Chaucer and Morris

by Angie Horn

May 15th, 1904

Submitted to the Department of English of the University of Kansas in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Degree of Master of Arts
Master Thesis
English
Horn, Angie 1904
"Chaucer and Morris".
Chaucer and Malice.

Presented to the Department of English Literature of the University of Kansas for the degree of Master of Arts by Angier Bover.

May 16, 1907.
Table of Contents

Introduction.
Norris's utterances in regard to Chaucer.
Points of comparison between Chaucer and Norris.
Method.
Purpose.
Verse structure.
Rime.
Diction.
Realism.
Emotion.
Treatment of love.
Love of beauty.
Treatment of nature.
Love of the good.
Conversational element.
Humor.
Variety.
Spirit.

Early poems of the Earthly Paradise compared with later ones.
Summary.
Bibliography


Morris, William. The Life and Death of Jason, anchor's ed. Boston, Roberts Brothers, 1876.

Chaucer and Morris may be called the two great narrative poets of English literature. Since Chaucer the English-speaking world has had some great poets, but none whose work has combined such power of narration with other distinctively poetic qualities so markedly as has that of William Morris. Separated as they are by five centuries of civilization, these two great Londoners are alike in many ways; their work shows resemblance which serve to establish a bond of literary kinship between them.

Certain well-authenticated facts in the life of Morris show that he had a loving and intimate knowledge of Chaucer. He became acquainted with Chaucer's works before 1855. The Life and Death of Jason
appeared in 1867 and the Earthly Paradise in 1868. Shortly after the publication of the first part of the latter, a German student at Marburg wrote to Morris, asking if it were true that Chaucer was his model. To this Morris replied:

"I quite agree as to the resemblance of my work to Chaucer; it only comes of our both using the narrative method, and even then my turn is decidedly more to Romance than was Chaucer's. I admit that I have been a great admirer of Chaucer and that his work has had, especially in my early years, much influence on me, but I think not much on my style. In fact, I try nature more than Romance rather than Classicism."

Morris' published utterances
as regards his relation to Chaucer are of value. The first occurs in the seventeenth book of The Life and Death of Jason. The lines follow: "Would that I had but some portion of that mastery that from the rose-hung lance of wooden Kent through these five hundred years such longs have sent to us, who, meshed within this smoky net of un rejoicing labor, lose them yet. And thou, O Master! - Yea, my Master, still, O Master, pardon me; if yet in vain Thou art my Master, and I fail to bring Before mine eyes the image of the thing My heart is filled with, thou whose beamy eye. 
Beheld the flush to Crescet's cheeks arise
When Trolius rode up the prising street
As clearly as they and thy tournament met
Those who in vineyards of Paeon withstood
The glittering honor of the club-topped wood.

Further is the Envoy to the Earthly Paradise, too long to quote, but which expresses Morris's love for Chaucer, whom he again calls his master.

A third tribute to the love which Morris bore to Chaucer is the Kelmscott edition of Chaucer's works, which was the affectionate labor of the latter years of Morris's life.

These facts are evidence tending to substantiate the belief, gained from a study of their poetry, that Chaucer really had some influence on the work of Morris.

The Canterbury Tales and the Earthly Paradise are the principal facts of investigation in this paper.
Between these two there are certain
resemblances which occur at once
to the reader.

The general method is the same:
the narration by different persons
of various tales, linked together by
a common motive. Chance sends
forth a band of English pilgrims,
and makes them record the tedious
ness of the journey with the recital
of stories. Nothing conceives a company
of fourteenth-century Norse mariners,
grown old in a vain search for the
Earthly Paradise, who near the ending
of their lives, find rest in a hospitable
city, and there at least, provided
by the elders, recite various legends
or listen to each recital by the host.
Each poem has a prologue, giving
the situation and circumstances
under which the tales were told.
The various tales which compose the
separate parts are linked together in Chaucer mainly by the comments of the audience and an introduction of the next speaker; in Mosier also by the comments and conversations of the listeners and an explanation as to the time and circumstances of each meeting. There is another feature which adds to the individuality and charm of the Earthly Paradise, the introductory verses to the different months, which preface each group of two tales. These short poems are veritable jewels, richly adorning the fabric of the work.

