



EMBODIMENT OF TRANSFORMATION FROM SCHOLASTICISM TO WORLDLINESS

GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S THE CANTERBURY TALES

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ABSTRACT

Although the medieval period is well-known for its otherworldly scholastic view of life, people's gradual prioritization of material interests is arguably an embodiment of a transformation from scholastic to anthropocentric outlook on life and people. Along with common people's interest in material gains, the ecclesiastical people's interest in luxury and ostentation, as well as acquisition of material profit, are representations of the new paradigm in social area. The growing interest in worldly profits among the clergy and their indulgence in ostentation is the particular point of satire in Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales. In this work, while Chaucer reflects the traits of an ideal person in the knight's description in "General Prologue", he deals with clerical corruption in "Reeve's Tale", the monk, the nun and the summoner's depictions in "General Prologue". While criticizing the problematic aspects of the ecclesiastical class in medieval context, Chaucer transgresses the borders of his period and favors the expression of female individuality in "Wife of Bath's Tale". Hence, The Canterbury Tales invites reading in relation to Chaucer's anxieties concerning medieval view of life and his position as a pioneer of a new anthropocentric social paradigm in literary context.

Religion is one of the fundamental aspects of the medieval worldview. The determining role of the Church in social life arguably established the basis of scholasticism in the Middle Ages. Despite its dominance in social areas, scholasticism encountered criticism as well. At this point, Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* (1387) can be viewed as an epitome of critical approach to ecclesiastical institutions and authorities. In addition to his critical view regarding the clergy and the Church in "The Reeve's Tale", his favor of female individual identity in *Wife of Bath's* description in "General Prologue" and his emphasis on the significance of positive sciences in "Canon's Yeoman's Tale" reflect his sensitivity to human nature and humankind as a whole. In this sense, although it is antithetical to medieval ethos, Chaucer's anthropocentric view of life can thus be judged as an embodiment of transformation from scholasticism to worldliness in medieval English literature.

During the Middle Ages, the major tenets of scholasticism are best represented in *Confessions* (AD 397-400) by St Augustine. In this work, he puts emphasis on man's tendency to indulge in worldly pleasures as a cause of alienation from benevolent Christian God: "Woe is me! And dare I say that Thou heldest Thy peace, O my God, while I wandered further from thee? Didst thou then indeed hold Thy peace to me? And whose but Thine were these words which by my mother, Thy faithful one, Thou sangest in my ears? [...]. For she wished, and I remember in private with great anxiety, 'not to commit fornication'. These seemed to me womanish bits of advice, [...]. But they were Thine" (1945: 24). Based on this repentance, St Augustine views divine benevolence as a path to his salvation. Hence, his following words idealizing the benevolence of Christian God in this work are arguably an embodiment of scholastic view of life in medieval context: "Thee I long for, O Righteousness and innocency, beautiful and comely to all pure eyes, and of a satisfaction unsating. With Thee is rest entire, and life imperturbable. Whoso enters into Thee, enters into the joy of his Lord: and shall not fear, and shall do excellently in the All-Excellent" (1945: 31). As understood from St Augustine's discourses, people in the medieval period accounted for their life in the world with God's benevolence. Because human life is bestowed by the glory of Christian God, people should

obey divine rules and ethical norms without questioning. For scholastic view, absolute obedience to Christian God brings reward, i.e. eternal bliss.

As a signification of strong bond with Christian God, in addition to strict obedience to divine rules, "pilgrimage – a devotional journey to sacred object or place – was [...] a vital part of English religious life" (Bernard, 2012: 125). Pilgrimage can be considered as a devotional journey because it represents a process of moral elevation of people and their avoidance of the deeds that are viewed sinful in Christianity. In medieval context, "one meaning that attached to the word 'sanctuary' in the thirteenth century was that of a refuge for criminals trying to avoid legitimate or illegitimate attempts at vengeance. For a thousand years, ecclesiastics had been routinely claiming that churches, because of their holiness, should be recognized as such places" (Jordan, 2008: 17). Thus, in relation to their contribution to moral elevation of man and obedience to divine rules, "the monastic life held a powerful attraction for men in late medieval England" (Clark, 2013: 160). Clerical lifestyle best summarizes the medieval social milieu because scholasticism inevitably brought with it an otherworldly approach among people in social context. The transitory nature of the physical world and the necessity for preparation for life after death were most often emphasized.

