INTRODUCTION

CHAUCER'S LIFE

IN COMPARISON with other major English writers of his time, Chaucer left abundant records of his life. We have no official documents for the life of the author of *Piers Plowman* or for the Gawain-poet; records of Gower's life are few and confused. But Chaucer, because he was a public servant, can be traced in the records of his offices. Publication of *Chaucer Life-Records* in 1966 brought together the 493 known items, 150 of them never before assembled, and provided a substantial basis for a Chaucer biography. These records of official acts rarely touch on his personal affairs and never mention his poetry; they do not give the year of his birth or the exact date of his marriage or death. But they do document a useful and eventful life.

Chaucer was a soldier, an esquire of the king's household, a member of diplomatic missions, a controller of customs, a justice of the peace, a member of Parliament, the clerk of the king's works in charge of building and repair at ten royal residences, and a forest official. As a soldier, Chaucer was captured by the French; as a customs controller, he monitored a chief source of the royal revenue; as a member of the 1386 Parliament, he saw the first attacks on Richard II, which led eventually to the deposition of the king in 1399. On the king's business he traveled over much of southeast England, to France a number of times, to Spain, and at least twice to Italy. His responsibilities brought him in contact with many kinds of people, among them: king, chief justice, bishop, and countess; merchant, money-lender, and friar; minstrel, soldier, gardener, and highway robber. Inspired and perhaps influenced, but certainly not distracted, by the world around him, Chaucer yet found time to write thousands of lines, among them some of the best poetry in English.

*The Chaucer Family*

Chaucer came from a well-to-do merchant family that had lived for several generations in Ipswich, some seventy miles northeast of London. The city exported wool to Flanders and imported wine from France. The family were vintners, wholesale dealers in wine, and also held positions in the customs service. As often happened in medieval families, they did not always use the same surname. Geoffrey Chaucer's paternal great-grandfather was called Andrew de Dinnington; Andrew's son, Robert Malyn le Chaucer; Robert's son, John Chaucer. The name Chaucer, from the French, meant maker of shoes or hose; but none of Chaucer's ancestors were, so far as is known, shoemakers or hosiers.

By the late thirteenth century Robert Chaucer, the grandfather, and his wife Mary had settled in London. Prosperous people, they continued to hold property in Ipswich. In 1324, John, son of Robert and Mary, was kidnapped by an aunt, who intended to marry him to her daughter in order to keep the Ipswich holdings in the family. Instead, the twelve-year-old boy was freed; the aunt and her accomplices went to prison and paid a heavy fine, £250, proof that they were wealthy.

John later married Agnes, daughter of one John Copton and niece of Hamo de Copton, "moneyer" at the mint in the Tower of London. The couple continued to accumulate property. After Hamo's death in 1349, a plague year, Agnes inherited, with Hamo's other London property, twenty-four shops and
two gardens. In the same year, John Chaucer inherited property from his half brother, Thomas Heyron. John and Agnes were, then, owners of substantial London property. John Chaucer was a vintner, as his father, stepfather, and half brother had been; like his father, stepfather, and cousins, he also held positions in the customs service.

Geoffrey Chaucer's parentage is clearly established; he described himself in a deed of 19 June 1381 as "son of John Chaucer, vintner, of London." But the date and place of his birth are not precisely known. For the date, the clearest evidence comes from his deposition of 15 October 1386 in the famous Scrope-Grosvenor trial (discussed below). There he testified that he was forty years old "et plus" (and more), making the date of his birth no later than 1345. Some witnesses in that case guessed inaccurately at their ages; but Chaucer added a verifiable statement that supports his testimony. He said that he had borne arms twenty-seven years; he had in fact served in France in the campaign of 1359. It is usual, then, to accept a birth date in the early 1340s.

Fourteenth- and fifteenth-century records tell something of Chaucer's descendants. A London lawsuit of Michaelmas term, 1396, identified "Thomas Chaucer, esquire, son of Geoffrey Chaucer, esquire." Additional evidence that Thomas was the son of Geoffrey rests upon a statement by Dr. Gascoigne, chancellor of Oxford and a neighbor of Thomas, and on the use by Thomas of a seal with Geoffrey Chaucer's coat of arms and name. A retinue roll compiled at Carmarthen Castle in 1403 lists Thomas Chaucer with Lewis Chaucer. Lewis seems to have been the lyte Louys my sone of the tendir age of ten year for whom in 1391 the poet composed A Treatise on the Astrolabe. Two presumed daughters of Geoffrey Chaucer are also sometimes mentioned, Elizabeth Chaucy, a nun at Barking in 1381, and Agnes, an attendant at the coronation of Henry IV; but the records do not clearly identify them as daughters of the poet.

Nothing more is known of Lewis, Agnes, or Elizabeth, but many records attest to the distinguished career of Thomas Chaucer, as he became one of the most wealthy and influential men in England. Enriched by marriage to a great heiress and by annuities from John of Gaunt, Richard II, and Henry IV, he served as chief butler to four kings, envoy to France, and, often, speaker of the House of Commons. His daughter Alice married as her third husband William de la Pole, Duke of Suffolk; their grandson John, Earl of Lincoln, was designated heir to the throne of his uncle, Richard III. Richard's defeat and death at Bosworth Field in 1485 effectively ended the possibility that a nephew of his could gain the crown. But John de la Pole and, after him, three of his brothers continued to assert the claim until the last of them died in about 1539, a prisoner in the Tower of London, thus ending the line of Chaucer's male descendants.

Chaucer's Early Home and Youth

Though Chaucer's birthplace is unknown, it is known that his parents, Agnes and John Chaucer, held property in Vintry Ward, one of the two wealthiest wards in medieval London, and in what the sixteenth-century antiquary John Stow called "the middes and hart of the city." One Chaucer "tenement" (property holding, not tenement in the modern sense) lay on Thames Street, which ran parallel to the river and a block north. It was largely inhabited by vintners, since wine landed at the quays on the Thames could easily be brought to their cellars for storage. Some of London's leading merchants, among the richest men in the city, lived in the ward as well. Two of them, John Stodeye and Henry Picard, served as mayors and lent thousands of pounds to the king. John Chaucer's name is associated with theirs in such records as wills and deeds. Nobles as well as merchants lived in Vintry Ward. Queen Philippa owned a dwelling there called Tower Royal; after her death it passed to her daughter-in-law, mother of Richard II, Joan of Kent, who took refuge there in 1381. Among the people living nearby were Gascon wine merchants, an Italian family, and Flemings—London in Chaucer's boyhood was a cosmopolitan city.

Wills of neighbors, deeds, and inventories give some idea of the probable plan and furnishings of the Chaucer home. Above the cellars were the hall (not a passageway, but the principal room), the kitchen, a latrine, and upper rooms called "solars." They were furnished comfortably with hangings for the walls and cushions for the benches, and such luxuries as heavy silver pitchers and cups engraved with the owners' coats of arms.
No school records for Chaucer have survived, but it is possible to account for some of the knowledge of Latin classics shown in his works. London merchants' sons in his time could receive a good education. Near the Chaucer home on Thames Street were three schools, among them the almonry school of St. Paul's Cathedral, which has preserved the inventory of books left in 1358 by a schoolmaster, William de Ravenstone, for the use of the pupils. As well as Latin grammars, treatises on theology, and a few music textbooks, there were classics—Virgil's *Georgics*; Claudian's *Rape of Proserpina*, cited three times in Chaucer's poems; ten books of Lucan; the *Thebaid* of Statius, quoted at the beginning of *The Knight's Tale* and partly summarized in *Troilus and Criseyde*; and the *Metamorphoses* of Ovid, Chaucer's favorite classical Latin source. Chaucer paid tribute, near the end of *Troilus and Criseyde* (5.1792) to five of the great poets of antiquity, Virgile, Ovide, Omer, Lucan, and Stace.

The earliest known document actually naming Geoffrey Chaucer is a fragmentary household account book, June 1356 to April 1359, kept for Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster and wife of Lionel, a son of Edward III. It records purchases in April 1357 for Geoffrey Chaucer—a short jacket, a pair of red and black hose (?), and a pair of shoes; and, "for necessaries at Christmas," there was recorded a gift to him of 2s. 6d. The relative modesty of the gifts suggests that Chaucer was among the youngest and least important of the retainers of the countess, perhaps in his early teens, and perhaps a page.

Life in the countess's household would offer a young attendant a rich variety of experiences if he accompanied her on her almost constant travels. During the time covered by the accounts, she spent Christmas at Hatfield for a royal hunting party, along with her young brother-in-law John of Gaunt, who later became the richest and most powerful man in England; she purchased mourning in London for the funeral of the dowager queen, Isabella; she visited a royal relative at the convent of Stratford-atte-Bowe (where the Prioress learned her French; General Prologue 1.125); and she was a guest at King Edward's Great Feast of St. George at Windsor, the king's favorite castle.

**Journeys and the Royal Court**

From the household of the countess Chaucer seems to have followed her husband, Prince Lionel, into the king's army. In September 1359 King Edward and his sons, with a large expeditionary force, were invading France. The king, who held King John of France prisoner, hoped to take the city of Reims and to be crowned king of France in Reims Cathedral, traditional site of the coronation of French kings. Chaucer, according to his testimony in the Scrope-Grosvenor case (see below), was at the town of "Retters" (Réthel), near Reims, which Edward was besieging in December and early January 1359–60. Chaucer testified that he was captured, but the captivity was short. By 1 March 1360 the king had contributed £16 to help pay Chaucer's ransom, and he was free. Edward's forces were at that date in the village of Brétigny, in the vicinity of Chartres. The campaign had brought Chaucer within sight of the great cathedrals of Reims and probably Chartres.

The last record of Chaucer in the service of Prince Lionel dates from the peace negotiations at Calais in October 1360, when the prince paid Chaucer for carrying letters from Calais to England.

The expedition and messenger service of 1359–60 were the first of many journeys and commissions for Chaucer. No records have yet been found for him, however, for the years between 1360 and 1366. After the gap in the records the first document concerning Chaucer is a safe-conduct for the period of 22 February to 24 May 1366, granted to Chaucer by Charles II (Charles the Bad) of Navarre; it permitted "Geffroy de Chauserre" with three companions, their servants, horses, and luggage, to travel through Navarre. Perhaps Chaucer was on a pilgrimage, like many others (and like the Wife of Bath; General Prologue 1.466), to the popular shrine of Compostela in Galice at Saint-Jame; the customary pilgrimage route crossed Navarre. Or Chaucer may have been sent by the Black Prince to recall English mercenaries from the forces of Henry of Trastamara, against whom the prince was mounting an expedition. Another possible explanation for Chaucer's journey is that it was connected with arrangements for the later passage of English troops through Navarre into Castile, where in April of 1367 the prince was to win the battle of Nájera and restore to his
throne Pedro the Cruel, called in The Monk's Tale (VII.2375) O noble, O worthy Petro, glorie of Spayne.

Other events of 1366 may have been more important to Chaucer than the Navarrese journey: the evidence indicates that Chaucer's father died in that year and that Chaucer married. The last record of John Chaucer is dated 16 January 1366, when he and his wife Agnes signed a deed; on 13 July 1366 Agnes was referred to as the wife of Bartholomew atte Chapel. Chaucer's marriage is implied by the record of a grant, on 12 September 1366, of an exchequer annuity of 10 marks to one Philippa Chaucer, damoiselle of the queen. This annuity was often collected for her "by the hands of" Geoffrey Chaucer. Philippa may have been a member of the Ulster household during Chaucer's service there; the accounts note in 1356 and 1358 clothing bought for one "Philippa Pan." Chaucer's wife seems to have been the daughter of Sir Gilles, called "Paon," de Roet, a knight of Hainault and one of Queen Philippa's countrymen who had accompanied her to England, and who became Guienne King of Arms, that is, chief herald of Aquitaine, when that region was ruled by the Black Prince. Another of the Roet daughters, Katherine Swynford, was for more than twenty years the mistress of John of Gaunt; he married her in 1396. Philippa Chaucer was in attendance on three members of the royal family: King Edward's daughter-in-law, Elizabeth; the queen, Philippa; and, after the queen's death, another daughter-in-law, Constance of Castile, the second wife of John of Gaunt. As Philippa Chaucer had received a royal annuity in 1366, so she also received in 1372 an annuity from the revenues of John of Gaunt.

Geoffrey Chaucer is first recorded as a member of the royal household on 20 June 1367, when he received a royal annuity. One record of that date described him as valettus; another of the same date called him esquier. At any rate, he was one of a group of some forty young men in the king's service, not personal servants, but expected to make themselves useful around the court. Like Chaucer, other esquires of Edward III did not come from the great noble families. They were often sent about England on the king's business, sometimes performed military service, and occasionally journeyed overseas on the king's behalf. In return, they received rewards such as were given to Chaucer: summer and winter robes, daily wages, annuities, and appointments to office. Geoffrey and Philippa Chaucer, among others, received liveries of mourning for Queen Philippa in 1369.

During the years when Chaucer was in the king's service, he may also have been studying among the lawyers of the Inner Temple, one of the Inns of Court. The tradition that he had received such training arose from a statement by Thomas Speght in his Chaucer edition of 1598 that "Master Buckley" had seen an Inner Temple record "where Geffrye Chaucer was fined two shillings for beatinge a Franciscane Fryer in fletestreate." It is now known that Master Buckley was at that time the keeper of the Inner Temple records, and that the fine was a customary amount. His testimony is accepted as very probably true. Mention of the Manciple (General Prologue I.567) and of the career of the Man of Law (General Prologue I.309-30) seems to show familiarity with the Inns of Court and the lawyers there. In addition, Chaucer's later official positions, as controller of the customs and clerk of the king's works, demanded that he keep records in Chancery hand, and use French and Latin legal formulas, skills taught in the Inns of Court.

During this time Chaucer may have been experimenting with various popular verse forms, in French as well as in English. By their nature, most of them were likely ephemeral, but recent publication of fifteen French lyrics, with the sigillum "Ch," from a fourteenth-century French manuscript (Wimsatt, Chaucer and the Poems of Ch) raises the intriguing possibility that these poems might be by Chaucer. Even if they are not, they represent the kind of French verse Chaucer may well have written during his early years at court.

While he was the king's esquire and, presumably, studying among the lawyers, Chaucer also made a number of journeys overseas. Two years after the Navarre safe-conduct of 1366, he "passed at Dover" on 17 July 1368 and was absent from England for at most 106 days; in that length of time the king's envoys had been able to make the journey to Rome and return. It has, accordingly, been suggested that Chaucer was sent as a messenger to Prince Lionel in Milan. There, in May 1368, the prince had married a daughter of the immensely powerful Visconti family, despots of Milan. Chaucer may,
however, have gone no farther than to France or Flanders on this journey.

_The Book of the Duchess_, Chaucer's first major poem, belongs to this period. It is an elegy for Blanche, Duchess of Lancaster, John of Gaunt's first wife, who died, it is now believed, on 12 September 1368. The duke remarried in 1371; but he continued to remember Blanche, paying £30 on 12 September 1379 for memorial masses on the anniversary of her death and ten silver marks in 1382 to each of the chaplains chanting masses at her tomb in St. Paul's. In his will of 1398 he directed that he be buried beside his "very dear late consort, Blanche." It seems significant, then, that on 13 June 1374 John of Gaunt granted a life annuity of £10 to Chaucer "in consideration of the services rendered by Chaucer to the grantor" and "by the grantee's wife Philippa to the grantor's late mother and to his consort." A few days later, on 18 June 1374, the duke ordered alabaster from which the master mason, Henry Yevele, was to erect a tomb for Blanche. It is clear that in 1374 John of Gaunt was remembering Blanche; by his grant to Chaucer he may have been rewarding the author of _The Book of the Duchess_.