The purpose of the two poets was probably the same in the main: to entertain the reader and make them forget themselves in the contemplation of the histories of others. Among the most clearly marked resemblances in Mosier's work to that
Of Chaucer is the verse structure. Chaucer, it will be remembered, used in all his poems the eight-or-nine-syllabled, four-stress line, or the ten- or eleven-syllabled, five-stress line, with the exception of Canida and Ertei, and the parody of the romance-metre in Sir Thopas. Monie's verse is clearly modeled on that of Chaucer. The Life and Death of Jason is written in heroic couplets. In the Earthly Paradise the style of verse used is exclusively Chaucerian. Of the twenty-four tales, seven, The Man Born to be King, The Writing on the Image, The Matching of the Falcon, The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon, The Story of Acutius and Lydippe, The Taming of Delavy, and the Ring Given to Venus, are written in octosyllabic, four-stress lines. The other seventeen
are in ten syllabled, five-stress lines.
The introduction is in octosyllabic lines, the Prologue, Epilogue and
Envoi in dactylic. The songs for the months are sometimes in
octosyllabic lines, sometimes in dactylic.

The verse is remarkable for its
case and fluency and often for its
musical quality. I can not forbear
quoting some lines which I think
show well with what grace Morris
used the Chaucerian metres, and
with what additional charm and
beauty his own genius invested them.
The following are the opening lines
of Atalanta's Race.

Through thick Arcadian woods a
hunter went
Following the beasts up, on a fresh
spring day.

But since his horn-tipped bow
But seldom bent
Now at the noon-tide nought had
happened to clay,
Within a vale he called his rounds
away,
Darkening the echoes of his lone
voice cling
About the cliffs and through the
beck, true ring.

Another quotation, from The Man
Born to be King, shows something
of the musical quality of Marie's
verse, and the fitting of sound to sense.
"Remembered not on this cork mora
Then to the ringing of the horn,
Jingle of bits and mingled shout,
Toward that came stream he rideth
out
To see his grey-winged falcons fly.
So long he rode he knew a
A mill upon the river's viene,
That seemed a godly place to him.
For on the oily smooth mill head
There hung the apples growing red,
And many an ancient apple-tree
Within the orchard could he see,
While the smooth millwalls white
And black
Shook to the great wheel's measured
And grumble of the gear within.
While on the roof that dinned that
din
The doves sat cooing half the day
And round the half-cord stack they
The sparrows fluttered twittering.

Mowbray's verse-scheme also is
Chaucerian, as well as his stanza
structure. The Canterbury Tales,
with the single exception of the
Monk's Tale, are written either in
rimesing couplets, and without stanzas
divisions of regular length, or in
the seven-line stanza, rimesing
a b a b c c. Morris has paid equal attention to the two styles, using the seven-line Chaucerian stanza in the Introduction, the Epilogue, and ten of the tales. The Prologue, the Epilogue, and the other tales are without stanzas of regular length, and are written in riming couplets. The introductory verses to the months present no variation, some being written in couplets, and others in the seven-line stanza. Morris is fond of alliteration, and uses it with as good effect as did his "Master." His rhymes seem easy and natural. There are few if any forced rhymes, and no free use of poetic licence. Sometimes, but not often, we find eye-rhymes. Morris is often helped out in a troublesome rhyme by the use of a word from middle English.
which he mingles with present-day diction in a very delightful way. His language shows plainly the influence of his Chaucerian studies, many favorite words and expressions of Chaucer having become apparently favorites of More's also. This trick of More's in introducing middle English words imparts a quaint flavor to his poetry, helping to give the impression of a time come centuries back.

In one respect More's diction differs from Chaucer's. While Chaucer clings to the language of common life, More's words seem more poetical, less commonplace. When he uses commonplace phrases, he manages to use them in an unusual way. However, he is not stilted or formal, but nevertheless gives a
lange of ideality to all that he
touched.

