exploration of one of the very greatest of late mediaeval poems, Henryson’s *Testament of Cresseid*, leads us straight into a consideration of how a poet could make room for himself under that complex shadow, indeed profit from it, use it. Henryson’s poem has not a nonce intertextuality, but a serious engagement with how a very great poem *can* be read, with the counter-story it does not tell but which it implies, and with some of Chaucer’s own great themes: the nature of knowing, authority and ‘truth’, and the key issue of fortune and human responsibility. It is to that very issue of the conflicts inherent in any ‘authority’ to which John M. Fyler’s essay draws attention: ‘The Merchant’s Tale’, *Troilus and Criseyde* and *The Testament of Cresseid* may seem miles apart, but they share the same uneasiness about literary authority, precedent and the possibility of certainty in anything – indeed, in language

itself. Is seeing believing? William A. Quinn's essay also explores indeterminacy and ambiguity as qualities radical to 'The Man of Law's Tale', examining some points of fracture in the narrative where Chaucer's fictional cosmos might slide for different readers into alternative realities. Ambiguity in every sense underlies Alex da Costa's exploration of the implications of how the Pardoner is presented, and the uneasy relation between accident and substance opens up a new and powerful historical/cultural perspective, especially relevant as we re-examine concepts of gender and performativity. By contrast, John Fyler's detailed and thoughtful discussion shows the attractiveness and exegetical value, too, of a critical approach where we agree to take to take the fiction at its word, surrender to its illusion, and give the narrator an intimate and organic relationship to his or her tale. Indeed, it could be argued that Chaucer himself began ironically to play with the fruitfulness of this idea, when he took *decorum* to new and extraordinary heights with 'The Pardoner's Prologue and Tale.'²⁴

But 'trewes as stiel...'²⁵ – does Troilus search for that which is always just beyond the finding – as in *Hous of Fame*, or *Parlement of Foulys*? Is that where 'trouthe' lies? Is the Ladder of Love, ascending from the romantic to the inenarrable divine the key, as it was for Dante?²⁶ The seven great Boethian stanzas that preface Book III of *Troilus and Criseyde*, or Theseus' speech (again drawing from Boethius) at the end of 'The Knight's Tale' might suggest so. But even as Castiglione's Bembo has his hearers rapt with his hymn to the ascent of the soul from love of created things to love of the Uncreated at the end of Book III of *Il Cortegiano* (1528), his rhapsody is undercut by the misogyny and plausible cynicism of Morello da Ortona. So too Chaucer never allows us an authorised, easy answer one way or the other. Simone Bovair's approach to one of the greatest poems about human love in Western literature explores what Chaucer might have meant by (and, perhaps more interestingly, how he might have valued) what we call 'romantic' love and its associated emotions – for the poem also includes the voice of Pandarus. The question of how they can be depicted – for the depiction hides as much as it reveals – is also an issue. For

...in forme of speche is change
 Withinne a thousand yeer, and wordes tho
 That hadden prys, now wonder nyce and straunge
 Us thinketh hem; and yet they spake hem so
 And spedde as wel in love as men now do. (*Troilus and Criseyde*, II, 22–8)

As so often, there is much we cannot know... even what the signs of emotion and body language or emotion, which we might think we recognise and understand, might actually mean. What is the significance of Arveragus' weeping? ('The Franklin's Tale', V (F) 1478–1479). Or the Prioress' tears (CT, I (A) 144). Barry Windeatt's 'Chaucer's Tears', which examines the unusually emphasised and detailed emotionalism – even if sometimes with moments of delicate comedy and irony – which Chaucer gives especially to his heroines, addresses the question of how the lost translation of Pseudo-Origen's *De Maria Magdalena*, which Chaucer claims among his early works (Prologue to *Legend of Good Women*, F 427–8), might have affected his treatment of weeping. The tears of 'routhe' might be more complex than they seem at first.

'Trouthe is the hiehst thing man may kepe.' However ironically and problematically framed Arveragus' words to Dorigen may be – for 'with that word he brast anon to wepe' – the issues of integrity, and compassion, which the lines focus are faced by every person in every age:

'How shall a man judge what to do in such times?'

'As he has ever judged,' said Aragorn. 'Good and ill have not changed since yesteryear; nor are they one thing among Elves and Dwarves and another among Men. It is a man's part to discern them, as much in the Golden Wood as in his own house.'²⁷

One value of reading old poets – besides simply pleasure, too often forgotten when we are being highminded and academic – is that they remind us that they faced these problems too, and their response may help us to cultivate our own moral and intellectual gardens the better.

This collection of essays is humble homage to a toweringly great poet. It also acknowledges the intellectual excitement, challenge and pleasure on so many levels that readers individually owe to him. Chaucer was the child of a specific cultural episteme, the heir of its imperatives and priorities; he lived in a world where many things were unimaginably and unknowably different from our own experience. But his work, his reaction to that world, changed the way that people could think of themselves – and that is true of all great writers, our spiritual ancestors, even if they are not even mere names to the majority of people. For they have helped make the world, and the language (in every sense) we ourselves take for granted. Unfolding what we *can* know of how Chaucer worked and could have thought –

‘the craft so longe to lerne’ – can be intensely rewarding and never ending, as anyone who teaches knows, for *both* teacher *and* taught. Engaging with his poems still has the capacity to change the way we can see, and grapple with the fundamental questions of knowledge, understanding, beauty and pleasure. And truth.