Another Lancaster connection was recorded in 1369, when Chaucer received £10 as one of the members of the king's household who were to accompany John of Gaunt on a military expedition to Picardy (where the Squire of the General Prologue [1.86] served part of his military apprenticeship). There is no record of Chaucer's part in the 1369 campaign. Nor is it known what was the king's business that took Chaucer to "parts beyond the seas" in 1370.

Having made four journeys abroad in four years, 1366-70, Chaucer undertook in 1372-73 a commission that gave him his first recorded contact with Italy. He accompanied two Italian merchants, Giovanni di Mari and Sir Jacopo di Provano, then residents of London, to negotiate on the king's behalf with the doge and people of Genoa, who wanted the use of an English port. The business discussed may have been partly military; Giovanni di Mari, Chaucer's associate, was in the same year hiring Genoese mercenaries for King Edward.

The commission given Chaucer before his departure did not name Florence; yet the expense account submitted on his return, 23 May 1373, recorded treating of the affairs of the king "in Genoa and Florence." The visit to Florence has seemed significant to Chaucer scholars because Petrarch and Boccaccio, still living, were in that region. Chaucer, if he did not meet them, could hardly have avoided hearing a great deal about them and about Dante, who, though he had died in exile fifty years earlier, was now revered in Florence. Quite possibly Chaucer obtained manuscripts of some of these authors' works on this visit. It is customary in this connection to mention the reference to Petrarch in _The Clerk's Prologue_ (IV.31–33), but with the warning that it is the Clerk, and not Chaucer, who claims to have heard the story in _The Clerk's Tale_ from Petrarch.

The journey of 1372–73, it was once thought, gave Chaucer his first acquaintance with the language and literature of Italy; but it is now agreed that Chaucer might well have been chosen for that mission because he already knew some Italian. The hundred days allowed by the 1372–73 journey would hardly have given Chaucer time to learn a language. London in Chaucer's youth provided better opportunities; many Italian families lived in London, some near the Chaucer house in the Vintry; Chaucer's father and grandfather had business dealings with Italians. In any event, Italy had become, by 1373, a part of Chaucer's firsthand experience.

A few months after his return from Florence, he had occasion to deal with Italians again. He was sent by the king to deliver a Genoese ship, detained at Dartmouth, to her master, a merchant of Genoa and an associate of Chaucer's fellow envoy, Giovanni di Mari. This commission has been taken as additional proof of Chaucer's knowledge of Italian. (It is also of interest because the piratical Shipman of the General Prologue [I.389] was _of Dartemouthe_.)

Other Journeys and the Customhouse

Chaucer seems to have had good fortune during the year after his return from Italy. On 23 April 1374, St. George's Day, while the king was celebrating the feast at Windsor, he made an unusual grant to Chaucer. Almost no other business was done on that holiday, but King Edward granted the poet a gallon pitcher of wine daily for life. The wine, it is sometimes suggested, may have been the reward for a poem presented to the king during the festivities. Chaucer collected the wine until the death of Edward III in 1377; Richard II, on his accession, immediately
confirmed the gift and, on 18 April 1378, permitted Chaucer to commute it for an annuity of twenty marks, a respectable income.

In 1374, also, Chaucer obtained a home in London. On 10 May, Adam de Bury, mayor of London, and the aldermen leased to Chaucer, rent-free for life, the dwelling over Aldgate, one of the six gates in the city wall. Chaucer was to keep the apartment in good repair, to allow entry for purposes of defense in time of war, and he was not to sublet. Such a lease was not unusual; the city owned dwellings over other gates and sometimes leased them to city officials. Ralph Strode, Chaucer’s friend, had a similar apartment over Aldersgate. Adam de Bury, whose name appears on Chaucer’s lease, had been an associate of Chaucer’s father, had been sent abroad on a mission by the king, and had held a customs office himself. It was once suggested that Chaucer owed the lease to the influence of King Edward’s mistress, Alice Perrers, who owned property near Aldgate; but it is more likely that Adam de Bury, because of his contact with the Chaucer family, did, as the lease states, make the arrangement.

The dwelling over Aldgate became, as it turned out, very convenient, just a few minutes walk from the customhouse, where Chaucer was to be employed for the next twelve years. On 8 June 1374 Edward III appointed Chaucer controller of the export tax, or customs, on wool, sheepskins, and leather, in the port of London, and of the subsidy, a heavier tax on the same merchandise. He was to receive an annual salary of £10. Chaucer, the son and grandson of men who had held minor offices in the customs service, was taking up a family occupation.

His task was essential. Because wool was England’s principal export, much depended on the wool customs and subsidy. These taxes had helped to finance King Edward’s wars in the 1340s and 1350s and were paying for the smaller military expeditions of the 1370s and 1380s. Wool taxes paid the daily costs of government, including, often, royal grants and annuities, and supported the costly court of King Edward and, later, of his grandson, Richard II.

As controller, Chaucer worked with the collectors, the nominal heads of the customs organization for the port of London. The collectors were merchants and were making the king large loans on the security of the revenue from the customs. Among these collector-creditors while Chaucer was in office were the immensely rich Nicholas Brembre, John Philipot, and William Walworth, neighbors of the Chaucer family in Vintry Ward. These three men were leaders of the politically powerful victualers’ guilds, *riche and sellers of vitaille*, like the friends of the Friar (General Prologue I.248). At the customhouse the collectors were expected to record each day’s shipments and the amount of customs or subsidy collected. The controller, Chaucer, kept the “counter-rolls,” independent lists against which theirs were checked. The controller had to monitor the honesty and efficiency of the collectors. Under these conditions, Chaucer’s position at the customhouse demanded tact and astuteness.

He had a heavy responsibility because customs receipts while he was in office were large, averaging over a ten-year period £24,600 a year. Dealing with such sums, the controller was, reasonably enough, expected to keep the rolls “with his own hand” and to exercise the office “in his own person. At the end of the fiscal year, at Michaelmas, controller and collectors were summoned to the “view,” or audit, a complex and arduous process.

An incident connected with the customs gave Chaucer a sizable reward. He was granted, on 12 July 1376, the value, £71 4s. 6d., of wool forfeited by one John Kent, who had exported it without paying customs. The sum was important, more than seven times Chaucer’s annual salary.

Chaucer seems to have been successful as controller. He was appointed on 20 April 1382 to the additional controllership of the petty customs, import and export duties on wine and other merchandise not assessed under the wool customs. He managed to collect his annual salary regularly, a considerable feat in itself. He remained in office twelve years, longer than any other controller of his time; and he received in most years an additional reward for his “unremitting labor and diligence.”

One detail from his experience at the customhouse explains the background of the line from the General Prologue (I.277) in which we learn that the Merchant wants the sea protected from pirates *bitwixe Middelburgh and Orewe//e:* customed merchandise was, after 1384, shipped to a central “staple” at Middelburg across the sea from Orwell, the seaport for the Chaucers’ home city of Ipswich.
While he held the office as controller, Chaucer was pursuing his literary interests. According to the Eagle in The House of Fame (653–57), Geffrey, when he had made his rekenynges, went to his house to sit at another book. Presumably the reckonings were at the customhouse, and Chaucer went home to Aldgate to read and write. It is generally believed that during the years when he lived over Aldgate Chaucer was writing major poems: The Parliament of Fowls, The House of Fame, and Troilus and Criseyde. In addition he was translating the Consolation of Philosophy of Boethius from the Latin. It has been observed that Chaucer was most prolific as a writer when he was apparently most busy with other affairs.

But he was too experienced an envoy to be allowed to devote himself entirely to his books and to the customhouse. In 1376, the year when Edward III and his heir, the Black Prince, were both dying, Sir John Burley, knight, and Chaucer, esquire of the king, received payment for journeys “on secret business of the king.” The records do not show where they went or what matters they discussed. During 1377 Chaucer was sent overseas several times on royal business. In February he and Sir Thomas Percy were advanced sums for a mission to Flanders, also described as “the king’s secret business.” But the expense accounts submitted on their return do not mention Flanders. Instead, they note payment to Chaucer for travel to Paris and Montereuil, 17 February to 25 March, and to “parts of France,” 30 April to 26 June 1377. The French poet Eustache Deschamps, who in 1386 was to send Chaucer a well-known ballade in his praise, may have been in Paris at that time.

According to Froissart, Chaucer was a member of a mission attempting to negotiate a marriage between Richard and a French princess; but Froissart is frequently inaccurate, and no known English record names Chaucer as a member of such a mission until after the death of Edward III, 21 June 1377. In fact, the only official note concerning the purpose of Chaucer’s series of journeys to France is dated 6 March 1381. It speaks of Chaucer as having been in France “to treat of peace in time of Edward III and in time of Richard II to discuss a marriage between the king and a daughter [not named] of his adversary of France.” A French marriage did not take place, and war with France was renewed.

Chaucer’s next mission gave him another opportunity to visit Italy. He and Sir Edward Berkeley received funds on 28 May 1378 from “the king’s treasurers for war,” William Walworth and John Philipot, collectors of the London customs, for a journey to Lombardy to discuss “certain business concerning the king’s war” with Bernabò Visconti, lord of Milan, and Sir John Hawkwood, the Englishman who was Bernabò’s son-in-law and commander of mercenaries. Official records do not give the result of these secret negotiations, but they do indicate that Lombardy maintained relations with England. Exchequer accounts of December 1378 show King Richard’s rich gifts to messengers from Bernabò and Hawkwood.

For Chaucer the journey meant a renewal of his acquaintance with Italian literature. The Visconti owned famous libraries and had been patrons of Petrarch. The strong impression they made on Chaucer was recorded in his poems. Bernabò himself, God of delit, and scourge of Lombardye, appears in The Monk’s Tale (VII.2399–2400). Observation of Bernabò and his brother, notorious tyrants, may have suggested to Chaucer the phrase tirauntz of Lumbardye (LGWPro F 374).

By 19 September 1378 Chaucer had returned to London. He did not go overseas again until his work at the customhouse had ended.

While he was still controller, his name appeared in a record which is not yet fully understood. One Cecilia Chaumpaigne, daughter of a London baker, William Chaumpaigne, and his wife Agnes, acknowledged, on 4 May 1380, a release to Geoffrey Chaucer of all kinds of actions (i.e., legal procedures seeking redress) in respect of her raptus as well as of any other matter. The definition of the word raptus in the context of this 1380 incident has been discussed repeatedly. It could have meant physical rape; or it could have meant abduction, as it did in the account of John Chaucer’s kidnapping and in the case Chaucer was appointed to investigate in 1387, the abduction of a young heiress, Isabella atte Halle. The record, however, is clear; it means that Cecilia Chaumpaigne clears Chaucer of all responsibility. Additional facts, equally ambiguous, further complicate interpretation of these events. On 30 June 1380 Robert Goodchild, cutler, and John Grove, armorner, citizens of London, acknowledged a general release to Chaucer of all actions of law. On the same day
Cecilia Chaumaigne acknowledged a similar release to Goodchild and Grove. Then, in a recognizance dated 2 July 1380 Grove agreed to pay Cecilia at Michaelmas £10, a sum equivalent to Chaucer's annual salary at the customhouse. It has been suggested that Grove served as an intermediary to bring about a settlement between Chaucer and Cecilia. It has also been suggested that Grove, because of his financial involvement, was the principal in the case and Chaucer only an accessory.

Students of medieval English law disagree on the interpretation of the records. What is undeniable is the high social standing of the witnesses to Chaucer's release: Sir William Beauchamp, chamberlain of the king's household; Sir William Neville, admiral of the king's fleet; Neville's friend, Sir John Clanvowe, author of a religious treatise; John Philipot, collector of customs; and Richard Morel, a merchant and member of Parliament who lived near Chaucer in Aldgate Ward.

The next year was marked by an event of much wider significance than the Chaumaigne case: the Rising of 1381, the Peasants' Revolt. No record tells us whether Chaucer was at Aldgate when thousands of rebels entered London through that gate or whether he saw them burn John of Gaunt's palace, the Savoy, or whether he saw them behead Simon Sudbury, archbishop of Canterbury and chancellor of the kingdom. A number of the victims came from Vintry Ward, where Chaucer still owned his father's house; they included Richard Lyons, merchant, who had profited by lending thousands of pounds to the king; and scores of Flemings, whose headless bodies were, according to the chroniclers, left piled in the streets near the river. When the Nun's Priest speaks casually of the noise made by the mob *whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille* (NPT VII.3396), Chaucer was talking of events that may once have been of a good deal more than casual importance to him.

The mob was brought under control with the help of John Philipot, Nicholas Brembre, and William Walworth, with all of whom Chaucer had worked at the customhouse. These "gode and worthi men of the city of London," as they were called in a popular account of the revolt, were immediately knighted by the king.

Chaucer, on 19 June 1381, four days after the suppression of the revolt, quit-claimed his father's holdings on Thames Street to Henry Herbury, a merchant and a man of means.

Chaucer may have been gradually ending his connections with London. He was beginning to entrust the work of the customs to deputies. The terms of his appointment as controller of the petty customs on 20 April 1382 allowed him to name a deputy. During his earlier absences, in France, 1377, and in Italy, 1378, his work had been carried on by deputies. He was permitted to employ a deputy at the wool customs from 23 June to 1 November 1383, and again for a month beginning 25 November 1384. Finally, on 17 February 1385 he was given leave to appoint a permanent deputy.

**Chaucer and Kent**

The changes at the customhouse have been taken to suggest that Chaucer had already left London for nearby Kent, a county with which he had had earlier associations. In 1375 King Edward had granted him the wardship of two Kentish heirs, William Soles and Edmund Staplegate. Such wardships, often granted to the king's retainers, could be lucrative. Staplegate's father had left large holdings in Canterbury, and Chaucer's profit from the estate was £104.

By 1388, records described Chaucer as "of Kent." He may have been living in Greenwich. The Host's reference in the Reeve's Prologue (1.3907) to *Grenewych, ther many a shrewe [rascal]* *is inne* has often been taken to mean that Chaucer himself was living in Greenwich and making one of his customary self-deprecating jokes.

Knowledge of two official positions Chaucer held in the 1380s strengthens the theory that he was then living in Kent. He was added on 12 October 1385 to a sixteen-member commission of peace for Kent. Other members were Sir Simon Burley, the Black Prince's friend, sometimes called the most influential man in the kingdom of the prince's son, King Richard II; representatives of leading Kentish families, Cobham, Culppeper, and Devereux; and six sergeants-at-law, men of the same high legal rank as Chaucer's Man of Law (General Prologue I.309). Membership on a Kentish peace commission in 1385–86 entailed a special responsibility because the French were at that time threatening to invade the south coast of England. In 1386 Cobham and Devereux were also appointed members of a "great and contin-
ual council given comprehensive powers over all matters of state" in the kingdom. Chaucer remained a member of the peace commission, with one brief and apparently accidental break, until 15 July 1389, a few days after he had been given another position.

Even more important than Chaucer's appointment as a justice of the peace was his election to Parliament in 1386 as one of the two "knights of the shire" (members of the House of Commons) to represent Kent. The Parliament to which he was sent was a turning point in King Richard's reign and in the history of medieval England. When it convened in October, troops had been called up to defend London against the threatened French invasion. But there were no funds to pay them; they were wandering the London streets searching for food and loot. In the sessions of Parliament, powerful noblemen, led by the king's youngest uncle, Thomas of Gloucester, attacked the chancellor and the treasurer of the realm and compelled Richard to dismiss them. Gloucester and his allies may have threatened to depose Richard if he did not comply. Though knights of the shire took a prominent part in the attack, there is no record that Chaucer was more than a quiet observer. He had ties with both sides.