Clergy based their lifestyle on the Christian doctrines and it was their responsibility to make common people conscious about divine norms. In A. I. Doyle's words,

In the largely illiterate society of medieval England, addresses from the pulpit and other public places were the commonest employment of the vernacular [...]. The main regular occupations of monks and nuns were common worship and private prayer, diversified by some form of practical labour or business and a certain amount of conversation and exercise, together with study and meditation. In church, their task was the singing and saying of the Latin liturgy, chiefly the Psalms [...] and hearing some of their numbers deliver sermons and lessons, for most of the part in Latin, as the monastic business meetings in the chapter-house were also supposed to be. (1954: 87-100)

Ecclesiastical people's concentration on worship, praying and sermons to get common people to gain awareness of Christian doctrines are the embodiment of scholasticism as a

dominant view of life in a medieval context. In addition, people's acquaintance with the divine norms by means of the clergy signifies the power of the Church in social area in the Middle Ages. The use of Latin for sermons and religious talks despite common people's illiteracy and failure in understanding that language indicates the church's authority over people in social context of the medieval period. However, it is also arguably a signification of dogmatic approach as a major problematic issue in that timeline because common people's obedience to ecclesiastical authorities without a questioning view can be considered as a signification of the lack of critical thinking among individuals in religious sense.

Although clerics were powerful in indoctrinating religious principles to common citizens, they were not completely alienated from a materialistic way of life. As a matter of fact, Doyle argues that "the core of the townsfolk was composed of tradesmen and craftsmen, organized in professional and religious guilds, many of them having some direct personal concern with agriculture apart from its indirect importance to all occupations and livelihoods" (1954: 93). In feudalism, landlords owned their lands and got the peasants to work for them. Similar to landlords, members of the clergy class were also involved in the acquisition of material gain. In George Holmes's words, "in thirteenth-century England [...] the Church-owned a huge proportion of the country's landed wealth, in estates varying from the 'liberties' of abbeys and bishoprics, carrying jurisdiction over large areas" (1962: 41). Putting emphasis on the ecclesiastical landlords, M. M. Postan claims that

[e]cclesiastical landlords did not form a single category. True enough, manors closest to the ideal type were most frequently to be found in Benedictine estates. [...]. The Benedictine monasteries housed resident communities of monks which were frequently large and as a rule grew in size and numbers in the course of the late twelfth and thirteenth centuries. [...]. Moreover, the Benedictine monks enjoyed what by medieval standards were high and rising level of sustenance. [...]. They and their abbots were regular buyers of cloth, vestments, condiments, books and other merchandise; they also bore a heavy burden of taxes to the pope and the king. (1972: 91-92)

Clergymen could consume foods above medieval standards and spent money on clothing and many kinds of merchandise.

Moreover, it is not wrong to argue that they somehow possessed goods that could be considered luxurious in medieval context. Although their possession of luxurious goods is contrary to the modest and humble lifestyle favored by medieval scholasticism, it was a widespread practice not only among common people but clergymen as well. At this point, Christopher Dyer's following words are arguably an embodiment of the prevalence of luxury among ecclesiastical people:

London was the place to which cloths of gold and continental linen were brought. London merchants were no more confined to one trade than their provincial counterparts [...]. Many merchants pursued trades closely associated with luxuries, and they played key roles in the social and political life of the city. [...]. The leading customers, the bishops, abbots, secular magnates, who needed to stay in the capital to attend to their official duties, or to consult their lawyers, acquired townhouses on the edge of the city. These were not just residences but also bases from which negotiations could be conducted with merchants. (2011: 236-237)