Moxie could not be called a
realist at all comparable to Chaucer.
The conception of the very situation
which serves as an excuse for the
telling of the stories is more
fantastic than that of the Canter-
bury Tales. A pilgrimage such as
Chaucer describes was not at all
uncommon in his time; he had
doubtless taken part in such a
one himself. But the situation of
a band of young men setting out
in good faith for an earthly Par-
adise and pursuing their wander-
ings through many years and over
varying lands and seas, is decidedly
more unlikely than such a journey
as the Canterbury pilgrimage took.
To be sure, one must take into
consideration the sophistries which
five centuries of progress have added to humanity. Is it conceivable that such a thing may have happened? in the light of what we know regarding the absurdities and follies of the popular beliefs at the time. Those who could believe in a philosopher's stone, alchemy, astrology and indistinct "sciences" might have undertaken such a voyage. But after all, it only may have happened. And even supposing that it did, the voyagers themselves were in no certainty of finding what they sought; their belief was that of the heart, which, as Sommell says, will believe any beautiful miracle in behalf of what it loves, or in this case, a thing it hopes for. At any rate, the whole thing is in a shadowy region, far removed from the clear light of a May morning.
shining on a simple English scene. This unreality pervades the entire work. Indeed, what seems to me the most striking difference between Morris and Chaucer is that quality in the work of the former for which I can find no better term than dreaminess. The march of events goes on like happenings in a dream. The descriptions, beautiful and vivid, are not in themselves lacking in any quality which could contribute to what we call a good description, but the pictures seem somehow surrounded by a dim, elusive atmosphere like the blue haze that colors an autumnal landscape. As we read, we see things clearly enough, but when we have closed the book and are trying to recall scenes or incidents, they appear but dim
and shadowy. It is as though we have awakened from a sort of opium dream, in which we get the delightful visions, without any unpleasant effects. Now and then it is true, a scene or a picture flashes out like a cut diamond from the misty, sapphire-colored setting of the rest. But in general Movies world is not our world. It is an enchanted garden, where the wand of the magician has caused to blossom flowers so delicate and fragile that they perish almost in our grasp. The legends in the Earthly Paradise, The Land East of the Sun and West of the Moon is surely the most dreamy. What could be more charmingly indefinite and suggestive than its very title? And this atmosphere of dreamland prevails throughout the poem. Indeed the substance of it is
made up of dreams within dreams. Chaucer, in his most lofty moments, never loses sight of the good solid earth. A word or a line brings him back to it. He is wholesome, cheerful, in every way human. His characters have human hearts; their souls are stirred by human passions and emotions; they are generally of a sort which we can easily comprehend. Some of them, it is true, hardly seem made of common clay— the lady laustance and Brieles for example. But they are clearly drawn and individualistic. Marie is not equal to Chaucer in this respect. All his women, to whom he pays any particular attention, are alike beautiful, pure, statuesque, reminding me of the white lilies which bloom one on each successive day, each just as lovely as the last.
and having no individual characteristics to make it remembered above its predecessor. SoMovie's
women blossom in the gardens of his Earthly Paradise one by one, being admired and then for-
gotten in the perfect beauty of the rest. Movie's men are gray-eyed, handsome, strong and brave, but they too are copies of one another. In the Prologue for instance there is nowhere shown that mastery of character sketching which has made the prologue to the Canterbury Tales such a delightful and unique bit of poetry. Movie's characters are in fact less human than Chaucer's. Take Italanta for example. What human heart can there be in a girl who sets such terms and calmly sees
the destruction of so many men whose only fault presumably was that they loved her. She seems to be made of ice. The loves of Ludum impress me as being the most far-fetched and impossible of the poems. The uselessness of the cruelties and follies of the several characters is astonishing. They are like creatures working under the sun of some evil Hell. The Man Born to be King, The Writing on the Image, The Son of Ossuce, and The Proud King contain characters who seem real and human. Alcestis is much like the substance of Chance. To call her as human as substance is not saying much, for substance is probably the most exalted and exult-like of Chance is women. Alcestis endures no trials such
As full to the lot of C. C. Constance, hence has no opportunities to display the virtues of saintly patience and humility in suffering. Her trial is sudden and soon over; it is the deliberate relinquishing of her life for another. She makes the sacrifice, and here in one touch she shows herself as human as Constance. The thought of hate comes into her heart for an instant, which is paralleled in Constance's momentary feeling against her husband whom she believes to have cruelly wronged her.

Motis, when he chooses is capable of depicting deep feeling and powerful passion, whether it be that of love, hate, jealousy or revenge. He makes his feel the misery in the heart of the proud
tling almost as keenly as though we ourselves were suffering in a similar situation. Another of his most effective pictures is that in which he shows us the wild rage and despair of the Queen in Bellerophon at Argos, when her love turns to hate.

Movies is fond of depicting the emotion of love. In his treatment of it he is unlike Chaucer in at least one respect. The love which Movies describes is hardly ever without a note of yearning, of unsatisfied longing. It is a passion which has in it something of dissatisfaction even at the moment of most exquisite delight. The lovers look beyond the present bliss to fear a future which threatens loss and disappointment. Love seems to distrust its own
joy, to make the heart more rest-
est and troubled. In the Dooms
of King Arving occurr these

E. P. I. p. 231.

"Love, to think that love can

fast away,

That soon or late to us shall come

day

When this shall be forgotten."

In Pygmation and the Image is

E. P. I. p. 271.

again the same thought:

"I love thee so, I grow afraid

of what the gods upon our heads

may send,

I love thee so, I think upon the end,

The Hill of Venus is a powerful

picture of the medicine and longing

of the human heart.

Nowe dwells more on the

beauty of love than does Chaucer.