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Notes

1. Geoffrey Parker and Lesley M. Smith, eds., *The General Crisis of the Seventeenth Century*, (London: Taylor and Francis, 1997).
2. Bruce M.S. Campbell, *The Great Transition: Climate, Disease and Society in the Late Medieval World* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2016).
3. The discussion of the early visual representations of Chaucer by Sonia Drimmer stresses how complex their semiotics can be: see *The Art of Allusion: Illuminators and the Making of English Literature, 1403–1476* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2019): see pp. 53–84, ‘Chaucer’s Manicule.’
4. *The workes of Geffray Chaucer newly printed, with dyuers workes whiche were never in print before* (London: printed by Thomas Godfrey, 1532). *The Plowman’s Tale* dates from within a few years of *Piers the Plowman’s Crede*, another poem of satire and complaint of Lollard cast which piggybacks on the prestige and reputation of a much more complex, profound and subtle poem. It is tempting to suggest that the *Plowman’s Tale* might indicate how one early reader at least perceived Chaucer’s incomplete *Canterbury Tales*.
5. The witness of (for example) John Skelton in *Philip Sparrow* (612ff., 677ff, 787ff.) is indicative, but even more so is John Bale’s *Illustrium majoris Britanniae scriptorum, hoc est, Angliae, Cambriae, ac Scotiae Summarium* (Ipswich and Wesel for John Overton, 1548, 1549.) The cultural and ideological importance of this work is discussed in my article, ‘Shakespeare and the English Canon’, *Early Modern Culture Online*, 8 (forthcoming).
6. ‘The true portraiture of GEFFREY CHAUCER the famous English poet, as by THOMAS OCCLEVE is described who liued in his time and was his Scholar.’
7. *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357–1900*, (London: Cambridge University Press, 1925); Derek Brewer, *Chaucer: The Critical Heritage*, 2 vols., (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978).
8. ‘Chaucer Asleep’, from a series of six panels ‘based on *Goode Wimmin*’, by Sir Edward Burne-Jones, in the Victoria and Albert Museum: <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O8453/panel-burne-jones-edward> (accessed 24 August 2020).

9. And thus makes dominant the *persona* of the Prologue to the *Legend of Good Women*, rather than the shrewd operator who was diplomat, Collector of Customs, and Knight of the Shire in the radical Wonderful Parliament of 1386.
10. The window was unveiled by Alfred Austin, Poet Laureate.
11. *Pope: Poetical Works*, ed. Herbert Davis (London: Oxford University Press 1966), p. 229. The squib does not enhance his reputation.
12. A fossil of this weighting remains, I suggest, in the practice in so many Collected Works of Chaucer of starting with *The Canterbury Tales* rather than printing his work in probable date order, which would give a far more nuanced picture of his development to the new reader.
13. <http://richardlloydplayscripts.com/script/the-canterbury-tales/> (accessed 15 June 2020).
14. Contrast John Dryden's desire to make Chaucer respectable in an age of periwigs and *politesse*: '...I have confined my choice [in the *Fables*, (1700)] to such tales of Chaucer as savour nothing of immodesty. If I had desired more to please than to instruct, the Reeve, the Miller, the Shipman, the Merchant, the Sumner, and, above all, the wife of Bath, in the prologue to her tale, would have procured me as many friends and readers, as there are beaux and ladies of pleasure in the town. But I will no more offend against good manners.' (This almost anticipates the line Alec Guinness speaks as the old parson in Hamer's *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949) about the stained glass in his church: 'I always say it has all the exuberance of Chaucer with none of his concomitant crudities.')
15. OED, 'engage', sense 8.
16. See J.C. Carlier [C.T. Watts], 'Roland Barthes's Resurrection of the Author and Redemption of Biography'. *Cambridge Quarterly*, 29 (4) (2000), pp. 386–393.
17. The notion that truth is not singular is a key concept in physics, as Einstein proposed. William Empson, in *Seven Types of Ambiguity*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1930) followed, developing Wittgenstein's insight that both truths cannot be seen at one and the same time – a proposition he memorably demonstrated using the duck/rabbit image of Gestalt psychology. Jonathan Bate, in *The Genius of Shakespeare* (London: Macmillan, 1997), p. 327, fruitfully applies this tool to Shakespeare. Chaucer himself would well have been aware of the Scholastic insight that a 'fact' is dependent both on the thing perceived and on the perceiver.
18. Cf. A.C. Spearing, *Textual Subjectivity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005), 101–36.
19. *Parlement of Fowlis*, 699.
20. *Heart of Darkness* (London: Penguin, 2007[1899]), 6.
21. Much we cannot know: we can be quite certain that, as with Shakespeare, much has been lost, especially of the work of Chaucer's youth and early manhood.
22. *Truth – Balade de Bon Conseyll*, 7.
23. *Middle English Dictionary*, senses 9,10,11a.
24. Cf. my discussion in C.W.R.D. Moseley (ed), *Chaucer: The Pardoner's Tale* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1989), pp. 39–49.
25. *Troilus and Criseyde*, V. 831.
26. L'amor che muove il sole e l'altre stelle (*Paradiso* XXXIII.145).
27. J.R.R. Tolkien, *The Lord of the Rings* (London, 1955) III, Chapter 2.