As a dominant view of life in the medieval context, scholasticism does not favor materialistic approach during life in physical world. St Augustine's following words in Confessions is arguably an explanation for the medieval reaction against indulgence in worldly pleasures: "The love for this world is a fornication against God" (1945: 41). Despite the otherworldly characteristics of scholastic philosophy, ecclesiastical people's interest in buying luxurious and ostentatious clothing can be considered as a contradictory case in medieval religious sense. Although ecclesiastical people taught common citizens about the major tenets of scholasticism, their indulgence in luxury and ostentation could be viewed as an embodiment of the establishment of materialist approach as a newly emerging approach to life and humankind in the following century. Thus, John Richard Green's following words in *Town Life in the 15th Century* (1894) can be considered as an explanation for the shift from otherworldliness to progressivist view of life in medieval social area:

The towns as we find them in the fifteenth century were the outcome of centuries of preparation. It was by a very slow and gradual process that England was transformed from a purely agricultural country, with its scattered

villages of dependent tillers of the soil, into the England we know today – a land of industrial town communities, where agricultural interests are almost forgotten in the summing up of the national wealth. [...]. In the course of the next hundred years, we see such trading posts as Lynn, Sandwich, Southampton, or Bristol, and centres of inland traffic such as Nottingham, Leicester, or Reading, and manufacturing towns like Norwich, Worcester, York, heaping up wealth, doubling and trebling their yearly expenditure, raising the salaries of their officers, building new quarters, adorning their public offices and churches, lavishing money on the buying of new privileges for their citizens, or on the extension of their trade. (13)

Man's effort to recognize the environment and finding solutions for the problematic issues in the physical nature contribute to his acquisition of knowledge about nature and its circumstances. A questioning rather than dogmatic approach leads human beings to be curious about making new discoveries. As a result, acquisition of scientific knowledge and its application in daily life enable technology to come to the foreground. In this sense, traveling long distances in a short time and use of rivers for navigation can be judged as the products of scientific knowledge while performing commercial practices with Europe is an indication of people's efforts to gain material profit. Considered in combination with each other, use of scientific knowledge and efforts to gain material wealth are not the practices that are compatible with the spiritualist nature of the scholastic point of view. Hence, these practices signify people's gradual alienation from the scholastic approach to life and humankind and the gradual transformation towards an anthropocentric view of life in social areas.

While the prioritization of materialist interests and the focus on the physical world contributed to the development of societies, they somehow led to the emergence of corruption in the society as well, particularly the clergy, in the late medieval period. In Norman P. Tanner's words, "the late medieval Church [...] was in such a decadent state that its collapse was more or less inevitable – an over-ripe apple that was bound to fall" (2011: 130). In relation to Tanner's description of the late medieval Church in this manner, P. J. P. Goldberg explains its reason as follows: "The attitude of civic and ecclesiastical authorities to

prostitution seems ambivalent. In some towns prostitutes and brothels were regulated. [...]. Ecclesiastical bodies gained both from their position as urban landlords and from their spiritual jurisdiction in matters of morality. [...]. In York the Vicars Choral rented cheap tenements to known prostitutes whose clients were often themselves vicars choral" (1988: 119). In Christian doctrine, the term "seven deadly sins" denotes the major vices to which people can get exposed. In Christian faith, these sins are pride, covetousness, lust, anger, gluttony, envy and sloth. The scholastic view puts emphasis on the avoidance of these deeds to reach God's grace and hence eternal bliss. However, ironically, while clergymen educate common people about these deeds and emphasize the significance of abstaining from these vices and follies, they somehow inevitably get exposed to the deeds which they teach as "sinful". In relation this paradoxical situation, Kiril Petkov argues that "in the period from the fourteenth to the twentieth century the old vices, one after another, lost their reprehensibility and became virtues. Capitalism, egalitarianism, consumerism, hedonism, democracy, secularization and social mobility shored up a new value set" (2012: 44). As understood from Petkov's claims, the understanding of vices not as sinful deeds is arguably an embodiment of the gradual change in the view of life in medieval context. Thus, considered in this sense, as argued by Goldberg, ecclesiastical people's ambivalent approach to prostitution and the regulation of brothels in the Middle Ages can be considered as antithetical to the ethos of the period. While this ambivalent approach can be viewed as a paradoxical case, it is a signification of a change from spiritualist to materialist view of life with regard to the change in the clergy's outlook on life and humankind as well.