While he was at Westminster attending Parliament, Chaucer, on 15 October 1386, gave his often-cited deposition in the Scrope-Grosvenor case. He was testifying that his friends, the Scrope family, had long borne the coat of arms that the Grosvenors were attempting to make theirs. Chaucer had, he said, seen the device on Scrope armor at the time of the siege of Reims in 1359-60.

**Personal Matters**

One of the first tributes to Chaucer as poet came from France in 1385-86. Though France at that time was preparing to invade England, Chaucer's friend, Sir Lewis Clifford, returned from France bringing Chaucer a poem of generous praise, written by the leading French poet of the time, Eustache Deschamps. Deschamps's ballade, with the refrain "great translator, noble Geoffrey Chaucer," stressed Chaucer's role as a cultural intermediary who had made _Le roman de la rose_ accessible to English readers. The poem praised Chaucer extravagantly for his brevity of speech, his wisdom, his practical learning. Des-

...
and Chief Justice Robert Tresilian. Whether or not Chaucer saw them moving through the London streets to their deaths, he described such a scene memorably in The Man of Law’s Tale (II.645–50):

*Have ye nat seyn somtyme a pale face,*
*Among a prees, of hym that hath be lad*
*Toward his deeth, wheer as hym gat no grace,*
*And swich a colour in his face hath had*
*Men myghte knowe his face that was bistad*
*Amonges alle the faces in that route?*

Chaucer himself seems to have been harmed during this time only by suits for debt. Twice, 16 and 25 April 1388, he was sued by John Churchman, collector of the customs at London. It is, therefore, sometimes believed that when he made over his annuities to a certain John Scalby on 1 May 1388, he was exchanging future income for cash with which to settle present debts.

Chaucer was not entirely free from official duties; he was still a member of the Kent peace commission. But between 1386 and 1389 he had leisure in which he could work on the General Prologue of The Canterbury Tales and a number of the tales themselves.

**Clerk of the Works and Forester**

New official tasks, however, soon demanded his attention. King Richard, who had regained power in May 1389, appointed Chaucer on 12 July 1389 to what was possibly his most arduous position: he became clerk of the king’s works. He had responsibility for construction and repair at ten royal residences and other holdings of the king. One was the Tower of London, serving at that time as palace, fortress, prison, armory, mint, and place of safekeeping for records. Among other “works” he oversaw were Westminster Palace, center of government as well as occasional dwelling for the royal family; the castle of Berkhamsted; and seven of Richard’s favorite manors, including Eltham and Sheen, mentioned in The Legend of Good Women (Pro F 497). He was also overseer of hunting lodges in royal forests, the mews at Charing Cross for the king’s falcons, parks (hunting preserves), gardens, mills, pools, and fences. He had purveyors who assisted him at most of these places and a controller who checked his accounts as he had checked those of the customs collectors.

Chaucer’s clerkship represented a heavier and more direct responsibility than did the controller. He was not dealing with such large sums of money as he had checked at the customhouse, but he supervised a great number of craftsmen and arranged for the purchase, transportation, and storage of large quantities of supplies. He had to find and pay the men, pursue them if they ran away, and, if necessary, imprison them; he had to choose, purchase, and store building materials, and to see that they were not stolen. Chaucer’s wages, at two shillings a day, amounted to more than three and one-half times his base salary at the customhouse.

The importance of Chaucer’s position is suggested by the achievements of the king’s craftsmen on his payroll. One of them, master mason Henry Yeveley, planned the rebuilding of the naves of Westminster Abbey and Canterbury Cathedral, designed the tombs of Richard II and Queen Anne in the Abbey, and devised the rebuilding of Westminster Hall, sometimes called “the handsomest building in Europe.”

Special occasions made special demands. After a storm that caused great damage along the Thames, Chaucer was appointed on 12 March 1390 to a royal commission “of walls and ditches” for the extensive marshes between Woolwich and Greenwich; he may then have been living in the latter town. In May and October of 1390, when King Richard invited knights from overseas to take part in his tournaments, Chaucer was in charge of putting up “scaffolds,” seating for the royal and noble spectators, and lists for the combats at Smithfield. Construction of lists in The Knight’s Tale (1.1882–84, 2087–88) has sometimes been compared to Chaucer’s task at Smithfield. One of the October guests was to be installed as a Knight of the Garter in St. George’s Chapel at Windsor Castle, where the order had been founded; accordingly, on 12 July 1390, Chaucer was commissioned to repair the chapel, described as “ruinous and like to fall to the ground.”

No large building projects were under way during Chaucer’s clerkship. Average spending by his successors was two and one-half times as great as his. But one useful project, undertaken before Chaucer took office, continued throughout his term and beyond. It was the rebuilding and enlarging of the wharf beside the Tower of London, where wool was brought for customs levy. The wharf repairs and other works near the Tower cost more than half of all the money spent by Chaucer in the works office; and, appropri-
ately, they were paid for by the revenue from wool customs. Chaucer's previous work as controller of customs had brought him daily to the wharf, and he knew well what improvements were needed.

At least once during his clerkship he encountered danger. In early September 1390, probably while traveling from one royal manor to another with money for payrolls, he was attacked by a gang of highwaymen and robbed. The robbers were caught, tried, and convicted. But the legal records differ so widely that it is not possible to determine whether there was one robbery or three; whether the loss was £10 or £20 6s. 8d. or £9 43d. whether the place was Westminster or Hatcham or the "Foule Oke," a place name or a tree, in Surrey or in Kent. It is certain, however, that Chaucer was not required to repay the king's money.

Chaucer's clerkship of the works ended on 17 June 1391. The robbery, in which he was said to have been wounded, may have caused him to give up the office. Or he may have found the financial situation unsatisfactory; when Chaucer left office, the audit of his account showed more than £87 still owing to him. This was a large sum; it exceeded by £17 the total amount of his wages during the entire term of his appointment.

When Chaucer left the clerkship, another place was waiting for him: at some time before 22 June 1391 he was appointed deputy forester of the royal forest at North Petherton in Somerset. Other royal servants received similar appointments.

The forestership, like Chaucer's earlier positions, was a responsible one, demanding skill in handling money and men, because forests in late medieval England were sources of revenue. Royal forests comprised entire regions that could, and at North Petherton did, include moor, marsh, pastureland, cultivated fields, and villages and their churches, as well as wooded areas. Royal forests yielded many kinds of income, such as fees for pasturing cattle and for allowing swine to feed on acorns and beech mast, and tolls for traveling forest roads.

According to tradition, Chaucer as deputy forester lived at Park House in the forest, though it is not clear whether his duties required that he live there. Wherever he lived, he did not lose touch with the court. In 1393 Chaucer received from King Richard a gift of £10 "for good service." The next year Richard granted him an annuity of £20. Henry of Derby gave Chaucer fur to trim a gown of scarlet (a fine cloth) during the year 1395–96. In the same year, Chaucer delivered £10 to Henry from the royal exchequer. King Richard, reminded of an earlier grant, certified to Chaucer in 1398 the yearly gift of a tun of wine.

Last Years

The mood of the court changed in 1397. After several years of peace and moderation Richard moved suddenly to take revenge on the Appellants, who had in 1388 caused the exile or death of a group of his friends. The king arrested his enemies, charged them with treason, and caused them to be imprisoned, exiled, or put to death. Henry, John of Gaunt's son, had been one of the Appellants; he was exiled in 1398. When John of Gaunt died in 1399, Richard seized his estates; Henry returned to claim them and took advantage of the opportunity to depose Richard and have himself crowned as Henry IV

Of Chaucer in these years we know little. We know that his Petherton appointment was renewed, and that he may have taken his last recorded journey. A royal protection was issued on 4 May 1398 to "Geoffrey Chaucer, our beloved esquire going about divers parts of England on the king's arduous and pressing business."

Henry's accession seems at first glance to have made little difference in Chaucer's life. The poet and his wife had received annuities from Henry's father; Chaucer had written The Book of the Duchess as a memorial to Henry's mother; and during the last decade Chaucer had received a gift from Henry himself. As king, Henry renewed the grants Chaucer had received from Richard II and granted an additional forty marks yearly for life. The envoy of a late poem, The Complaint of Chaucer to His Purse, hailed Henry as true king by right of conquest, birth, and free election (line 23), though the Complaint itself suggests that the grants approved by the new king had not yet been paid.

Chaucer now provided himself with a home near the court. On 24 December 1399 he took a fifty-three-year lease of a house near the Lady Chapel of Westminster Abbey, on a site now occupied by the Chapel of King Henry VII. For a few months he collected, or others collected
for him, his royal grants: on 21 February and 5 June 1400 he received partial payments of the arrears due on his exchequer annuities. No life records of later date have been found.

The inscription on Chaucer's tomb in Westminster Abbey gives the date of his death as 25 October 1400. The tomb may, however, have been erected as late as 1555, and there is no other evidence as to the exact date of his death. He was buried in the Abbey for several reasons, none of them, so far as we know, related to his being a poet. He had a right to burial there because he was a tenant of the Abbey and a member of the parish. Moreover, commoners who had been royal servants were beginning to be buried near the tombs of the kings they had served. No one in England in 1400 could foresee that Chaucer's tomb would be the beginning of Poets' Corner and that Chaucer would become the "stremes hede" of poetry in English.

MARTIN M. CROW AND VIRGINIA E. LELAND

THE CANON AND CHRONOLOGY OF CHAUCER'S WORKS

The manuscripts and early printed editions attribute to Chaucer a great many works that were demonstrably written not by Chaucer but by his contemporaries or by fifteenth-century "Chaucerians" who emulated his style and poetic forms. These "apocryphal" works (most of which are printed in the supplementary volume 7 of Skeat's edition) were included in collected editions of Chaucer's works until the publication of Skeat's Oxford Chaucer (1894) and the Globe Chaucer (1898). Hence, many of the ideas about Chaucer held by eighteenth- and nineteenth-century poets and critics were shaped by these false attributions.

The problems of the authenticity of the works are discussed in the notes to each. In general, the most important evidence is supplied by Chaucer himself—the lists of his works in the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women, the Introduction to The Man of Law's Tale, and the Retraction at the end of The Canterbury Tales—and by the testimony of those who knew or could have known him: Henry Scogan, to whom Lenvoy de Chaucer a Scogan was probably addressed and who vouches for the authenticity of Gentilesse; John Lydgate, who began his own poetic career in Chaucer's lifetime, and who provides a list of Chaucer's works in the Prologue to his Fall of Princes; and the copyist John Shirley (c. 1366 - 1454), who, though he retails a good deal of gossip, is usually reliable in his attributions. Such testimony accounts for the authenticity of all but a handful of lyrics, which are accepted as Chaucer's on the basis of their attribution by the scribes and their conformity in style and subject matter to the works authenticated by the testimony of Chaucer and his contemporaries.

Some works in this volume are clearly not by Chaucer, including most of the Supplementary Propositions of the Astrolabe. They are printed here because some may indeed be Chaucer's and because they illustrate certain passages in the authentic works. The "B" Fragment of The Romaunt of the Rose is also clearly not Chaucer's; neither are all scholars convinced that either the "A" or the "C" Fragments of The Romaunt of the Rose are authentic (though most believe that the "A" Fragment is Chaucer's). All three parts of The Romaunt of the Rose are printed, because some may be genuine and because the Romaunt provides the student with a contemporary translation of a work that had an enormous influence on fourteenth-century literature in general and on Chaucer's works in particular. Among the lyrics, the Complaynt D'Amours and A Balade of Complaint are probably not by Chaucer; they are included because the case on neither is completely closed, and convincing proof for or against their authenticity is still lacking. Against Women Unconstant, Proverbs, and Womanly Noblesse have been accepted by some editors and rejected by others.

Robinson provided a subsection of the lyrics that he labeled "doubtful," and included in that section Merciles Beaute, which almost all scholars now accept as genuine. We have chosen to place that poem, along with the others in Robinson's "doubtful" section, a group labeled "Poems Not Ascribed to Chaucer in the Manuscripts." Robinson doubted the authenticity of Proverbs, but the present editors believe that the work may indeed be Chaucer's; the question, however, remains open. Aside from Proverbs, the canon as Robinson defined it, and thus as represented in this edition, is almost universally accepted.

Apparently, there are a number of lost works. In the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women Chaucer lists two works that have since been
lost, *Origenes upon the Maudeleyne* (ProLGW F 428) and *Of the Wreched Engendrynge of Mankynde* (ProLGW G 414), a translation of a work by Pope Innocent III, and he implies that he also had written many love lyrics and *many an ympe* for Love’s holidays (ProLGW F 422). In the Retraction to the *Tales* he lists a work called *the book of the Leoun* and *othere booke of legendes of seintes, and omelites, and moralitee, and devocioun* (X.1087–88).

Attempts have been made to identify these lost works, and a number of poems have been proposed for inclusion in the canon: Carleton Brown (PMLA 50, 1935, 997–1011) argued that “An Holy Medytacioun” (in Lydgate’s *Equatorie* 0/ the Planetis) were consistent with Chaucer’s own phonology, morphology, and syntax of the text of the *Astrolabe* (printed in Price’s edition) showed that the Chaucer’s composition, written in his own hand. R. M. Wilson’s careful study of the language (printed in Price’s edition) showed that the phonology, morphology, and syntax of the *Equatorie* were consistent with Chaucer’s own usage. Chaucer, in the preface to the *Astrolabe*, had promised to compose third and fourth parts with materials similar to those in the *Equatorie* manuscript (though not in the *Equatorie* itself).

Given this promise, the evidence of the handwriting, and the consistency of the language with Chaucer’s usage, the case for the authenticity of the *Equatorie of the Planetis* seemed very strong indeed.

Robinson was not convinced. The argument from the marginal notation, potentially the most persuasive evidence, seemed to him very weak: The entry “radix Chaucer” hardly constitutes an ascription of the treatise to the poet and might even seem more natural if written by a person other than the author. The argument from the handwriting, which is based on a comparison of the Peterhouse entry with a Record Office note made fourteen years earlier and not proved to be in Chaucer’s hand, also rests on slender evidence.

Robinson therefore rendered a “Scotch verdict”—not proven—on the claim for Chaucer’s authorship of the *Equatorie*. Because the work is of purely scientific interest, and because of the availability of Price’s edition (1955)—complete with facsimile, transcription, translation, detailed explanatory notes, and full introductory and illustrative materials—Robinson decided not to add the *Equatorie* to his second edition.

Very little has changed since then. No one has offered convincing further evidence of Chaucer’s authorship and no one has made a persuasive case against it. We are inclined to share Robinson’s skepticism. J. D. North (RES 20, 1969, 132–33) has noted a few possibly significant differences in the technical vocabularies of the *Astrolabe* and the *Equatorie* (though in the absence of the Latin text from which the latter was translated, one cannot make too much of this), and he notes that none of Chaucer’s works show any evidence of the use of an equatorium. Most Chaucerians are inclined to believe that the *Equatorie* was written by a contemporary Londoner, perhaps one in Chaucer’s own circle of acquaintances, though the question remains open.

We have decided to omit the *Equatorie of the Planetis* from this edition for the same reasons Robinson adduced. The work, while possibly by Chaucer, adds little to our understanding of his undoubtedly genuine works. Though it is of great importance to the student intent on the study of fourteenth-century science as part of
Chaucer's intellectual milieu, such a student is still best served by Price's admirable edition; the *Equatorie* is a scientifically and mathematically much more sophisticated work than the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, and it requires for its understanding the exhaustive commentary that Price supplies.

