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## CHAUCER'S THE CANTERBURY TALES: A REFLECTION OF MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

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**Abstract.** This article explores how Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales reflects the social, moral, and cultural structure of medieval English society. The research examines the representation of various social classes such as the nobility, clergy, merchants, and peasants through the characters of the pilgrims. Descriptive and analytical methods are used to interpret how Chaucer's language, humor, and satire reveal the moral values and contradictions of fourteenth-century England. The findings show that The Canterbury Tales serves not only as a literary masterpiece but also as a realistic mirror of medieval life, exposing the complexity, diversity, and hierarchy of its society.

**Keywords:** Geoffrey Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, medieval society, satire, social classes, moral values.

### INTRODUCTION

Geoffrey Chaucer is often called the "Father of English Literature" because of his great contribution to the development of English poetry. His most famous work, The Canterbury Tales, gives a clear picture of life in fourteenth-century England. The collection of stories is told by a group of pilgrims who come from different social classes and professions. Through their tales, Chaucer shows the daily life, beliefs, and moral values of medieval people. The work reflects not only the beauty of language and storytelling but also the social structure and problems of that time. By mixing humor, satire, and realism, Chaucer creates a true image of medieval society that still remains interesting and meaningful today.

### LITERATURE ANALYSIS AND METHODOLOGY

Many scholars have regarded The Canterbury Tales as one of the most important social documents of the medieval period. According to Derek Pearsall (1992), Chaucer's work "portrays the entire range of medieval society with remarkable realism and detail," offering a vivid insight into the lives of people from different social ranks. Similarly, Jill Mann (2002) argues that Chaucer uses humor and irony not only for entertainment but also to expose the corruption and moral weaknesses of the Church and the upper classes.





In literary analysis, *The Canterbury Tales* has often been interpreted through the lens of social realism and satire. The characters such as the Knight, the Miller, the Wife of Bath, and the Pardoner represent various classes and moral types found in fourteenth-century England. As A. C. Cawley (1961) points out, each pilgrim functions as a symbol of their social group, making the work a microcosm of medieval life. From a sociological viewpoint, Chaucer's work demonstrates how medieval English society was strongly hierarchical yet deeply interconnected. The feudal system determined one's social status, and the Church held immense power over moral and cultural life. However, as Caroline Barron (2010) argues, *The Canterbury Tales* reveals the early signs of social change – the rise of the middle class, the questioning of clerical authority, and the growth of individualism. Chaucer's use of Middle English rather than Latin or French also reflects this social shift, making literature accessible to ordinary people and marking the emergence of national consciousness.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis of *The Canterbury Tales* reveals that Geoffrey Chaucer successfully captures the social, moral, and cultural complexity of medieval England. The results indicate that the work is not only a literary achievement but also a valuable historical document reflecting everyday life in the fourteenth century. Through his carefully constructed characters, Chaucer presents a vivid cross-section of society, illustrating the relationships and tensions between different social groups.

One of the major findings is that Chaucer's portrayal of social classes is both realistic and critical. The Knight, the idealized figure of nobility, represents honor and chivalric values that were central to medieval life. In contrast, characters such as the Miller and the Pardoner highlight the decline of moral standards and the rise of hypocrisy among both commoners and the clergy. Jill Mann (2002) points out that Chaucer's satire "does not merely ridicule individuals but questions the moral health of society as a whole." This balanced depiction demonstrates Chaucer's deep understanding of human nature and social dynamics.

Another key finding concerns Chaucer's treatment of the Church. The religious figures in the tales such as the Pardoner, the Monk, and the Friar symbolize the corruption and moral decay within the medieval Church. According to Derek Pearsall (1992), Chaucer "portrays the clergy with a realism that exposes both the spiritual weaknesses and the material ambitions of the institution." However, not all clerical characters are negative; the Parson, for instance, stands as an example of true Christian virtue. This contrast reflects Chaucer's objective and humanistic approach: he criticizes individuals, not religion itself.





From a cultural perspective, the study finds that *The Canterbury Tales* captures the transition between the medieval and early modern worldviews. The growing importance of individual experience, humor, and secular themes shows Chaucer's progressive outlook. Caroline Barron (2010) suggests that Chaucer's focus on common people and everyday language signals "a cultural shift towards social awareness and linguistic democratization." His choice to write in Middle English instead of Latin or French gave voice to a wider audience and contributed to the development of English as a literary language. The discussion also reveals that Chaucer's narrative technique particularly his use of frame narrative and dramatic realism enhances the social authenticity of the text. The interactions among the pilgrims during the storytelling contest mirror real-life communication among people from different walks of life. A. C. Cawley (1961) explains that this narrative device allows Chaucer "to present society not as an abstract concept, but as a living, dynamic human community."

Overall, the findings confirm that *The Canterbury Tales* functions as both a mirror and a critique of medieval society. Chaucer's combination of humor, moral reflection, and social observation enables readers to understand the moral conflicts, aspirations, and contradictions of the Middle Ages. His work continues to be relevant today because it explores timeless human values such as honesty, pride, greed, and love making it one of the earliest and most profound social commentaries in English literature.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* serves as a vivid and realistic reflection of medieval English society. Through his diverse group of pilgrims, Chaucer presents the social hierarchy, moral values, and cultural tensions of the fourteenth century. His use of satire, humor, and realism exposes both the virtues and the vices of different social classes, especially the corruption within the Church and the rise of individualism. The study confirms that *The Canterbury Tales* is not merely a collection of stories but a timeless social commentary that mirrors the complexities of human life and the spirit of the Middle Ages.

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