In addition to exposition to the deeds that can be viewed as "sinful" in scholastic thought, the second point of paradox in medieval context is related to their failure in following science and welcoming scientific way of thinking. The prevalence of astrology and alchemy instead of astronomy and chemistry in medieval social areas can be considered as an indication of this failure among the clergy. Stephen C. McCluskey's following arguments related to the "East" can be considered as a representation of the ecclesiastical outlook on astronomy as a

science: "The direction east took on a whole range of symbolic associations in Christian thought. Besides being the place from which heaven springs, as the rising place of the sun it symbolized the resurrection of Christ, the Sun of Righteousness; by association it became the symbol of resurrection of the dead; it was the place of the Christians' true home in paradise; to Christians in the west, it was the direction of Jerusalem" (2004: 204). The attribution of religious meaning to geographical directions is arguably a signification of the scholastic impact on the failure in the development of science. Following the celestial movements to determine a person's fortune in a year and performance of alchemy represent the unwelcoming approach of clerical class to positive science, which arguably denotes the material world. Considered in this sense, the indulgence of ecclesiastical class in acquiring financial profits whilst opposing scientific view of life reflects the paradoxical aspect of the medieval period.

A third case that can be considered as paradoxical in the Middle Ages is related to the outlook on the issue of gender. In the medieval period, idealization of women in a way leading their lovers to suffer for them is entitled as "courtly love". For Alexander J. Denomy's definition, "courtly love is a species of that movement inherent in the soul of man towards the desired object. [...]. When the object of love is the pleasure of sense, then love is sensual and carnal [...]. Courtly love is a type of sensual love and what distinguishes it from other forms of sexual love, from mere passion, from so-called platonic love, from married love is its formal object, namely the lover's progress and growth in natural goodness, merit, and worth" (1953: 44). Considering Denomy's arguments, the medieval ethos glorifies love based on progress in merit and virtue, not on sexual and carnal desires. At this point, in *The Art of Courtly Love* (1186-1190), Andreas Capellanus, one of the forefathers of courtly love tradition, deals with love as a means to moral elevation in the Middle Ages. For Capellanus, as a sign of love for a woman,

The man who would be considered worthy to serve in Love's army must not in the least be avaricious, but very generous; he must, in fact, give generously to as many people as he can. [...]. And also if he sees that the poor are hungry and gives them nourishment, that is considered very courteous and generous. [...]. He ought not to

utter falsehood in praise of the wicked, but he should if possible make them better by secret reproofs. If he finds that they remain wholly incorrigible, he should consider them stiff-necked and banish them from his company [...]. He ought never mock anyone, especially the wretched, and he should not be quarrelsome or ready to take part in disputes. (1941: 59)

Generosity, charity, honesty, and opposition to injustices are the values considered as the major characteristics of the people in love with a woman. Thus, considering these ethical traits, it is not wrong to claim that love for a woman enables a lover to get virtuous and abstain from sinful practices that cause his corruption. Capellanus' relation of love to merits can be considered as an explanation for the glorification of women in the medieval social context.

While loving a woman contributes to man's moral elevation in the medieval context, Capellanus argues that women may also cause men's temptation. In *The Art of Courtly Love*, his following discourses can thus be considered as a paradox in terms of the medieval outlook on women: "Not only is every woman by nature a miser, but she is also envious and a slanderer of other women, greedy, a slave to her belly, inconstant, fickle in her speech, disobedient and impatient of restraint, spotted with the sin of pride and desirous of vainglory, a liar, a drunkard, a babbler, no keeper of secrets, too much given to wantonness, prone to every evil, and never loving any man in her heart" (1941: 201). This critical outlook on women can be best explained with the term "original sin". In biblical account, Eve's temptation of Adam from the forbidden tree is indicated as the major reason for man's expulsion from Heavenly Kingdom. In line with this situation, perception of women as "the temptress" is arguably a sign of patriarchal bias concerning the issue of gender in social areas. This view related to women is also ironical in the sense that it is contradictory to the idealization of women in terms of their contribution to men's moral elevation.