There is little concrete evidence for determining exactly when Chaucer's works were written. There are, of course, no records of the "publication" of any of his works, and contemporary references to Chaucer's works are rare. The mention of *Troilus and Criseyde* in Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love* is of some help in establishing the date of *Troilus*, though exactly dating Usk's *Testament* is difficult. Likewise, the reference to Boece and *The Romaunt of the Rose* in the ballade that Eustache Deschamps addressed to Chaucer (usually dated 1385–86) is of little help in determining the exact dates of those works.

As might be expected, the works themselves contain little specific information about when they were written. Only the *Treatise on the Astrolabe* contains an actual date, 12 March 1391 (Astr 2.1.7), but there are indications in the text that Chaucer returned to the work after some interval, in the spring of 1393 or even later. (Supplementary Propositions 2.44 and 45 are dated 1397, but they are spurious.) He may therefore have begun writing the *Astrolabe* earlier than 1391; there is no way of knowing when he stopped and left the work unfinished. Likewise, though many of Chaucer's poems may have been "occasional, intended to celebrate or commemorate some important court event, only *The Book of the Duchess* can be positively linked to a specific historical event, the death of Blanche of Lancaster in September 1368. Even this is of limited help, since scholars have differed considerably on the question of how long after Blanche's death the poem was written. Other allusions to historical events are rare in Chaucer's works, rarer than many scholars have been willing to believe; even when they do appear (for example, the unusual conjunction of the stars described in *Troilus* 3.624–30, which actually occurred in 1385), the exact implications of such allusions for dating a poem is a matter of dispute. Moreover, Chaucer sometimes revised his works (as in the case of the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*); adapted existing works to new purposes (as in some of *The Canterbury Tales*); or kept by him works to which he turned sporadically over a long period of time (as may have been the case with the *Astrolabe*). It is no wonder that the dates assigned to Chaucer's works are at best approximations.

Chaucer does, however, provide us with some basis for determining the approximate order in which his works were written: for instance, he lists some of his works in the Prologue to *The Legend of Good Women*. The Introduction to *The Man of Law's Tale* lists some of the lives told in *The Legend of Good Women*, and this shows that at least parts of the *Legend* were written before that Introduction. Likewise, Chaucer's allusions to his own works, such as the mention of the Wife of Bath in *The Merchant's Tale* and in the Envoy to Bukton, supply evidence for the relative order of composition of those works.

Though clearly less reliable than direct allusions, the internal analysis of Chaucer's works can also provide some evidence for their order of composition. Chaucer sometimes "borrowed" from his own works, and at various stages of his career he concentrated his attention on particular problems of form and subject, producing clusters of works characterized by a striking number of identical lines and shared stylistic devices. Where the date of one work in a group related by form or subject is known, however roughly, the relative dates of the other works can often be inferred.

Chaucer's works also tend to reflect his reading and intellectual interests, and identification of sources common to a group of works can be used in the same way as form and subject to infer relative dates. In the late 1370s Chaucer's reading of Italian poetry, mainly that of Boccaccio, is apparent in almost everything he wrote. In the early 1380s he undertook the translation of Boethius's *Consolation of Philosophy* and this affected almost all that he wrote at that time. In the middle of the 1380s Chaucer developed an interest in the technical aspects of astronomy that led to his *Astrolabe* and a concern with judicial astronomy (astrology) that is apparent in many works probably written in the late 1380s and early 1390s. About this time Chaucer apparently came upon the works included in Jankyn's "Book of Wicked Wives" (mentioned in the Wife of Bath's Prologue) and their influence is apparent throughout the "Marriage Group" of
The Canterbury Tales (the tales from the Wife of Bath’s Prologue to The Franklin’s Tale).

The tendency of Chaucer’s works to reflect his current reading and interests is the basis of the old, not altogether mistaken, division of Chaucer’s career into the so-called French, Italian, and English periods. His early works reflect his reading of and admiration for French courtly verse; his discovery of Italian poetry significantly affected the form and subject matter of his poetry; and his last period, the time of The Canterbury Tales, is characterized by a profound shift in his ideas about poetry and the representation of English life. These divisions are not mutually exclusive; Chaucer was an English poet from the beginning, and as his career developed he added to rather than rejected his earlier enthusiasms. Yet his interests and his ideas about poetry did change, and tracing such changes can be useful in determining the chronology of his works.

Finally, the scholar intent upon establishing the relative dates of Chaucer’s work must consider matters of style and his increasing mastery of his craft. This is a difficult matter, since Chaucer’s literary accomplishments are so varied that it may be said that he never “developed” in the manner of many writers. He was the most restlessly experimental of poets, constantly trying and mastering, then abandoning but sometimes later returning to genres, metrical forms, styles, and subject matter. Stylistic comparison for the purpose of determining chronology is thus rendered very difficult indeed. Yet, applied with care, stylistic analysis can help to determine the relative dates of composition.

By such means scholars have developed a chronology of Chaucer’s work about which there is, given the nature of the problem, a surprisingly broad consensus. Opinion is not unanimous, however, and the chronology given below represents only a general agreement. In many cases, there is reason to doubt the chronology, and the Explanatory Notes should be consulted for particular details about each work.

BEFORE 1372: Fragment “A” of The Romaunt of the Rose (if Chaucer’s); possibly the ABC; The Book of the Duchess (1368–72).

1372–80: Lyrics such as The Complaint unto Pity and Complaint to His Lady; Saint Cecilia (The Second Nun’s Tale, possibly later); some of the tragedies later used in The Monk’s Tale; The House of Fame (1378–80); Anelida and Arcite.

1380–87: The Parliament of Fowls (1380–82); Boece; Troilus and Criseyde (1382–86); Adam Scrivyn; The Complaint of Mars (probably around 1385); The Complaint of Venus; Palamoun and Arcite (The Knight’s Tale); possibly the “Boethian ballades” (The Former Age, Fortune, Truth, Gentilesse, Lak of Stedfastnesse); The Legend of Good Women (though some of the legends may be earlier, and the Prologue was later revised).

1388–92: The General Prologue and the earlier of The Canterbury Tales; A Treatise on the Astrolabe (1391–92, with additions in 1393 or later).

1392–95: Most of The Canterbury Tales, including probably the “Marriage Group.”

1396–1400: The latest of the Tales, including probably The Nun’s Priest’s Tale, The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale (though part of the latter is probably earlier), and The Parson’s Tale; and several short poems, including Scogan, Bukton, and the Complaint to His Purse.

LARRY D. BENSON

LANGUAGE AND VERSIFICATION

The English language had been used in poetry and prose for at least six centuries before Chaucer began to write. The earliest records show considerable regional variation, but by the end of the tenth century the type that is now called Late West Saxon, though it was not completely homogeneous, had come to serve as a generally accepted written language over most of England. The tradition was destroyed by the great political and cultural upheaval of the Norman Conquest, and for several generations writing in English was not much cultivated. When it revived, in the late twelfth century and after, writers used their own regional forms of the language, and no particular type could claim superiority over the others. Soon after the Conquest, commerce became increasingly centered in London, and government administration and courts of law at Westminster nearby. The London area attracted a varied population from many parts of the country, especially the east and central midlands, and this inflow led eventually to a blend of linguistic elements recognizable as characteristic of the capital. Considerable variation in particular features was evidently accepted until long after Chaucer’s time. Thus the frequent assertion that his usage corresponds in all
The increasing use of English in every sphere of life in the course of the fourteenth century made it natural that Chaucer should choose to write in it, even though some contemporary writers, notably his friend Gower, used French and Latin as well. Inevitably, too, Chaucer wrote in the English familiar to him from business as well as from court circles in London and Westminster. In some respects, especially in the technique of verse, he was a great innovator, and a substantial number of words and phrases, many of French origin, are first recorded in his work. But the influence he had on the English language seems to have been more a matter of style than substance. He showed that English could be written with an elegance and power that earlier authors had not attained. Once his literary eminence was recognized, as happened during his own lifetime, the type of language in which he wrote gained prestige. Yet, this would concern the cultivation of literature more than the practical affairs of merchants or officials, and Chaucer’s example cannot have had much effect in determining what kind of English would later develop into the generally accepted written standard.

**Pronunciation**

An author as interested in form as Chaucer obviously was cannot be appreciated without attention to the effect of reading aloud. The study of the pronunciation of ancient languages is a complex matter relying on comparison among related languages, observation of known history, and phonetic probability, by which a reasonably convincing view of the relation of writing to pronunciation can be built up. The manuscripts in which Chaucer’s works have been preserved are all later than the date of his death, though some are not much later; and it is uncertain how closely they reproduce his original spelling. A fully coherent and uniform system of spelling had not yet been developed—the pre-Conquest system, itself not completely consistent, had been much modified by French conventions.

Some of the variants were evidently matters of writing only, implying no instability of pronunciation. For example, two characters now completely obsolete were still often used as alternatives by the scribes who copied Chaucer’s works: the ancient ð (“thorn”) alternated with th as a way of representing what must have been the interdental fricative sounds that are now always spelled th, as in thin and then; and z (“yogh”) had a number of possible values, being usually equivalent to y in words like zit (yet) or to gb in nyzt (night). These characters are replaced in most editions, as they are in this one, by their modern equivalents; but other alternative spellings are often, though not always, left unaltered by editors, notably the largely free variation between i and y representing vowels, as lif or lyf (life), or between ou and ow as in you or yow.

Though individual European languages have developed their own peculiarities in representing pronunciation by means of the Roman alphabet, there is much common ground in the use of the majority of letters. The striking differences between modern English and the continental languages in the way in which letters are associated with sounds, especially the long vowels and diphthongs, did not arise until after Chaucer’s time, so that the pronunciation of his English can, however partially and approximately, be recovered by giving the spellings of the manuscripts the values they would have in, say, French or Spanish or Italian. Much information also comes from the rhymes and rhythms of verse. In addition to the articulation of individual sounds, it is necessary to attend to the weight and incidence of stress in words of more than one syllable. Though the main stress very often falls on the same syllable as in modern English (this of course can vary to some extent) there are many differences and alternatives. In words of native English descent, the stress tends to fall on the first syllable, unless it is a prefix; but in those from French often later syllables are stressed.

Many words which in modern English have initial stress are still accented in the French way by Chaucer. So, for example, licour (Tales I.3) has the stress on the second syllable, which consequently contains the fully articulated long vowel ū, to rhyme with flour, ou being an established French way of writing this sound; and similarly servyse (I.250) takes the stress on the
second syllable, as modern French service still does, and rhymes with arise, which had not yet developed the modern English diphthong. Some words of French origin are stressed in more than one way, sometimes—especially at the end of a verse line—on the French pattern, but sometimes with the initial stress characteristic of native English words: coroune and coroune vary, as in Tales I.2290 and 2875; requeste (Tr 3.148) is stressed on the second syllable as in the later language, but in Tales I.1204 and in some other places where the word appears within, rather than at the end of, the line, the first syllable is stressed; and similarly revers (VII.2977) has the stress on the prefix (as in the frequent alternative stressing of research today). Both the stress and the number of syllables vary with the position in the line of mæner, as in Tales I.71, but manière, rhyming with cheere, in lines 139-40, or with beere, in lines 875-76. The number of syllables may often differ from that in later pronunciation, notably in words with the frequent suffix -cio(u)n, which regularly forms two syllables, so that, for instance, nacioun (II.268) has three syllables and congregacioun (VII.2988) has five. Such words often rhyme with others having a long ā in the final or only syllable, such as toun, which implies at least some degree of stress on that syllable. Another type of stress pattern is seen in remembraunce (Tr 5.562), which is accented on the first and third syllables and so can rhyme with such words as chaunce. This kind of movement appears mostly in words of French origin, but it may also occur in native compounds ending in -nisse and even verbal forms ending in -inge (a traditional rhyming practice dating back at least to the early thirteenth century). Thus bisynesse (Tales I.3643) rhymes with gesse; dawenyng (VII.2882) with synge.

Though a few particular points remain in doubt, there is good reason to believe that the London English of Chaucer’s time used the following vowel sounds in stressed syllables:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Short</td>
<td>a e i o u as in man, men, bis, folk, ful</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Long</td>
<td>ā ē ĕ ī ĭ ū and probably ā as in name, sweete, breath, ridden, good, foo, flour, muwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Diphthongs</td>
<td>ai au iu eu ou oi as in day, cause, newe, fewe, soule, joie</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Both the short and the long i were often written y, as in nyght and nyne, respectively, and the short u was written o, (a French convention) especially next to letters consisting of short vertical strokes like m and n, as in comen, sonne.

Long vowels were distinguished by the scribes inconsistently: ē and ō, whatever their quality, were often shown by the doubled letters ee and oo, and ā less frequently by aa; ū was usually written ou or ou. A single vowel symbol followed by a single consonant and another vowel, as smale, seke, ridden, cote, normally represented a long vowel, but there are exceptions, especially with i. Before certain consonant groups, especially ld, mb, nd, vowels were generally long, as in old, climben, finden.

Of the short vowels, a was evidently a low front sound like that of French patte, not the more fronted sound now general in words like English bat; o was a rounded vowel more like that of the British bot or the first sound in auction than the unrounded sound now general in American speech; u was always rounded as in put, not unrounded as in putt.

Of the long vowels, ā was probably further to the front than the usual articulation of the a of “father”; ē was like the French close e in café, but longer; ī like the French open e in fête, not far from the beginning of the sound of e in thre; ĩ was like the i in machine; ō was like the French close o in rôle, not far from the beginning of the sound of o in note; ō was like the sound of oa in broad; ũ like the u in rule. The distinction between close and open ē and ō was not expressed in spelling at the date of most Chaucerian manuscripts. The appropriate sound of o or oo can usually be deduced from the modern forms of the words concerned, for the sounds have remained distinct and the descendant of close ō came to be spelled usually oo, that of open ō often aa. Close ō mostly developed to ū as in food (sometimes shortened as in good), open ō mostly to the diphthong now heard in road but in broad changed little. However, the vowels that were formerly close and open e are not generally distinguished in modern English, and the pronunciation has to be learned primarily from etymology, though spellings introduced mainly in the sixteenth century, and often surviving, are also of great help. The close sound was represented by many scribes and printers by ee, the open sound by ea, and modern forms are usually a good indication of the earlier difference in such pairs as meet and
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sound</th>
<th>Pronunciation</th>
<th>Spelling</th>
<th>ME Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ā /a:/</td>
<td>a in father (but fronted)</td>
<td>a, aa</td>
<td>name, caas</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ā /a/</td>
<td>a in Fr. patte or Ger. Mann</td>
<td>a</td>
<td>can, that</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ē (close) /e/</td>
<td>e in Fr. café or in fate (but a pure vowel)</td>
<td>e, ee</td>
<td>grene, sweete</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ɛ (open) /ɛ/</td>
<td>e in Fr. fête or in there (but a pure vowel)</td>
<td>e, ee</td>
<td>teche, heeth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>e (in unstressed syllables) /ə/</td>
<td>e in horses</td>
<td>e</td>
<td>sonne</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>i /i/</td>
<td>i in machine</td>
<td>i, y</td>
<td>shires, ryden</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o (close) /o/</td>
<td>o in note (but a pure vowel)</td>
<td>o, oo</td>
<td>bote, good</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>o (open) /ɔ/</td>
<td>oo in broad</td>
<td>o, oo</td>
<td>holy, goon</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ʊ /u/</td>
<td>oo in boot (but a pure vowel)</td>
<td>ou, ow, ogh</td>
<td>flour, fowles, droghte</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ū /u/</td>
<td>u in put</td>
<td>u, o</td>
<td>but, yong</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ū /u:/</td>
<td>u in Fr. lune or Ger. grün</td>
<td>u, eu, ew, uw</td>
<td>vertu, seur, salewe, muwe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>au /au/</td>
<td>ou in house</td>
<td>au, aw</td>
<td>cause, lawe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ēi /ai/ or /œi/</td>
<td>e + i or a + i</td>
<td>ay, ai, ey, ei</td>
<td>sayle, day, wey, heir</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ēu /iu/</td>
<td>i + u</td>
<td>eu, ew</td>
<td>knew, newe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ēu /eu/</td>
<td>e + u</td>
<td>eu, ew</td>
<td>lewed, fewe</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>oi /oi/</td>
<td>oy in boy</td>
<td>oi, oy</td>
<td>coy</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ōu /ou/</td>
<td>o + u</td>
<td>ou, ow</td>
<td>growen, soule</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ōu /ou/</td>
<td>o + u</td>
<td>o, ou (before -gh)</td>
<td>thought, foughte</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MEat. (Break and great exceptionally preserve a different sound relation lost in most other words.) Even in some fifteenth-century manuscripts the beginning of the spelling distinction can be seen—words like ease, peace are usually written ese, pes, but occasionally ease, peas.

