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Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies

Title

The Idea of the Canterbury Tales (review)

Permalink

<https://escholarship.org/uc/item/4446z8vn>

Journal

Comitatus: A Journal of Medieval and Renaissance Studies, 8(1)

ISSN

0069-6412

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Publication Date

1977-10-01

Peer reviewed

The critical apparatus also includes a select bibliography of important works dealing with the tales and an index and glossary of the proper names occurring in the *Mabinogi*. Ford has performed the service of compiling an index which allows the reader to find a particular personage from among the myriad of names found in the tales, greatly facilitating the scholarly study of these tales.

This work will undoubtedly furnish an invaluable contribution to the field of medieval literature. The translations are of equal use to both the general reader and the more specialized student of Middle Welsh or of folklore and mythology. As Ford points out, this volume is not meant to replace Jones and Jones' *Mabinogion*, which contains translations of five tales not included in the present collection, but *The Mabinogi and Other Medieval Welsh Tales* will certainly provide a useful, and much-needed, adjunct to the earlier work.

1. The other recent translation, *The Mabinogion* (Penguin, 1976), by Jeffrey Gantz, is not intended as a literal rendition of the Welsh texts, and contains a liberality of spelling and diction which would render difficult its use by a serious student of the tales.

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Donald R. Howard. *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*. Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: Univ. of California Press, 1976. Pp. 403. Illustrations. Hardcover, \$15.00.

Donald Howard's book, *The Idea of the Canterbury Tales*, both intrigues and maddens. It intrigues because of the many fascinating subjects the author brings under discussion. It maddens for the same reason. Howard seems to have the same propensity for *curiositas*, or "wandering by the way," that afflicts the Canterbury pilgrims. We get courses in medieval theories of memory, in rose-window design, in real pilgrimages to Canterbury, in manuscript initials, in book-making, "and much, much more." No matter; it's all interesting, even if the question "How did we get *here*?" keeps nudging itself into one's consciousness as one reads.

With such *richesses* of subjects, I can only mention a few that seemed most promising to me. Howard contends that the poem is "unfinished but complete" (quoting Northrop Frye), that Chaucer never meant to write 120 tales and that he never envisioned a return trip after the poem had taken shape in his mind. The pilgrimage is a one-way journey, starting in the morning and drawing to a close as the sun goes down, thus suggesting a parallel with the human life-cycle. Chaucer wrote a beginning, an ending, and some middle fragments, which Howard groups into tales of civil, domestic, and private conduct. It follows from this theory

that the problem of ordering the fragments, which has so vexed *Canterbury Tales* criticism, is a deliberately built-in problem. Each tale and each group of tales can be related to the others in any number of ways, depending on one's point of view. Theme, parody, genre, teller—apply any one of these criteria and a different grouping of the tales will emerge. (Howard compares the form to the interlace structure of medieval romance and visual art.) Furthermore, the form is infinitely expandable, because of the gaps. It would accommodate 120 tales, or any number, between morning and evening, between creation and apocalypse. Chaucer has sketched the outlines and left the rest to our imaginations. This discussion, and the close reading of the individual tales which occupied Chapters 5 and 6, I found most stimulating. I suppose that one's point of view will determine what one finds important in this book, as well as in the *Canterbury Tales*.

Point of view will probably also determine what one finds to dispraise. A long comparison between *Troilus and Criseyde* and the *Canterbury Tales* I found singularly unenlightening. It had an aroma of leftovers from *The Three Temptations*. Howard is somewhat too ready to reach for Christian doctrine to help him over the hard places, although he scorns Robertsonian exegesis. He says, for example, that one reason the *Franklin's Tale* cannot be Chaucer's last word on marriage is that it does not promote the Christian ideal of marriage. Apparently Howard will allow the famous Chaucerian irony and detachment to go so far and no farther, not realizing that it is difficult to stop that sort of thing once it gets started. Finally, and most unsettling, is the lack of a clear sense of where one has been and where one is going. Howard compares the *Tales* to a labyrinth, and perhaps he is trying to make his work imitate the original. I cannot recall, however, feeling so lost while reading Chaucer as I do while reading Howard. With shame I confess that I cannot tell what the "idea of the *Canterbury Tales*" is.

But read the book. The footnotes and the illustrations are worth the price of admission. (There is, alas, no bibliography.) Howard writes in an engaging style, acknowledging the struggling and, at times, exasperated reader, avoiding both too magisterial and too chatty a tone. While you may not agree with all of his conclusions, he raises important questions, and the experience of mentally arguing with him will clarify your own idea of the *Canterbury Tales*, whatever it is.

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William G. Leary. *Shakespeare Plain: The Making and Performing of Shakespeare's Plays*. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1977. Pp. xi+298. \$4.95.

"Plain and not honest is too harsh a style"; Shakespeare's Queen Elizabeth might direct this same condemnation onto many popular guides to Shakespeare's plays, but not onto William G. Leary's honest and artful *Shakespeare Plain*. By bringing