As a writer of the period, Geoffrey Chaucer shows his sensitivity to these problematic and paradoxical issues in social and religious areas. To this end, Chaucer's view of an ideal individual can help readers to appreciate his critical approach regarding the social and religious circumstances in his lifetime. In "General Prologue" in *The Canterbury Tales*, the

depiction of the knight with such traits as "Trouthe and honor, freedom and curteisie" (1988: 2) signify Chaucer's outlook on the characteristics of an ideal person. In addition to these merits, Chaucer also puts emphasis on loyalty as one of the major virtues in life. "The Knight's Tale" is arguably an epitome of this view. The two knights, Palamon and Arcite, are imprisoned in Duke Theseus's palace. Their encounter with the Duke's daughter, Emily, leads to Chaucer the narrator's discussion in the tale in terms of the loyalty in acquiring the beloved. The basis of this discussion can be explained by the debate between the two knights for the marriage with Emily. Arcite's following address to Palamon is arguably a reflection of the importance of loyalty in interpersonal relations: "Thyn is affecciuon of hoolynesse,/And myn is love as a to a creature" (1988: 34).

Despite his emphasis on the significance of truth, honor, generosity, and courtesy as the major merits in social relations, Chaucer also reflects his awareness of man's inevitable tendency to indulge in worldly interests as a sign of the transformation towards the new materialist outlook on life. In this context, the tragic accounts in the "Monk's Tale" embody the frailties in human nature and man's tendency to indulge in material interests. Belshazzar's tragedy can be judged as an embodiment of pride, causing man's fall. As a son of the king, Belshazzar turns out to be the ruler of his country after his father's death. During his reign, he acts ostentatiously and takes pride in his power. By the end of the tragic account, the narrator's following discourses reflect the negative impact of pride on human beings:

For whan Fortune wole a man forsake,
She bereth away his regne and his richesse,
And eek his freendes, bothe moore and lesse.
For what man that hath freendes thurgh Fortune,
Mishap wol maken hem enemys, I gesse;
This proverbe is ful sooth and ful commune.
(1988: 248)

Boethius's *The Consolation of Philosophy* (AD 524) arguably accounts for man's fall because of his excessive attachment to the pleasures and interests in the physical world. In Boethius's work, the protagonist, Lady Philosophy, focuses elaborately on the term "Fortune". For Lady Philosophy, "I know the many disguises of that monster, Fortune, and

the extent to which she seduces with friendship the very people she is striving to cheat until she overwhelms them with unbearable grief at the suddenness of her desertion. If you can recall to mind her character, her methods, and the kind of favor she proffers, you will see that in her you did not have and did not lose anything of value" (1999: 22). As a result of Fortune, people can experience happiness and prosperity. On the other hand, due to Fortune, they may lose their welfare as well. Hence, it is not wrong to suggest that human beings experience different cases, which bring happiness or sorrow. Therefore, human life does not follow a linear sequence. Thus, "change" is the word that best characterizes life in the physical world. Considered in this sense, Lady Philosophy's discourses about Fortune are arguably an epitome of the transitory trait of life on the Earth. In line with these arguments in Boethius's work, Belshazzar's pride because of his and his father's status does not bring positive results. Instead, it leads to the termination of his reign. Due to the temporariness of experiences in the physical world, people should avoid worldly ambitions and desires that mainly derive from pride. At this point, Chaucer's focus on the adverse effects of pride on humankind in "The Monk's Tale" reflects his sensitivity to human nature as well as his anxieties regarding man's frailties.