The sources of close ǣ were the Old English long ǣ and ǣo, as in seke (seek), depe (deep), and short e lengthened before consonant groups, as in feeld (field) and Old French and Anglo-Norman close ǣ, as in contree (country). The main sources of open ē were Old English ǣ and ǣa, as in teche (teach), grete (great), and short e lengthened in an open syllable (i.e., before a single consonant and another vowel), as e (eat), and Old French and Anglo-Norman open e, as in ese (ease) and irete (treat). The existence of ǣ, a vowel like that of French lune or German grün, is inferred from the fact that words adopted from French containing this sound almost always rhyme with other French words, e.g., muwe with stuwe (Tales I.349-50), not with native words containing the diphthong iu, like newe. The sole exception appears to be the rhyme in Tr 4.1310-12, where muwe from French mue rhymes with trewe from Old English
The diphthong in such words was evidently still a “falling” one, that is, with the stress on its first element, not the second, as in modern few. Words containing low or tw do not rhyme with those containing the Old English ēaw or ēaw (a small number), which are also written ew in Middle English; thus newe does not rhyme with fewe. The latter diphthong must still have had a lower vowel, some kind of e, as its first element. No such distinction between close and open first elements can be observed in diphthongs containing o: growen, which etymologically should contain a close ō, rhymes with known, which should have an open ō—the sounds have evidently coalesced. The diphthong written either ai/ay or ei/ey somewhat similarly arose from two earlier diphthongs with first elements of distinct quality, as in day from Old English ēaw, and May from Old French mai, against wey from Old English weg.

By the early fourteenth century, these sounds had merged, so as to rhyme together, but the quality of the resulting diphthong cannot be confidently determined. Descriptions given much later by grammarians indicate that in the sixteenth century there was much variation in the pronunciation of such words. It is probable that in Chaucer’s time the first element of the diphthong was articulated further back, nearer to a than to e. The diphthong written oi/oy seems also to have developed from two earlier diphthongs with first elements of distinct quality, as in joie, Troie, and other words, the latter in destraye, anoie. These groups are usually, but not invariably, kept apart in rhyme.

The spelling ow/ow could represent, in addition to ō as already noticed, the diphthong ou composed of o and u, as in grow. Scribes varied in writing words in which o precedes the back fricative consonant usually written gb. The commonest spelling is probably ow, but simple o is favored by some, so that modern thought may be written thought(e), thought(e), or thought(e). Scribes did not always match spellings exactly to pronunciation as evidenced by rhyme. In particular, some words descended from forms containing the diphthong ei before the consonant y were sometimes written with the historical spelling ei/ey though the diphthong had developed to the simple vowel i. Thus eye might be so spelled though rhyming with such a word as crye, as in the Tales, VIII.964–65.

Fully unstressed syllables may occur before or after the main stress in a word. Those before the stress are usually in prefixes, most of them presumably containing the same neutral or “central” vowel as in the first syllables of modern about and away. Those after the stress are the more numerous and important because they include the major grammatical inflections of nouns, adjectives, verbs, and adverbs. Many of these inflections contain a vowel usually written e, whether final or before one of the consonants -s, -n, -d, -st, -th. When the vowel was final, it was no doubt also the neutral vowel. Such vowels were often elided before a vowel or b- beginning a following word. When a consonant closed the unstressed syllable, the vowel could evidently be higher, since it is sometimes written i or y and may form part of a rhyme with a syllable containing a short i as the plural noun clerkis rhymes with the singular clerk is in Tales VII.3235–36 and the past participle woundid with the group wounde bid in II.102–3. Unstressed syllables also often contain the vowel i in the common adjectival ending usually written y, as in booly, and the verbal ending -ing(e). Before the stress i occurs in prefixes, especially in past participles like ybake, yronne and some adverbs like yno(u)gb, iwis, but also in bi- as in biginne; and in the prefixes dis- and in- (derived from romance languages) as in disport, inspired.

The consonants of Chaucer’s English were mostly the same as those used in the modern language and were represented by the same letters. A number of consonants since lost in pronunciation were still sounded: initial g, k, and w were sounded, as in gawen, knoen, wlatoun, wretten; l before consonants, as in half, folk; r in all positions, and it was probably trilled, at least between vowels, as in faren. Wb- was still always distinct from w-, and in -ng the g was probably sounded as in finger. But in French words initial b was not pronounced, nor was g in the combination gn (representing a French palatal consonant): resigne (ABC 80) rhymes with medicyne (78). The letter c, as a spelling, was usually distributed as it still is, representing s before a front vowel but k before a back one or l; however, k was sometimes used before a back vowel, as in kan, kaughte. The suffix so common in modern English as -tion usually had the form -cio(u)n, and cc was the normal spelling in words like accoun.
(action). *Ch* represented the sound that it still has in *church*, and not the sound that developed in French, as in *machine*. The group now written *tch* was normally spelled *cb*, as *wrecche*. The letter *g* represented, as it does today, the back stop before back vowels, as in *good*, and some others, like *biginne*; before *e* and sometimes *i*, it had the affricate sound heard in modern English *age*, and not its French sound. Initially this sound could be represented by either *g* or *j* (often written *i*, of which *j* is merely a variant shape): *jet* (Tales VIII.1277) is written *get* in some manuscripts. When doubled, *g* could mean either of these sounds: the stop in *bigge* (big) or the affricate in *brigge* (bridge). (The spelling *dg* was not yet in use.) Chaucer's English still used a group of consonantal sounds which the later language has lost—the spelling *gh* represented a fricative consonant, front or back in articulation according to preceding vowels, like that written *cb* in German *ich* and *Bach* and in Scottish *loch*. The nearest sound in modern English is perhaps a strongly articulated initial consonant in *hive*. The fricative sounds represented by *f, s*, and *th* were evidently voiceless, except between vowels or in positions without stress, so that *is*, for example, often rhymes with words such as *this* or *blis*, and *was* with *bras, allas*; but in the fully unstressed syllables of many noun plurals, the *s* may well have been voiced and pronounced as *z*. Between vowels and following the stress, all the fricatives were presumably voiceless. This can be seen in nouns ending in *f* in the singular, which are written with *-v* in the plural (*wif, wives*), or conversely in the relation of the consonants in paradigms such as *yeven* (give), with past singular *yaf*; and the same no doubt held for the other fricatives, though the distinction could not be shown in the spelling; e.g., the *s* in *risen* was pronounced *z*.

In Chaucer's rhymes a distinction is maintained between long and short consonants, though opportunities for it are not very numerous. For instance, *sone* (son) rhymes only with *wone*, noun or verb, which historically had a single *-n*, whereas *sonne* (sun) rhymes with *wonne, wonne, conne, bigonne*, all with etymologically double *n*.

**Inflections**

Many words in Chaucer's English retained from an earlier period unstressed final syllables that have since been lost, in pronunciation though not always in writing. Some of these syllables, usually consisting of the neutral vowel written *-e*, were an integral part of the word deriving from a previous form, whether in Old English, Old French, or occasionally some other language. Others were inflections carrying a grammatical significance. They also often consisted of the neutral vowel alone, but often it was followed by a consonant; and some inflections consisted of a consonant alone.

**Nouns**

Most nouns modify their forms to indicate plural number and to mark the genitive, or possessive, case. The uninflected form of the singular may end in a consonant, such as *folk* or *flour*, or an unstressed *-e*, as *ende* or *space*, or a stressed vowel or diphthong, as *see* or *array*. A small number of nouns have alternative forms with and without *-e*, the commonest probably being *blis* or *blisse*. The inflections of the plural and the possessive are usually the same, marked by *-s*, or by *-es* if the singular ends in a consonant. Monosyllabic nouns ending in the singular in either a consonant or a diphthong acquire a second syllable in the plural, as *bokes, dayes*. Words ending in *-e* add only *-s* and so remain of the same syllabic structure. Most nouns of more than one syllable and ending in a consonant, especially those of French origin, form the plural with simple *-s*, as *coverchiefs, parisshens*, and those ending in *-t* often adopt the French spelling *-z*, as *servants*; but some assume the fuller English ending, as *laxatyes* (sg. *laxatyf*). A small group of nouns form their plurals with *-e*n instead of, or as an alternative to, *-es*; a few are still current. Those which always have *-e*n are *brethren, children, yen*; *oxen, keen (cows)*, *pezen* (peas) occur once each. Alternatives to forms in *-s* are *assben, been, doghtren, joon, bosen, snoon, sustren, tooon*. Nouns forming the plural by change of vowel, as in modern English, are *men, wommen, feet, gees, teeth, mys*. Some nouns are unchanged in the plural. These may be (a) words derived from Old English nouns whose plural form was the same as the singular, e.g., *deer, bors, neet, sheep*, sometimes *tibing*; (b) words denoting measure of time or space, qualified by numerals (which would often have been followed by a genitive plural), such as *foot, myle, pound, night, winter, yere*; (c) words of French origin ending in *-s*, notably *ca(s)* and *pa(s)*; and (d) the word *maner(e)* with numerals and in phrases like *many manere*.
Case in the singular is mostly shown in the genitive, or possessive, by adding -s or -es. A few possessives take no ending, being descended from Old English nouns that were unchanged in the genitive. These are mainly nouns of relation ending in -r, such as fader, brother, suster; alternative forms with -s are also found. A few others, such as lady or berte, descend from Old English genitives in -an. Proper names ending in -s add no suffix in the possessive, as Primus, Venus. In the plural, the possessive is usually identical in form with the nominative, as bir frendes soules (Tales III.1725), senatoures wyves (VII.3371); but nouns forming the plural by change of vowel also add -es in the possessive, as mennes wittes (II.202), wommennes conseils (VII.3256). In some prepositional phrases a singular noun may add the ending -e (and double a final consonant after a short vowel): to bedde, to shippe, on fire, with childe, and especially on live (alive). Live also functions adverbially in a few phrases, such as al bir lyve (I.459).

ADJECTIVES Like nouns, adjectives may end their basic form in -e, whether of Old English origin, as grene, sweete, or French, as amiable, debonnaire, rude. Monosyllabic adjectives ending in a consonant do not normally inflect for case, but they regularly add -e when qualifying a plural noun and also in the so-called weak declension. The weak form is found in two principal uses: (a) when the adjective is preceded by a defining word, such as the definite article, a demonstrative, or a noun or adjective in the possessive case, as, for instance, the yonge sonne (Tales I.7), this olde man (VI.714), Epicurus owene sone (I.336), bis owene good (1.611); and (b) in vocative phrases such as O stronge god (I.2373), leve brother (I.1351). An inflectional -e is also sometimes used after prepositions, as with harde grace (III.2228). Adjectives in predicative positions are not always inflected in the plural, as they weren as sayn (I.2707), thise ladies were nat right glad (IV.375), but many are, as they were seeke (I.18), the bowes weren so brode (I.2917). Definite uses are rare in this position: uninflected forms appear in this is the short and playn (I.1091). An inflectional -e is rare in adjectives whose basic form has two syllables, where it would often not fit the rhythm of the verse, but in trisyllabic words the additional weak syllable it provides is often preserved: The booly blisful martir (I.17), but the semelieste man (IX.119). The adjective alle inflected as if weak or plural occasionally qualifies a singular noun, as in As alle trouthe and alle gentilisse (Tr 2.160) and alle thynge with singular verb in alle thynge bath tyne (Tales IV.1972). A few plural adjectives, of French origin, have the French ending -s: two are in verse, places delителей (V.899), romances that been roiales (VII.848), and a number in prose, such as boures inequales (Astr 2.8.2). A rare survival of a genitive plural ending is -er in aller (of all; Old English ealra) in phrases such as oure aller cost (Tales I.799); it also functions as an intensive of the superlative in the form alder- as in alderbest (I.710), and in bothe (of both; Tr 4.168).

The regular suffixes for the comparison of adjectives are the same as in modern English, -er and -est, sometimes in the weak forms -re and -este. Monosyllabic ending in a consonant double it before the comparative ending, and a long vowel in the stem syllable is then shortened, as gretter from gret. The short vowel is extended to the superlative grettest. Ould, long, and strong change o to e in the comparative and superlative, elder, lenger, strenger. The adjectives good, yvel or badde, muchel, and litel have irregular comparison as in modern English: bettre and bet, werse (baddel once), moore, lasse or lesse, with superlatives beste, werste or worste, mooste, and leeste; neigh has the comparative neer and the superlative nexe. Comparison may also be expressed by the adverbs moore and mooste, as the moore mury (Tales I.802), the moore noble (1.2888), the mooste stedefast (IV.1551).

ADVERBS Many adverbs of manner are derived from adjectives, often by means of the suffix -e, as faire, faste, boote, lowe. Such forms may be compared in the same way as adjectives, with suffixes -ere(e) and -este(e), as The fastere sbette they (Tales VII.2532), the faireste bewed (VII.2869). These suffixes are applied similarly to other adverbs, such as soone, which doubles the -n- (and shortens the vowel) in sonner (VII.1450). Adverbs are also formed with -ly or -liche, which is added to words of French, as well as native, origin, for instance, myrily, playnly, rudeliche. Such forms are mostly compared by means of moore and moost, as the moore lightly (X.1041), moost felyngly (1.2203). Murnery (I.714) is the only example of the addition of the comparative suffix before the ending. Irregular comparison appears in the same group of words as with adjectives: wel, yvele or baddely, muchel or muche, litel
or * lite* have, respectively, *bet or betre, wers or werre, moo or moore, lasse or lesse*. In addition, *fer has ferre, ny has neer*, with *next* as the superlative.

**PRONOUNS**

**Personal**

Most forms are like those of modern English. In the first person singular nominative, the normal form is *I* but *ich* appears occasionally, with some variation among manuscripts. It is suffixed to the verb and confirmed by rhyme in two occurrences of *theeb* (Tales VI.947 and VIII.929). *Ik* occurs twice and *theek* once in passages spoken by the Reeve from Norfolk (Tales I.3864, 3867, 3888). The second person nominative *thow* is often suffixed to a verb, with assimilation of the consonant, especially when linked to common verbs, as in *arow, wiltow*, but also occasionally when joined to others, as *thynkestow* (Tr 4.849). The possessive adjectives *myyn* and *thyn* take the normal plural *-e* when qualifying plural nouns. If they precede a word beginning with a consonant other than *b*, they lose the *-n*, as *myyn bertes queene* but *my wyf* (Tales I.2775). In the third person singular, the possessive of the neuter is the same as the masculine, *bis* (not *its*: *the lylie upon bis stalke grene* (I.1036)). When qualifying a plural noun, the masculine and neuter possessive is often written *bise*, as if inflected like an adjective, but the *-e* does not seem to have been pronounced as a syllable. The neuter nominative (and accusative) singular is usually *it*, but *bit / byt* appears sometimes in a minority of manuscripts (not of *The Canterbury Tales*). The feminine nominative is always *she*, the objective and possessive usually written *bir* or *bire* within the line but *bere* at the end, rhyming with such words as *bere, spere* (I.1421-22, II.459-60). In the plural, the second person nominative *ye* and the objective *you / youre* are distinguished. *Ye* occurs once (Troilus 1.5) as a weakened form of the objective. In the third person, the nominative is always *they*, the possessive and objective, *bire / bere* and *hem*, respectively. Specifically disjunctive forms of possessive pronouns are *bires, oures, youres*. Reflexive functions of the personal pronouns are usually performed by the ordinary objective case forms, as *I putte me in thy protection* (Tales I.2363), *to dyner they hem sette* (II.1118); but compounds with *self, selve(n)*, also occur—*I shrew myself* (VII.3427), *to hemself* (VIII.510). *Man / men*, an unstressed form of the noun, functions as an indefinite pronoun "one," as in Tales I.2777.

