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

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ABSTRACT

One of the most important pieces of medieval English literature is Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, which provides a rich and complex depiction of society in the fourteenth century. The narrative depicts social hierarchies, economic shifts, religious corruption, gender interactions, and changing values of the late Middle Ages through its varied cast of travelers. Chaucer is both a literary classic and a significant historical record because of his realism and sarcasm, which highlight the virtues and vices of medieval life.

KEYWORDS: Chaucer, The Canterbury Tales, medieval society, social classes, satire, pilgrimage, Middle English literature.

INTRODUCTION

A group of pilgrims coming from London to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury is shown in Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, which was written in the late fourteenth century. A microcosm of medieval English society can be found in their characters, stories, and relationships. Chaucer wrote during a time of significant social and economic change, including the emergence of the middle class, the fall of feudalism, the consequences of the Black Death, challenges to Church authority, and the expansion of urban life.

The Canterbury Tales' accurate and thorough portrayal of many social groupings is one of its best features. Chaucer depicts the diversity and conflicts in medieval England by including individuals from nearly every social stratum. The concept of medieval

chivalry is embodied by the knight. He is honorable, humble, and committed to Christian combat. Chaucer treats him with respect, demonstrating the persistence of some conventional ideals.

The Knight's son, the Squire, is a symbol of young vitality and courtly passion. He represents the evolution of chivalric ideals from valor on the battlefield to grace, poetry, and courtly love. One of the boldest aspects of The Canterbury Tales is its exposure of corruption within the medieval Church. While Chaucer respects true religious devotion as seen in the Parson and the Prioress he sharply criticizes corrupt church officials. Despite the legal and customary restrictions on women's responsibilities in medieval society, Chaucer offers his female characters particularly the Wife of Bath strong voices. One of the longest and most intricate discussions of marriage, sexuality, and women's authority in medieval literature may be found in her prologue.

The Wife of Bath questions conventional biblical conceptions of feminine obedience. She contends that experience matters more than academic knowledge and sees marriage as a place of power and negotiation rather than merely surrender. She represents a new social reality where women, especially widows, might become wealthy and self-sufficient.

CONCLUSION

Chaucer captures the complexities, contradictions, and transformations of the fourteenth century through his diverse characters and their narratives. His portrayal includes the traditional ideals of chivalry, the rise of the middle class, the moral failures of the Church, evolving gender roles, and the emergence of individual identity. Through his realistic observations and subtle satire, Chaucer challenges social norms and invites readers to reflect on human behavior. As a historical document, the work provides invaluable insight into the economic, cultural, and moral conditions of the late Middle Ages. As a literary masterpiece, it remains a timeless exploration of human nature and society.

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