Besides pride, Chaucer indicates that man can get exposed to the following sinful deeds in "The Pardoner's Tale":

O glotonye, ful of cursednesse,
O cause first our confusioun,
O original of our dampnacioun,
Til Crist had boght us with his blood agayn!
(1988: 300)

Chaucer's emphasis on man's avoidance of lechery, gluttony, homicide, pride, blasphemy can be considered as an indication of his awareness of the frailties in human nature. Thus, Chaucer offers a solution to the avoidance of the deadly sins that cause man's fall in this world and life after death in the tragic account of Hercules in "The Monk's Tale". For him, "Ful wys is he that kan hymselfen knowe!" (1988: 245). So, contemplation is the basic key to the salvation of mankind from vices and follies. Consideration of the deeds, words and their probable consequences in interpersonal and social interactions can help individuals to

refrain from sinful acts that cause degeneration in individual and social terms.

In *The Canterbury Tales*, while Chaucer warns his readers about the possible negative consequences of sinful deeds by means of the tales narrated by different pilgrims in the work and provides guidance to them with regard to contemplation as a key factor to acquisition of bliss, he indicates that ecclesiastical people get exposed to their materialist interests more than different social classes in medieval context. In Gail Ashton's words, as a matter of fact, "medieval religion is a materialistic one based on the exchange of money" (86). In line with Ashton's argument, in "General Prologue", Chaucer puts emphasis on the materialistic trait of clerical people despite their supposedly otherworldly orientation. Despite his status as a member of the clergy, the monk's description is an embodiment of his worldliness. In the description, "I seigh his sleves purfild at the hond/With grys, and that the fyneste of a lond" (1988: 6) indicates ostentation in his costume, while "He was a lord ful fat and in good point" (1988: 6) signifies his gluttony.

A similar case is also observed in the prioress' depiction. This character, named as Madame Eglantine, wears ostentatious costumes, like the monk. According to the description, "Of smal coral aboute hir arm she bar/A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,/And thereon heng a brooch of gold ful sheene" (1988: 5). The necklace, trinket and a very bright golden brooch represent Madame Eglantine's interest in decorative accessories. Her interest in these objects despite her status as a member of clergy can be viewed as a signification of her indulgence in worldly interests.

A third example that reinforces the attribution of significance to the physical world as a major problematic issue among the clergy in the medieval social context is the friar. His depiction in "General Prologue" is the signification of the religious people's interest in worldly pleasures:

And certainly he hadde a merye note:
Wel coude he singe and pleyen on a rote;
Of yeddynges he bar utterly the prys.
[...]
He knew the tavernes wel in every toun
And everich hostiler and tappestere
Bet than a lazare or a beggestere (1988: 7-8)

While the friar's interest in playing a musical instrument and singing a song can be viewed as a signification of his interest in worldly pleasures, his recognition of taverns, barmaids and innkeepers much better than the outcasts of the town is arguably a sign of his materialist approach to life and his alienation from the spiritualism of scholasticism. Chaucer is critical for the characteristics of the friar, since, in his words as the main narrator, "For un-to swich a worthy man as he/Accorded nat, as by his facultee/To have with sike aqueyntaunce" (1988: 8). Chaucer's anxieties regarding the degeneration among the clergy can be related to his understanding of "ideal man". Honesty, generosity as well as avoidance of the seven deadly sins are the traits necessary for humankind as a whole. Remarkably, the members of the clergy, who supposedly internalize these qualifications and guide ordinary people to have these merits, turn out to show signs of alienation from the religious doctrines that consider worldliness as a sinful practice.

At this point, it is not wrong to argue that the summoner's personality contributes to the appreciation of Chaucer's critical approach to the clergy class in the medieval social area. For the depiction, "as hoot he was and lecherous, as a sparwe" (1988: 19). In addition to lechery, he is presented as a character interested in drinking alcoholic drinks: "Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,/And for to drinken strong wyn, reed as blood;/Than wolde he speke and crye as he were wood" (1988: 19). Considering the task of summoners in church courts, sobriety and earnestness are the traits that he supposedly has. Ironically though, his taste for strong red wine and shouting like a madman when drunk indicates that the summoner loses his ability to think logically and soberly. The loss of sobriety and rational way of thinking make this character vulnerable to the commission of sinful deeds. Moreover, the summoner lacks honesty, one of the merits included in Chaucer's concept of "ideal man": "But wel I woot he lyed right in dede" (1988: 20).