**Demonstrative**

*This* has the plural written *thise* or *thees*, in which the *-e* appears not to have been pronounced as a syllable. *That* has the plural *tho*. *Thiike* (from *the* and *ilike* "same," but generally with a less precise sense) has the same form in the singular and plural.

**Relative**

The relatives *that, which, which that, and the which* (that) are all used for both persons and things. *Who* is not used in the nominative as a relative; it is the usual interrogative with reference to persons. But the possessive *whos* and objective *whom* are often relative, as *before whos child* (Tales II.642), *whom that we diden wo* (III.1491).

Of other pronouns, *oother* has the possessive in *-es*, as *ootheres brother* (I.2734), plural *obere* (1.2885).

**VERBS**

The characteristic ending of the infinitive of nearly all verbs is *-en* or *-e*, but a few monosyllabic words with a long vowel or diphthong in the stem eliminate the *-e*, as *gos(o)n* or *gos(o), seyn*. Verbal forms ending in *-n* (infinitive, present tense plural indicative and subjunctive, past tense plural indicative and subjunctive, and past participle) may always have alternatives without *-n*. A few verbs preserve an inflected infinitive in special functions, as *to doone* (Tales VII.1000), *fairer was to sene* (Tr 1.454).

The only simple tenses formally distinguished are the present and the past. In the present all regular verbs are conjugated alike, with distinctive endings for each person of the singular but only one for all persons of the plural. The endings are normally *-e* (1), *-est* (2), *-eth* (3) *-en* (pl). There are a few exceptions: one 2 sg. in *-es* in 'brenges' (HF 1908), three 3 sg. in *-es / -is* (confirmed by rhyme) in BD 73 and 257 and HF 426. There is also a group in The Reeve's Tale in which the *-es* is a mark of the students' northern dialect (e.g., *hoes, wagges, falles* [Tales I.4027-42]; and in addition *-es* in the plural, e.g., *werkes* [1.4030]). An alternative form of the 3 sg. is sometimes used for metrical convenience in verbs with stems ending in a dental consonant: the ending *-eth* loses its vowel and the consonant is assimilated to that of the stem, giving a monosyllabic form ending in *-t* or *-th*, as *bit* instead of *bideth* (Tales I.187), *rit for rideth* (I.974), *rist for risteth* (1.3688), *fynt for fyndeth* (I.4071), *worth for wortheth* (VII.751). The vowel *o* in the stems of *holden* and *stonden* is also
replaced by a in the short form, as balt (V.61) but boldeth (IV.1189), stant (V.171), but stondeth (V.190). An exceptional contracted form of 2 sg. is lixt for liest (III.1618, 1761).

The present subjunctive has the same stem as the infinitive, with the ending -e in all persons of the singular and -e(n) in the plural. The present participle and the verbal noun (gerund) both end in -ing or -inge.

In the past tense, strong and weak verbs differ completely. Strong verbs, many of which are still current in modern English, make their past tense and past participle by changing the stem vowel, but weak verbs add to the infinitive stem endings containing d or t mostly according to the preceding consonant, though some of them in addition change the form of the stem. Strong verbs often have different stem vowels in the singular and plural numbers of the past tense and in the past participle, and historically the vowel of the second person singular should be the same as that of the plural; but the pattern has been modified by the influence of related parts on one another, and some verbs have alternative forms. Strong verbs have the same form in the first and third person, with no ending, but the ending -e in the second. All verbs have -e(n) in the plural, except that singular forms are occasionally used in plural function. Characteristic past inflection of strong verbs is as follows:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>1 and 3 sg.</th>
<th>beren</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 sg.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Pl.</td>
<td></td>
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In songe and songen, the o represents the vowel u. An exceptional range of variants appears in the past of seen—in the singular, say, saugh, saw, seigh, sy, and in the plural, the same forms, as well as swe, seyen, syen. Some of these are no doubt attributable to copyists, but they cannot always be confidently identified and most of the major variants are confirmed by rhyme. Examples of the use of a singular form in plural function are yaf (Tales I.302; it is singular in I.177) and sat (VI.664), beside seten (VII.2544). Similarly, drank, correctly the first and third person form, is used as the second person form in VII.2226.

The past subjunctive normally has the stem vowel of the plural indicative, with endings -e and -en in the singular and plural respectively—for instance, songe (BD 929).

To form the past participle, all strong verbs may take the full ending -en, as founden, comen, wonnen, but the -n is often dropped.

In weak verbs the past tense and participle are marked by -d(e) or -t(e). After a long syllable the ending may be -de, as berde, wende (from wenen [think]), cryde, or it may be -ed, as cleped, demed, payned, semed. After a voiceless consonant it is normally -te, as keppe, mette, but this also occurs in other environments, such as felte, mente, sene, wente (from wenden). The participle normally has the same form as the past tense but without the final -e, though there are a few exceptions, such as cryed. Some weak verbs change the vowel of the stem in the past tense and participle. Most are like the forms in modern English, as solde from sellen and taughte from techen, but some have not survived, as dreynte from drenchen, quyenite from quenchen, straughte from strechten, thoughte from thinken (seem), as well as thenken (think). Personal endings of weak verbs in the past singular are -e in first and third person, and -est (like the present) in the second.

The past participle of both strong and weak verbs may optionally take the prefix i-/y-

A verb exceptionally irregular, having features of both strong and weak conjugations, is boten, past bighte, which has both the active sense “promise” and the passive “be called,” and abnormal forms such as batte in 3 sg. present, beit in past sg.

Imperatives of both strong and weak verbs for the most part lack an ending in the singular, as com, help, hoold, set, sey, tel. Some imperatives of short-stemmed weak verbs are written with -e, but meter seldom shows it to have been pronounced: e.g., make (Tales I.3720, VIII.300, Tr 3.703, 5.913). Verbs having consonant clusters at the end of the stem need -e, as berkne. The plural imperative often has the ending -eth but may also take the same form as the singular; so we find herknethe but also taak in the same speech (Tales I.788–89).

A few verbs, surviving in modern English mostly as “modal” auxiliaries, such as shall, will, can, may, have past forms like weak verbs, but those of the present tense are patterned on the strong conjugations, except that the second person singular ends in -st as canst, mayst, woot; or -t in shalt, wilt. First and third persons are identical, as can, may, shal, woot; the plural has a differ-
ent vowel, as *connen, mowen, sbullen, witen, but the singular forms are often used with plural subjects. The past tenses of these verbs are *coude or *couthe, mighte, sbolde, wiste.

Other irregular verb forms are:

**doon**  
pr. 2, 3 sg. *doost, dooth, past *dide

**goon**  
pr. 2, 3 sg. *goost, gooth, past supplied by *yede or *wente

**been**  
pr. 1, 2, 3 sg. *am, art, is, pl. *be(n), occasionally *are(n)

past 1, 3 sg. *was, 2 sg. *were, pl. *were(n); subj. *were, *were(n); imper. *be, *beeth; past part. *(y)been

**wil or wol**  
pr. 1, 3 sg., 2 sg. *wilt, wolt, pl. *wolle(n), wil, past *wolde

**baven or ban**  
pr. 1 sg. *have, 2 hast, 3 *bath, pl. *have(n), *ban, past *bad(de)

Negative forms occur for parts of *been: nam, nart, his, nas, nere(n); of *baven: nath, nad(de); of *wil: nil, nilt, nolde; of *woot: noot, nost, niste.

**Some Features of Syntax and Idiom**

**Nouns**  
**Number**  
A noun denoting a material object or an attribute possessed separately by each individual of a group may have a singular form, where the later language would use the plural: *the colour in hir face* (their faces; Tales I.1637), *Thus shal mankynde drenche, and lesse hir lyves* (I.3521); but the plural may also be used, as *ban lost bir lyves* (III.1997). Some collective nouns are treated variously as singular or plural: *folk* usually has a plural verb, as in *Thanne longen folk* (Tales I.12), but occasionally has a singular, as *While folk is blent* (Tr 2.1743); *mankynde* is referred to by a plural pronoun in the passage just quoted, but usually has a singular verb, as in *Mankynde was lorn* (II.843).

**Case**  
Some genitive forms in -*es* are used as adjectives, notably *lyves* (living), in *lyves creature* (Tales I.2395, IV.903, Tr 3.13), *shames* (shameful), as *shames deeth* (Tales II.819, IV.2377). The same ending often appears in adverbial function, as in *algates* (at any rate), *nedes* (necessarily), *ones* (once), and in phrases comprising *thankes* and a possessive pronoun, meaning "willingly," as *bir thankes* (Tales I.2114).

A noun that is the indirect object of a verb may be preceded by *to*, but may also be simply in the common form: *Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres* (Tales I.232), but *pynnes, for to yeven faire wyves* (I.234), and *swich lawe as a man yeveth another wight* (II.43).

When a noun in the genitive is qualified by a phrase, whether with *of* or in apposition, the word on which the genitive depends follows it immediately and the phrase comes after, as *the kyng Priamus sone of Troye* "King Priam of Troy's son" (Tr 1.2), *the Seintes Legende of Cupide* (the legend of the saints of Cupid; Tales II.61), *Seys body the kyng* (BD 142).

**Adjectives**  
Most attributive adjectives normally precede the nouns they qualify but in verse they often follow: *bis shoures soote* (Tales I.1), *hir fyngres* (Tr 1.19), *worthy wyves* (IV.380), *deere maister sovereign* (VII.3347). Certain set phrases regularly have this order—*(the) blood roial* (Tales I.1018, 1546, II.657, VII.2151, etc.)—and so, even in prose, do some phrases containing more or less technical words of French origin: *the lyf perdurable* (Tales X.184), *the day vulgar* (Astr 2.9 rubric).

In predicative use, superlatives are sometimes reinforced by *oon: she was oon the faireste* (Tales V.734), *oon the beste knyght* (Tr 1.1081). The sense is "the very fairest," etc., differing from the later common partitive use "one of the fairest"—which has, however, intruded into a few places where the noun remains illogically singular, as in *oon of the gretteste auctour* (Tales VII.2984).

An adjective may function as a noun, not only in the plural, such as *the poor* in modern English, or *this olde wyse* (VIII.1067), but also in the singular, as *the wyse it demeth* (Tr 1.644), *an impossible* (V.1009).

The demonstrative *this* is used idiomatically to draw attention to a character in a narrative, as *This gentil duc* (Tales I.952), sometimes by name, as *This Troilus* (Tr 1.268). It may more generally imply familiarity with, or understanding of, persons or things referred to: *Thise noble wyves and thise loveris* (Tales II.59).

**Articles**  
The definite article is sometimes used with nouns of abstract reference, as *Th'experience so preveth* (Tales IV.2238), and with
other words that seldom have it in the later language, e.g., the deeth (I.1716).

The indefinite article may be prefixed to a numeral to indicate an approximate figure: Welly an eights bussbels (VI.771).

**PRONOMS** In addressing a single person, the forms historically appropriate to the second person singular, thou, thee, thy(n), are often replaced by the plural ye, you, youre(s) (and ye as subject takes a plural verb). This is a matter of social usage of some complexity, and a brief statement that would cover all occasions is hardly possible. It is approximately true that the plural forms imply greater formality and politeness; yet they can be used even in intimate conversation, or within a family, in cultivated society—in Book 3 of Troilus and Criseyde, they are the prevailing forms used by the lovers to each other: And that ye me wolde ban as faste in mynde / As I have yow (3.1506–7), though Criseyde momentarily changes to I am ibyn at the end of the stanza.

A personal pronoun in the object form is often used reflexively with verbs that in the later language are not reflexive: She gan to rewe, and losing wealth; Tales VII.2560), though Criseyde momentarily changes to I am ibyn at the end of the stanza.

When it has an identifying function before the verb be, the form of the verb is determined by the complement: it am I (Tr 1.588), it were gentilmen (LGW 1506).

The pronouns who and what, which are mainly interrogative, also function as indefinites: Bityde what bityde (whatever may happen; Tales VII.874). They may imply an antecedent: Who habth no wyf (Tales I.3152), who nede habth (Tr 3.49). Especially when reinforced by so, the indefinite often suggests condition: whoso wel the stories soghte “if anyone were to investigate” (Tales VI.488).

**ADVERBS AND CONJUNCTIONS** As is used in a number of ways that were later largely or wholly lost. As may introduce an imperative: As lene it me (Tales I.3777). It begins many expressions of time: as now (I.2264), As in his tyme (VII.2498), as for a certein tyme (VII.977). It may intensify an adverb: as swithe (as quickly as possible; II.637). It may form a conjunction: ther as I yow devysse (1.34).

Tber often introduces a wish, blessing, or the like: Iber Mars his soule gye (I.2815), ther God his bones corse (IV.1308).

Many conjunctions incorporate a redundant that: Whan that (1.1), though that (1.68), if that (1.144).

**PREPOSITIONS** Some prepositions have, in addition to senses still current, others which are now obsolete. So for example:

After in after bir degree (according to their rank; Tales I.2573), after oon (alike; I.341).

At in at ye (plainly; I.3016), at o word (briefly; II.428), at regard of (in comparison with; PF 58).

By in by the morwe (in the morning; Tales I.334), by wyves that been wyse (about wives. III.229).

For, besides its common expression of cause or aim, may signify intention or purpose to avoid a certain result, as For lesynge of riches (for fear of losing wealth; Tales VII.2560), For faylyng (so as not to fail; Tr 1.928), For taryinge heere (so as not to delay here; PF 468). When followed by an adjectival or past participle, for expresses reason, as if constructed with the corresponding noun: for old (with age; Tales I.2142), For wery (because of weariness; PF 93). This is shown to be the correct analysis of such phrases by the insertion of a qualifying word in for pure ashamed (out of very shame; Tr 2.656). For is often prefixed to an infinitive, as will be discussed in the section on mood below.

Of often signifies an agent: I wolde nat of hym corrected be (Tales III.661), be was slayn of Achilles (VII.3148). It appears in numerous phrases, such as of kynde (by nature), of neuw (newly), of youre curteisye (I.725), and is equivalent to over in To have victorie of hem (I.2246). It sometimes expresses a partitive of indefinite amount: Of smale boudes (some little dogs; I.146), of youre wolde (some of your wool; VI.910).

Out of is equivalent to without in out of doute (Tales I.487), out of drede in the same sense (Tr 1.775).

To indicates role or function in to borwe (as a pledge; Tales I.1622), to wedde in the same sense (I.1218).
Toward is sometimes divided, with the object between the parts: To Rome-ward (II.968), To sourseward (VII.549).
Up is equivalent to upon in up peyne of (on pain of; I.1707), up peril of (VII.2944).

Prepositions may follow the nouns or pronouns they govern: al the fyr aboute (Tales I.2952), Rood hym agayns (II.999), take our flessh us fro (VII.2451), seyde his maister to (VIII.1449).

In a relative clause, a preposition governing the relative (whether expressed or not) is usually placed near to the verb rather than at the end of the clause: That men of yelpe (that men boast of; Tr 3.307), Ther is another thing I take of bede (there is another thing [that] I take heed of; 1.577); but the preposition may also be put at the end, and in this position in has the form inne: in what array that they were inne (Tales I.41). In an infinitive phrase of purpose, a preposition defining the relation of an object to the infinitive is normally placed before the object: to shorte with oure weye (to shorten our journey with; I.791), To saffron with my predicacioun (to season my preaching with; VI.345); but it is placed finally in it es to ben wondrid upon (Bo 4.pr1.23). An infinitive adjunct to an adjective or noun may be preceded by a preposition: moore blissful on to see (more delightful to look at; Tales I.3247), a myourin to preye (Tr 2.404).

VERBS Many important functions are performed by “modal” auxiliaries (see pp. xxxvii–xxxviii above), which are often the same as in modern English but with some additions. Certain verbs that in the later language are only auxiliaries may be used as full verbs. Conne, for instance, is the infinitive of a verb meaning principally “to know,” as in his lesoun, that be wende konne (his lesson which he thought he knew; Tr 3.83); its past tense is coude, as in she koude of that art the olde daunce (Tales I.476). It is also used in some idiomatic phrases such as konne ibank (feel gratitude; Tr 2.1466). As an auxiliary, it is frequent in uses mostly resembling those still current, but is especially common in collocation with may, as in as I kan and may (VII.354). Shal has its ancient sense of “owe” in by that feith I shal Priam of Troie (Tr 3.791). In auxiliary use it often retains the sense of obligation, necessity, or destiny, as He moot be deed, the kyng as shal a page (Tales I.3030), but also may indicate simple futurity in any person, as I am agast ye shul it nat susteene (IV.1760). The past sbolde has a wide range of modal uses, many of which survive, but some are unfamiliar; e.g., The time Approcheth, that this wedyng sbolde be (the time approaches when this wedding should take place; IV.260–61), wban that I my lyf sbolde forlete (when I was about to lose my life; VII.658); As though a storm sbolde bresten every bough (as though a storm were to break ; I.1980). A comparatively rare usage is that of “uncertified report,” in which a statement made by another person is repeated without commitment to its accuracy: hym told is of a frend of bis / How that ye sbolden love oon batte Horaste (he has been told by a friend of his that you are said to be in love with a certain Horaste; Tr 3.796–97). An important concessive function is a special case of the construction (noted below in discussing the subjunctive) using the introductory adverb al and inversion of the verb and subject, as al sbolde I therfore sterre (though I should die for it; Tr 1.17), Al sbolde bir children sterre (Tales VI.451). Wil / wol and the past wolde are generally less complex in implication than shal / sbolde. The sense of wish or desire is very often present to some degree, as Whoso wol preye (III.1879), I wol nat do no labour (VI.444), but sometimes no more than simple futurity, in any person, seems to be implied: My tale I wol bigynne (VI.462), right as thou wolst desire (III.1402). The notion of regular or customary action is added in Mordre wol out, certeyn, it wol nat faille (VII.576).

A frequent auxiliary that later fell out of use is ginne, especially its past gan (plural gonne). These form periphrastic tenses of present and past, respectively, in a way comparable to the mainly later use of parts of do: myn herte gynnetb blede (my heart bleeds; Tr 4.12), upon bir knes she gan to faile (she fell on her knees; Tales IV.292). Chaucer rarely uses do / did as an auxiliary, as in why do ye wepe, and Is tiber no morsel breed that ye do kepe? (VII.2432, 2434), and probably Nicolo dosib ful softe unto bis chambr er carie (I.3409–10). In other functions do is very frequent, both in uses which still survive, and in some now obsolete, notably as a causative followed by an infinitive: If that ye do us botbe dyen (Tr 2.327), be dide doon sleen hem (he had them killed; Tales III.2042). An auxiliary now obsolete in the present is mo(o)t, which has the two almost contrary senses “may” and “must”: Also
moote I thee (as I may prosper; VII.817), A man moost nedes love (a man must of necessity love; I.1169). The past tense moste expresses past time as in it moste ben (it had to be done; Tr 4.216), but is also used modally with reference to present time, like its descendant, modern must: We moste endure it (Tales I.1091). Another obsolete auxiliary is the (need), a third person form usually constructed with a pronoun in the objective case, as what the thee recche (why you need you care; III.329). Its past subjunctive appears in Yow thurste nevere han the more fere (you would not need to feel any greater fear; Tr 3.572).

Such so-called impersonal constructions are found with some other modal verbs, as Us moste (we must; Tales VIII.946), as hire oughte (as was right for her; Tr 3.581). They are frequent also with a number of other verbs, sometimes with the subject pronoun it, as Me thynkest it (it seems to me; Tales I.37), it reweth me (I regret it; VII.3097), and sometimes without, as if you liketh (if it pleases you; I.777), hire liste nat (she had no wish; II.1048), Hym deigned nat (he did not deign; VII.3181), if that you remembre (Tr 4.73).

Tense “Expanded” or “progressive” forms of present and past tenses (those made up of a part of the verb be and a past participle) are infrequent in comparison with the later language: My newe wyf is comynge (Tales IV.805), As Canacee was pleyng in bir walk (V.410), We ban ben watynge (1.929). Simple forms are used in such places as Ye goon to Caunterbury (you are going; I.769), I dye (Tr 1.420), Wher as this lady romed to and fro (Tales I.1113), Jankyn Redde on his book, as he sat by the fire (III.713–14). A simple past, rather than a construction with have, is used in expressions like A fairer saugh I neve (I have never seen anyone more beautiful; IV.1033). The perfect and pluperfect of intransitive verbs are commonly formed with the verb be rather than have: The constable doon is fare (II.512), been they kist (II.1074), be they went (IV.1701), At nyght was come (I.23).

A characteristic feature of Chaucer’s narrative style is the use of present forms to refer to past time, often with parallel past forms closely following: She walkeed up and downe And as an angel bevenysbly she soong (I.1052–55), He taketh his leve, and she astoned stood (V.1339).

Future time is expressed mainly by the auxiliaries shal and wil, the use of which in particular persons is not strictly defined, as has already been pointed out above.

Mood Infinitives may be used in their “plain” form or with a preceding particle to or the group for to. To and for to are often simple alternatives without distinction of meaning, even in adjacent phrases, as Thanne longen folk to goon on pilgrimages, / And palmeres for to seken straunge strondes (I.12–13). The plain infinitive occurs principally after auxiliary verbs such as can, may, shal, wil, as in modern English. (It sometimes occurs also after oghte, as in I.660.) The plain infinitive often serves as a complement to verbs of motion, especially with some sense of purpose: Come soupen in his hous (Tr 3.560), go we dyne (Tales VII.223). It also often follows certain verbs used without personal subject, as if you liketh known (Tr 5.1366), hym liste ride so (Tales I.102). It is frequent (as it is later) with a noun or pronoun object of verbs of perception and of volition: Bidde hym desende (V.321), they herde a belle clynke (VI.664). Occasionally, it may depend on an adjective, as wont art oft ubreyde (Tr 5.1710), and it may be the subject of an impersonal expression where modern English would use for: it is a good man been at his large (Tales I.2288). It is regular after leten with an object, both in the primary sense “allow,” as lat my body go (III.1061), and as a means of forming the equivalent of an imperative of the first or third person—lat us turne agayn (II.170), Lat no man truste (VII.1997). With do(o)n and leten in causative function the infinitive often has a passive sense, as if a noun denoting an agent were to be understood: To pieces do me drawe (cause [someone] to pull me to pieces, so, have me pulled Tr 1.833). Lat see is especially frequent as a set phrase “let it be seen, let us see.” Leten is sometimes followed by the infinitive doon, as well as another infinitive, in a phrase of this kind: Lat do hym calle (have him summoned; Tales VI.173).

The infinitive with (for) to has a wider range of use, largely in the same functions as the modern infinitive with to. Thus for example, it may express purpose as in for to seke (Tales I.17), for to tellen (I.73), for to doon (I.78), To make his Englissh sweete (I.265), south to seyn (I.284). It may depend on an adjective, as in an esy man to yere penaunce (I.223), so worldly for to have office (I.292). It may function as the subject of an impersonal expression: Now were it tyme a lady to
negate (Tr 3.630). In some phrases the infinitive has a passive sense: to blame (Tales 1.3710), to preyse (VI.42), to drede (VII.3063), for to chese (Tr 2.470). This is related to the use of the inherited "inflected infinitive" in ye woot what is to doone (what is to be done; Tales III.2194). A concessive use of the for to infinitive appears in places like for to dyen in the peyne (though we were to die under torture; I.1133), For to be deed (even if I were to die; IV.364). In sentences expressing the terms of an agreement the infinitive often accompanies a nominative pronoun: And ye, my lord, to doon right as yow leste (IV.105).

The subjunctive in main clauses may express wish, as God yelde you (may God reward you; Tales III.2177), an imperative of the first person plural, as go we se (Tr 2.615), and concession, as Bityle what bytyde (Tales VII.874), Be as be may (VII.2129). It is used in the apodosis (main clause) of a hypothetical conditional sentence: A clerk hadde litherly biset his whyle (a scholar would have wasted his time; I.3299). In dependent clauses it is largely concerned with condition or hypothesis, as if gold ruste (1.500), if thou telle it (I.3505), and especially in the frequent tag if so be / were, with a subordinate clause also using a subjunctive: if so be that thou my lady wynne (I.1617). It extends naturally to the negative condition in clauses introduced by but if (unless)—Who may been a fool but if he love? (I.1799), and the unfulfilled condition expressed by the past subjunctive were (were [it] not), as Nere myn extortcioun (if it were not for my extortion; III.1439). Inversion of verb and subject, as in this example, often expresses condition: Had thou nat toold (VII.2053), konne be letterure or konne be noon (VIII.846). The subjunctive is further used in hypothetical expressions: As though be stongen were (as though he had been stabbed; I.1079); it may express purpose, as Lest thee repente (III.2088); and anticipation of a future event, as er that thou go benne (I.2356), til that it dye (III.1145). It implies the uncertainty of information in Where that be be I kan nat soothly seyn (I.3670), and the unwillingness of a speaker to vouch for a report in I trove that be be went (I.3665), though it is likely that in such dependent clauses the use of the subjunctive was at least to some extent conventional. Another principal function of the subjunctive is to mark concession, which may be expressed by the conjunction though (that), as Thogh thou beere walke (II.784), or by the introductory adverb al with inversion of verb and subject, as  

Negation The primary negative adverb is ne, placed before the verb (or incorporated in it in those contracted forms noted above in the description of verb forms, p. xxxviii), which is sufficient to mark a sentence as negative: she ne wiste what it signyfied (1.2343), I noot how men hym calle (1.304). It is very often reinforced by another negative, most frequently nat or nought: be ne lefte nat (I.492), Ne studieth noght (1.841). Nat or nought alone, following the verb, may also suffice, as in His arwes drouped noght (1.107), It is nat honest; it may nat avaunce (1.246); exceptionally, it precedes the finite verb, as in Nat greveb us youre glorie (1.917), Ye felen wel youreselfe that I nought ly (Tr 2.1283). Sometimes a series of words in a passage, pronouns as well as adverbs, may all be given negative forms: He nere ver yet no vileynye ne sayde / unto no maner wight (Tales I.70–71).

Interrogation A positive sentence is normally converted into a question by inversion of verb and subject: Wostow that wel? (Tr 1.775), se ye nought? (2.1465). When the question concerns two alternatives, the interrogative may be intensified by beginning the sentence with the pronoun wether, as Wether seistow this in ernest or in pley? (Tales I.1125). After interrogative words such as why, or what as object, inversion is also normal: Why cridestow? (I.1083), What do ye? (I.3437), how thynke ye? (III.2204).

Versification Verse in English in the fourteenth century was composed in two different traditions, which were usually kept distinct, though some authors combined them in the same work. One system, which evolved from Old English and the general Germanic tradition, depended on the pattern of stressed syllables in each line of verse, linked by alliteration of initial sounds; normally lines did not rhyme together. The other, which in England began in the twelfth century and was imi-
tated from French and Latin models, depended partly on the number of syllables in each line and partly on the linking of lines in couplets or groups by rhyming final sounds. Before the fourteenth century, by far the most frequently used of the second type was a line that in principle contained eight syllables, but might in practice vary between seven and ten, arranged in rhyming couplets. This form as used by French writers regularly had eight or nine syllables, and the syllable count determined the line. Syllable stress is more prominent in English than in French, and when this form was imitated in English syllables bearing stress usually alternated with syllables of less weight, so that the line was characterized by four stresses, or beats. The number of unstressed syllables was less restricted than in French, probably owing to the influence of the native type of line. This form was used in many English poems, some long and important, from the early thirteenth century onward, so it was obviously well known long before Chaucer began to write.

In spite of a good deal of irregularity of rhythm in the texts as preserved in the manuscripts, there is no reason to doubt that this familiar type of verse was what Chaucer intended to write in his early poems *The Book of the Duchess* and *The House of Fame*. (Four-stress lines also form part of the “tail-rhyme” stanzas of the Tale of Sir Thopas.) It has, of course, remained popular to this day. In his other poetry, however, Chaucer used a longer line, containing five stresses, or beats, which before his time had appeared only rarely, in a few anonymous poems. It is likely that this form was suggested by the decasyllabic line often used in French, especially arranged in groups to form stanzas, but in part also by the eleven-syllable line used in Italian verse, which is of similar length but freer in rhythm. Chaucer took up the five-stress line early in his writing career, in the eight-line stanza of the ABC (a French form), and used it again in *The Monk’s Tale*. He used the same kind of line in seven-line stanzas (later called “rime royal”) in *The Parliament of Fowls*, *Troilus and Criseyde*, and the tales told by the Man of Law, the Clerk, the Prioress, and the Second Nun, as well as in much of *Anelida and Arcite* and some minor poems. His greatest contribution to the technique of English verse was the arrangement of this five-stress line in rhyming couplets, which he adopted in *The Legend of Good Women* and most of *The Canterbury Tales*. No earlier model for this has been found; it may well have been his own extension to the five-stress form of the pattern so familiar with the shorter line.

Chaucer wrote rhymed verse in all his poetical works. He clearly knew the alliterative form (see the Parson’s comment in Tales X.42–44), and exploited features of it in a few passages (such as I.2605–16), but the alliterative form is never essential to the structure of his verse. His rhymes are in general careful, matching sounds that must have corresponded exactly in the type of English he wrote. In some words, or groups of words, he took advantage of the existence of alternative pronunciations (much as a modern versifier may rhyme *again* either with *main* or with *men*). Thus the verb *die* often appears as *dye*, rhyming with such words as *folye* (e.g., I.1797–98), but sometimes as *deye*, rhyming with words like *weye* (e.g., I.3033–34); the verb *liste* (please) often rhymes with such words as *wiste* (e.g., Tr 1.678–79), but its variant *leste*, a pronunciation characteristic of the southeast of England, rhymes with such words as *bese* (e.g., Tr 1.1028–29). Choice among optional variants such as these is one aspect of the flexibility of Chaucer’s use of language.