In *The Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer's critical view regarding the paradoxical situation of the ecclesiastical people in medieval context is best expressed in the host's words to the monk in "Monk's Tale":

God yeve me sorwe, but, and I were a pope,
 Not only thou, but every mighty man,
 Thogh he were shorn ful hye upon his pan,
 Sholde have a wyf; for al the world is lorn!
 Religioun hath take up al the corn
 Of treading, and we borel men been shrimpes.
 (1988: 239)

As understood from these discourses of the host, Chaucer argues the fading authority of the ecclesiastical institutions owing to the worldliness and commission of sinful acts among the clergy. Chaucer expresses his critical approach to corruption in the clergy not only in terms of the contents but also forms of the tales. In the literary context, fabliau is a major technique in *The Canterbury Tales* to render Chaucer's criticism stronger and more plausible. For John Hines,

fabliau narrative is characteristically brief, and the plot is complicated and problematic only for some of the characters within the tales, not for the well-informed readers or the audience of the piece. There are frequently one or more characters within the fabliau who are as well informed of the situation as the reader may be, and in control of it. The difference between the situation of such characters and real readers and that of the remaining characters within the fabliaux makes irony a typical feature of the experience of reading a fabliau. (1993: 3)

The complicated and problematic aspect of the plot is related to the characters educated in accordance with ecclesiastical principles. In Chris Baldick's words, in fabliau, "a standard plot is the cuckolding of a slow-witted husband by a crafty and lustful student" (1990: 80). The craftiness and lecherous traits of the students getting a religious education are arguably a reaction against the degenerating ecclesiastical institutions and people. At this point, Velma Bourgeois Richmond's arguments can be viewed as an explanation for the use of fabliau in reinforcing Chaucer's opposition to hypocrisy among the ecclesiastical people: "While secular romances present an idealistic view of life, fabliaux show a coarse side with little that is noble. This French form of short versified narrative [is] designed to provoke laughter" (83) about the deeds of the clergy in the plot. Hence, Chaucer's "The Reeve's Tale" can be viewed as an epitome of fabliau in medieval English literature to react against the moral

corruption of the religious people. In this tale, there are two students named John and Alan, who are depicted as "yonge povre clerkes" (1988: 79). As a result of their enticement of Simon the miller, they spend the night at the miller's home. During the night, when everyone is asleep, Alan aims to have sexual intercourse with the miller's daughter. However, mistaking the girl's bed, the miller's following words to Alan "A, false traitour! False clerk [...]/Thow shalt be deed, by Goddes dignitee!" (1988: 124) account for the tale's complicated plot. Moreover, the miller's wife "was falle aslepe a lyte wight/With John the clerk" (1988: 125) and this reinforces the sophistication in the plot as well. The satirical point in the tale is that though John and Alan receive education based on theology, they make plans to cuckold a miller by having a sexual affair with his wife and daughter. The lechery as a trait of these clerical students embodies the exposition of the Church to vices and follies. By employing these characters with the use of fabliau technique, Chaucer shows his reaction against the corruption of the religious strata in the medieval social context. Thus, it is not wrong to argue that Chaucer's critical viewpoint for the clergy derives from their worldliness despite their recognition of the Christian moral values.

As a signification of his sensitivity to humankind and human nature, Chaucer views science and scientific ways of thinking as a path to man's progress. In line with his emphasis on science as a means to the development of people and societies, similar to his critical remarks concerning the paradoxical situations of the clergy, he presents his critical outlook on the issue of alchemy, a practice common in medieval context that aims to "achieve the transmutation of the base materials into gold, the discovery of a universal cure for disease, and the discovery of a means of indefinitely prolonging life" (Merriam Webster Dictionary). His emphasis on the significance of positive science for human progress is embodied in the yeoman's following critical remarks about the practice of alchemy in "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale":

I wol yow telle, as was me taught also,
 The foure spirites and the bodies sevene,
 By ordre, as ofte I herde my lord hem nevene.
 The firste spirit quik-silver called is,
 The second orpiment, the thridde, y-wis,
 Sal armoniak, and the ferthe brimston.