The most significant difference between Chaucer’s verse and that of later centuries lies in the greater number of light syllables required or permitted by the inflectional system of his language, described above. Some of these inflected forms are comparatively familiar because related forms survive in particular circumstances in the modern language; for instance, participial forms such as *aged* and *learned,* when used as adjectives, are pronounced as two syllables. In the fourteenth century the ending -ed was pronounced as a separate syllable in other participial functions as well, for example, in *percéd* and *batbed* (Tales I.2, 3). Other instances are unfamiliar to a modern reader because the sound is no longer pronounced. These are final unstressed syllables consisting of the neutral vowel written e (see p. xxxiii above). This vowel may function as a grammatical inflection (indicating, for example, case, number, mood, or tense) or it may be an integral part of a word—thus in *the yonge sonne* (Tales I.7) the *e* of *yonge* is the mark of the definite form of the adjective, but that of *sonne* had been part of the word already in its Old English form *sunne*. Pronunciation of these end-
nings is, for the most part, necessary to the rhythm of the lines, and Chaucer, in addition, nearly always avoids rhyming words ending in e with others in which it would not be etymologically or grammatically in place. A telling example is found in Tr 5.260-64: since the structure of the seven-line stanza requires that the rhyme of the first and third lines should contrast with that of the second, fourth, and fifth, Chaucer uses the rhyme of -ly in the adverbs pitously and myglytyly against -ie in the French-derived nouns fantasie and folie and the (English) infinitive drye to achieve the necessary effect. Another indication that these final vowels were sounded appears in such rhymes as Rome: to me (Tales I.671-72), where the to must be stressed and Rome must have two syllables. But though the final vowel was evidently generally pronounced, there are many exceptions within the line. In particular, when a final -e is followed by a word beginning with a vowel or with an b- that is either silent (as in French words like honour) or in weak stress (as often in such words as be, bis, bem, hire), it is normally elided. Thus in So boote be lovede (Tales I.97), the -e of the adverb boote, grammatically correct, is not pronounced before be. The -e is also silent in many short unstressed words such as baddé, hire, oure, and it is sometimes slurred in polysyllables such as mesurable (1.435), benefice (1.507). Unstressed vowels next to certain consonants within words may also be slurred, so that beveine (1.519) has two syllables, never (1.734) has one.

A regular line of the longer form contains five stresses, which may vary a good deal in strength according to the sense, and indeed often be potential rather than essential to a natural reading. Usually a light syllable precedes each of the stressed syllables. In

Bifil that in that sésôn ón a dáy,
In Sóuthwerek at the Tábard ás I láy (I.19-20)
a normal reading gives a regular rhythm. But the order of stressed and light syllables is often reversed, as in the next line,

Rédý to wénden ón my pílgrýmáge (I.21)
and, more notably, there is sometimes no initial light syllable at all, and the line may be called "headless."

Twényt bőokes, clád in blák or réed (I.294)
A small number of lines lack a light syllable after the second stressed syllable, giving a "broken-backed" effect which some fifteenth-century poets, especially Lydgate, much favored, so that

the line may be called "Lydgatian":

Hire gréteste óót wás but by Seinte Lóy (I.120)
On the other hand, there are sometimes more light syllables (mostly only one) than regular rhythm requires. A light syllable may precede a natural pause.

For bé was láté ycóme from his viáge (I.77)
That nó drópe ne fille úpón hire brést (I.131)
And fôrth we ríden a litel móre than páas (I.825)
But in numerous lines it clearly does not do so:

Of cóurt, and to bée estâtîch of manère (I.140)
Men móote yeve silver tô the pôvre fréres (I.232)
With a thrédbare copé, as is a pôvre scolér (I.260)
Pékke hem up right as they grówe and éte bem ýn (VII.2967)

(Chaucer did not divide his lines by a regular caesura after a set number of syllables.)

The same features appear in the poems in the four-stress line, and through them and other means Chaucer gave his verse great freedom and variety of movement. To illustrate using a characteristic passage, the following extract from the General Prologue (1.285-308) is marked to show metrical stresses and the probable treatment of unstressed syllables. Stressed syllables are marked by accents, but the degree of stress must, of course, have varied with individual readers. Unstressed -e pronounced in final syllables has a dieresis (¨); when it is elided or slurred, it is underdotted (ç).

A Clérk ther wás of Óxenförd alsó,
That tînto lógyk báddé lóngé ygô.
As léénë wás bís bórís as is a rákë,
And bé nas nát right fât, I úndertákë,
But lóókëd bólwë, and òberó sóbrëly.
Ful thredbårë wás bís óverëste cóurtepý,
For bé báddë géën hym yét no bénéficë,
Ne wás so wôrdëly for to hâve officë.

For bým wás lévere báre at bís bêddës bêed
Twényt bóókes, clád in blák or réed,
Of Áristôtle and bís phëlôspôbë,
Than rôbës rîche, or fitbële, or gáy sàutrë.
But ál bê thât bê wás a phëlôspôbrë,
Yet báddë bê but litel góld in cófrë:
But ál bê thât bê mygbët of bís fréndës bëntë,
On bôokes and on lërnýmë bê it spëntë,
And bîsîly gán for the sôülët prëyë
Of bém thât yáf hym wëbërith with tô scolëy.
Of stùdîë tóok bê móst cûrë and móst bêdë.
Nogbt ò word spák bê móorë thán wás nêddë,
And thát was séyd in fórme and révérencé, 
And shórít and quyk and fúl of hý senténcé. 
Sównyng in móral vértu wás hí spéchë, 
And gládly woldë be lërnë and gládly têchë.

NORMAN DAVIS

THE TEXTS

The texts in this volume, with the exception of *The Canterbury Tales*, have been reedited on the basis of a fresh examination of the textual evidence by direct consultation of the authorities, including both manuscripts and early prints, though most often by means of facsimiles and microfilms. These texts are thus at once revisions of Robinson's texts and new editions in their own right. Robinson's text was used as the base; that is, in most cases the editors use the same base manuscripts as Robinson chose and adopt his spellings, but each of his editorial decisions was reconsidered in the light of the evidence. His textual judgments were treated with respect, but there are a good many changes; ideas about editing Middle English have developed considerably since Robinson's first edition appeared in 1933, and the work of scholars and editors in the intervening years has greatly advanced our knowledge of Chaucer's texts. Most important, Robinson did not have direct access to many of the authorities; for the poetic works he was largely dependent on the Chaucer Society's transcriptions, and for the *Boece* and *Astrolabe* he was not able to take account of all the authorities. That his texts emerge from revision with relatively few changes is a tribute to his sound editorial judgment.

The degree of change from Robinson's edition naturally varies from text to text. The text of *The Canterbury Tales* shows relatively few changes, and it must be noted that this is not a new edition in the same sense as are the other texts in this volume. Only a few authorities were consulted directly and those few only on occasion. The editors, initially Robert A. Pratt and later Ralph Hanna III, in consultation with the General Editor, depended instead on work for Pratt's edition, *The Tales of Canterbury*, and on the materials contained in Manly and Rickert's *Text of the Canterbury Tales* (1940). The text presented here is in effect, therefore, a revision of Robinson's work, with errors corrected and relatively few new readings introduced. The appearance of Manly and Rickert's edition, which provided the full collations that he had lacked in editing the text for the 1933 edition, induced Robinson to reconsider his text of the *Tales*; his 1957 edition contained over 160 changed readings. That there were not more shows that Robinson was not convinced by Manly and Rickert's theory that the Ellesmere is an "edited" manuscript whose scribe (or "editor") frequently "corrected" the meter. That theory has now been refuted by George Kane in his essay on the Manly-Rickert edition, which appears in *Editing Chaucer* (ed. Paul G. Ruggiers, 1984). The text printed here represents about the same degree of revision; when Ellesmere stands alone, its readings have been considered with somewhat more skepticism than Robinson showed in 1957, and even more skepticism entered the consideration of those cases where Robinson chose a metrically smoother line from later manuscripts against the testimony of both Ellesmere and Hengwrt. But in those cases where it seemed to the editors that the choice between alternate readings was doubtful, Robinson's decisions were usually accepted. The text of the *Tales* therefore contains no radical departures from Robinson's 1957 edition, though it has been thoroughly revised.

For *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *Anelida and Arcite*, and many of the minor poems, Robinson (like most editors) used the Fairfax manuscript as his base text, and the present editors do the same. This is a late manuscript, compared with Ellesmere or Hengwrt, and it is one of but four authorities for *The Book of the Duchess* and five for *The House of Fame*, all of which are late and, as Robinson noted, "agree in readings unsatisfactory in sense and meter. Earlier editors had therefore freely emended these texts. Robinson was more conservative than his predecessors, and his emendations were for the most part carefully considered. Larry Benson's edition of *The Book of the Duchess* and John Fyler's edition of *The House of Fame* do not greatly differ from Robinson's texts. Many of his emendations have been allowed to stand, though in many other cases the editors have replaced the emendation with the reading attested by the manuscripts, with the result that in a few places the text reads less smoothly than Robinson's. Most of these involve "grammatical forms apocopated in the manuscripts"—final *-e* and *-n*—which Robinson often silently restored.
In those cases where the meter is affected, these restorations have been reconsidered with special care, and where allowed to stand, notice is taken and the manuscript forms are listed in the Textual Notes.

Much of what has been said in the preceding paragraph applies to Vincent DiMarco’s edition of Anelida and Arcite and to R. T. Lenaghan’s edition of the Short Poems, though the textual situation is much more complex in many of these works. Robinson chose the Fairfax manuscript as the basis for the Anelida, as does DiMarco, but Robinson frequently rejected the readings of Fairfax in favor of those attested by the other authorities. DiMarco has done the same, and a number of new readings are the result. The Fairfax manuscript is likewise chosen as the base for a number of the short poems, while for the rest the base manuscripts were equally late. Robinson therefore frequently adjusted the language to the norm established in his edition of the Tales. Lenaghan has reassessed the textual evidence and in some cases restored the manuscript readings and spellings, though, as in the Anelida, changes are relatively few.

For The Parliament of Fowls and The Legend of Good Women, Robinson used as his base Cambridge MS Gg.4.27, which he recognized was heavily emended by its scribe. (M. B. Parkes and Richard Beadle provide an excellent discussion of this scribe’s practices in their commentary accompanying the facsimile edition of Gg.) Gg, for all its peculiarities, is the earliest manuscript, and it contains the only complete version of the roundel in lines 680–92 (though added in another hand). All editors since Skeat (who based his text on Fairfax) have therefore chosen it as their base. Robert A. Pratt, who supplied the editor, Vincent DiMarco, with much of the materials for this edition of the Parliament, was even more suspicious of Gg than Robinson was, and in effect he rejected it as the base manuscript. Since Robinson was used as the copy text, however, Gg remains technically the base, though its unique readings were considered with more skepticism than Robinson displayed. Some of these readings—a dozen or so—are undoubtedly genuine, and they have been retained, though fewer appear here than in Robinson’s text. A. S. G. Edwards and M. C. E. Shaner, editors of The Legend of Good Women, likewise treated Gg with skepticism, though here again its witness is of mixed value; it is the earliest of the manuscripts, it contains the only copy of the revised version of the Prologue to The Legend of Good Women, and some of its unique readings are undoubtedly genuine. A number of unique readings that Robinson accepted are here rejected, and these account for most of the differences between this edition of the Legend and Robinson’s. Yet changes in the text are relatively few.

The edition of Boece by Ralph Hanna III and Traugott Lawler differs from Robinson’s for a different reason. As noted above, Robinson—like all editors before these recent years of easy travel and freely available microfilms, photographic reproductions, and good facsimiles—was often not able to consult the authorities directly. He was largely dependent on the evidence provided by transcriptions, textual studies, and previous editions. In the case of Boece, he had access to the Chaucer Society transcriptions of Cambridge University Library Li.iii.21 (C2), British Library Add. 10340 (A1), and Cambridge University Library II.i.38 (C1), his base, as well as to the editions of Thynne (in photographic facsimile) and Caxton, if only in the collations in Kellner’s edition, and to the variants in Liddell’s Globe edition. Hanna and Lawler’s edition is the first to be based on a collation of all known authorities.

Stephen A. Barney’s edition of Troilus and Criseyde also contains more changes than many of the other texts, since again Robinson did not have direct access to all the authorities. He depended on the variants recorded in Root’s edition and on the transcriptions published by the Chaucer Society, including that of his base manuscript, Corpus Christi College, Cambridge, MS 61, which contains occasional errors that influenced his text. Fresh transcriptions of all the manuscripts were made by Sister Margaret Jennings and Dr. Ardath McKee, and Robert A. Pratt began the work of editing. The task was handed over to Barney, who had access to photographic and microfilm reproductions of all the authorities as well as the new transcriptions. As Barney explains in the introduction to the textual notes to Troilus, one of the main problems here was the question of whether Root, following McCormick, was right in his theory that the surviving manuscripts represent two or three stages of composition and revision; recent studies have confirmed Robinson’s belief that the extensive changes Root regarded as authorial
revisions are "rather scribal than authoritative. The text therefore does not contain the extensive changes an acceptance of the McCormick-Root theory would have entailed, but the fresh collation of all authorities has led to a good many minor changes, and this is, though based on Robinson, a new edition of the poem.

The case of *A Treatise on the Astrolabe* is similar to that of *Boece*. Robinson did not have access to all the manuscripts, and John Reidy's edition is the first to take account of the evidence of all known authorities. Reidy's collation of the manuscripts confirmed Robinson's choice of Bodleian Library MS Bodley 619 as the basis of the edition, and the text printed here therefore is in appearance very close to Robinson's, though it incorporates a number of important changes and therefore differs from Robinson's text more greatly than many of the other texts in this volume.

The text of *The Romaunt of the Rose* differs more radically from Robinson's than any of the others. The *Romaunt* survives in only one manuscript—Hunterian Museum, Glasgow, MS V.3.7—and in Thynne's printed edition of 1532. Robinson, like all previous editors, regarded Thynne's edition as an authority equal to the one surviving manuscript. Since Thynne supplies a number of lines missing in the manuscript, its version has seemed to some superior to the manuscript, and the most recent editor of the *Romaunt* used Thynne's edition as his base. Robinson used the manuscript as his, but he freely drew on Thynne's readings. It is now known that Thynne used that one manuscript as the copy-text for his edition and that many of the changes he introduced were editorial rather than evidence for another manuscript authority. Alfred David's edition of the *Romaunt* is the first ever to take account of this fact, and it therefore differs significantly from that of Robinson and those of all previous editors.

Robinson's spellings have been retained throughout, with occasional corrections, but with no attempt to make them completely consistent. In the *Tales, Troilus, Boece*, and the *Astrolabe*, Robinson used the spelling of his base manuscripts (with some changes). In the other works, where his manuscripts were late (such as those based on Fairfax) or contained many unusual spellings (such as Gg), he often changed the spellings to conform to what he regarded as the norm established by the early manuscripts. When such changes affect the meter or sense, they are regarded as emendations and are discussed in the Textual Notes.

Since the spelling of the texts printed here is largely the same as that in Robinson, the most obvious and pervasive difference between these texts and Robinson's is in the punctuation. The punctuation of the manuscripts, though sometimes of great interest, is not authorial and is finally of little help to the editor of an edition such as this, intended to be accessible to students and general readers. In punctuating his texts, Robinson employed a set of conventions that no longer obtain: his punctuation was very heavy, combining dashes with commas or semicolons, using exclamation points within sentences, and employing semicolons where modern usage calls for commas and commas where writers today would ordinarily omit them. For many readers such punctuation detracts rather than helps, and the texts have therefore been repunctuated in a style more nearly in accord with modern usage. Middle English differs from Modern English in ways that make it impossible to use a completely modern style of punctuation— independent clauses, for example, do not always require an express subject—and works intended for oral recitation naturally differ from those intended solely for reading. The editors have endeavored to provide a punctuation that is as close as possible to contemporary usage but that takes account of the nature of the texts.

The foregoing is intended only as a general description of the differences between the texts in this edition and those in Robinson. The Textual Notes in the Appendix contain full discussions of the problems of establishing the texts.

LARRY D. BENSON