The bodies sevene eek, lo! hem heer anoon:
 Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe,
 Mars yren, Mercurie quik-silver we clepe,
 Saturnus leed, and Jupiter is tin,
 And Venus coper, by my fader kin!
 This cursed craft who-so wol exercyse,
 He shal no goog han that him may suffice;
 For al the good he spendeth ther-about, e,
 He lese shal, ther-of have I no doute. (1988: 529)

Whereas following the movements of planets can be considered compatible with scientific way of thinking, their association with metals and conjuring supernatural beings such as bodies and spirits are an embodiment of the spiritualist approach to life and humankind. Reliance on spiritual beings to render human lifespan longer is one of the major critical points for Chaucer because as the narrator, he does not favor the practice of alchemy. Moreover, Chaucer indicates in the yeoman's following words that practice of alchemy can even lead people to lose what they possess: "That slyding science hath me maad so bare,/That I have no good, wher that ever I fare" (1988: 525). Thus, scientific thinking not only makes life more practical but it also enables people to progress in terms of both civilization and prosperity. As a matter of fact, Chaucer's opinions regarding alchemy as a common practice in the Middle Ages are antithetical to medieval spiritualist outlook on life. This opposition in Chaucer signifies the change from scholastic to anthropocentric paradigm in social areas.

As an embodiment of this shift in relation to the view of life in the social sense, Chaucer reflects his oppositional approach to medieval outlook on life with regard to woman's acquisition of female individual identity in patriarchal system. Unlike the judgment of women as "miser", "envious" and "greedy" in Andreas Capellanus's *The Art of Courtly Love*, Chaucer's *Wife of Bath* as a character is an expression of humanistic approach to women in terms of their individuality in the society. Her following characteristics in "General Prologue" can be considered as a signification of the paradigmatic transformation in terms of the approach to women: "Housbondes at chirchidore she hadde fyve,/ [...] /In felawschip wel coude she laughe and carpe./Of remedies of love she knew perchaunce" (1988: 14). Arguably owing to Eve's image as the temptress in the Biblical account of Original Sin,

patriarchal system has prejudiced approach to women. In *Women and Evil*, Nel Noddings argues that "woman has been associated in a stereotypical way with both good and evil. As an 'angel in the house', woman has been credited with natural goodness, an innate allegiance to 'the law of kindness'. But this same description extols her as infantile, weak, and mindless – a creature in constant need of male supervision and protection" (1989: 59). Considering the view of woman as a temptress in biblical account, it is somehow inevitable to observe male domination in social areas in medieval context. At this point, *Wife of Bath's* marriage with five husbands, whom she met in the church, her playful and seductive remarks in a community and her expertise in the art of love are the characteristics that do not comply with the female role in patriarchal medieval society. By portraying this character, while Chaucer opposes the spiritualist worldview of the Middle Ages, he also indicates his sensitivity to humankind as a whole. Her freedom in expressing her individuality by means of playful remarks in a group and marriage with the people she chooses signifies her free will as a sign of her independent female identity.

To sum up, scholasticism's imposition of religious doctrines on human beings disregarding the individuals' free will signifies its isolation from social life in the Middle Ages. Despite the dominance of spiritualist outlook on life, the indulgence of both common people and the clergy in the material world and its interests inevitably established the basis of the shift from spiritualism to worldliness. Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* epitomize this transformation in medieval social milieu. Though their descriptions and deeds in the tales are antithetical to scholastic ethos, the interest of students in church in sexual affairs with a miller's wife in "The Reeve's Tale", the yeoman's emphasis on the significance of positive science for human progress in "Canon's Yeoman's Tale" and *Wife of Bath's* free and independent decision for marriage and her witty style in a community all represent a deviation from the otherworldly approach of scholasticism due to attribution of more significance to man and his needs as an individual. Thus, Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* can be considered as an embodiment of paradigmatic transformation from scholasticism to worldliness.

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