True, it is more of ten a material

beauty than a spiritual one.
He never descends to grossness; the love he depicts is a refined passion, but it is a love which delights in and depends upon physical beauty. Mme. d'Arnaud puts two beautiful young creatures together and crowns them with music, flowers, fragrance, in short any and everything which contributes to a beautiful setting. He neglects no detail which can add to the charm of the picture. Chaucer is much less refined. In his treatment of love and does not so insist on the idea of beauty. To be sure he is not averse to beauty of character as well as person. He has given us some women in whom the two are combined, for example, Filisola, Custance and Virginia. But he does not disdain to
speak of love between persons who are not patterns of beauty. In Morris the story of Cupid and Psyche makes love most beautiful. The extreme delight in material beauty, the censurelessness of treatment here is not like Chaucer, but it is very much like Keats.

Indeed, in his worship of beauty Morris is more like Keats probably than he is like any other poet, ancient or modern. Chaucer it is true loved the beautiful, but not with the intensity of Morris. In him it has become a passion. If he is the poet of love, he is not less the poet of beauty and if Keats holds first rank as he is generally considered to do, as the apostle of the beautiful, Morris certainly deserves the
second place. Marvin in fact carried the love for the beautiful into his daily life more than Keats. He was always creating the beautiful with his hands as well as his brain. He always surrounded himself with an atmosphere of beauty; in his home beauty reigns supreme, he could not bear ugliness.

Both Chaucer and Marvin loved Nature and not the least charming element in their works is the nature description. Their poetry has that unmistakable quality which proves their observations to have been minute and loving. Their treatment of Nature however is somewhat different. With Chaucer Nature is beautiful but simple. She smiles at him with the innocent eye of a young girl, all tenderness.
simplicity and youthful vivacity.
In Nature there is her deeper, sadder side. She is grown older, more serious, not less beautiful but with a maturity which hints of change. She has within her calm, deep eyes the quiver of life's mysteries and that shadow which the inevitable and approaching Death casts over his victims. Nature understands the effect which Nature has on our feelings and enters into them in much of his verse. His descriptions of Nature in the Earthly Paradise are perfect and always suggestive. In his love of whatever is good and pure Nature resembles Chaucer. It is obvious enough that whatever of conveniences there is in Chaucer is to be ascribed to the times rather than to the personality of the man.
There is no coarseness in Morris, and this is due not more to the conventionality of the nineteenth century than to the tastes and ideals of the age. A man who loved beauty as Morris did could not endure the ugliness of vice and impurity.

To be sure, he does not express his own sentiments on this subject as vigorously as does Chaucer, and in this lies one of the differences between the two. Chaucer is fond of giving his own opinion on the actions of his several characters in good-natured terms, of consigning the evil doers to avenging fends and of calling down the blessing of Heaven upon the good. His conversational touches on life in general give an agreeable brightness to his style and a sense of familiarity.
which one does not find in the
work of Morice. Morice does not
comment; he leaves characters and
events to make their own impres-
on the reader and add no words
of his own.

Of that delightful humor which
is so characteristic of Chaucer we
find hardly a trace in Morice,
either of that which is called
humor in the popular sense, mere
funniness" or that other sort which
perhaps comes nearer a true ex-
planation of the term, that humor
which hides under an appearance
of lightness a serious earnest and
which is closely akin to pathos.
The absence of humor in Morice's
poetry helps to give it a darker
shade than it ever found in
Chaucer's verse. Morice intends us
to enjoy, but he does not purpose
to minister to anything lower in us than our sense of beauty. He would scorn to gain our attention by means of any commonplace artifice to make us smile; if indeed we were capable of doing so. I am not aware that he does not try to do so. Attempts at humor would be a blemish rather than an ornament upon the sustained dignity and beauty of his style. Hence it is inclined to dwell longer on the depiction of a single situation than is Chaucer. He has not that trick of setting a situation before the reader in a few effective lines and passing on to another with that air of transition which is one of Chaucer's characteristics. Chaucer certainly is in no hurry; he does not spare words when he comes to tell of something which
he particularly enjoys, but he can
chip here and there with an
agility which seems foreign to him.
In plain truth Morris, if read
uninterruptedly for two or three
hours, becomes monotonous. His
style lacks variety, because there
is no variety of motive. Nor do we
find as many distinct and varied
attributes in the style of Morris
as in that of Chaucer; everything
is subdued to a dryness, seductive
beauty, with nothing to clash with
the soft, sweet harmonies in which
he delights.

There is a business pervading
most of Morris's works which is
directly opposed to the buoyancy of
Chaucer's spirit. This is caused by a
sort of Juticism, which runs throughout
his work, appearing sometimes even
in his most joyous poems. There
is a feeling of fleeing slavery from death, which must sooner or later put an end to earthly happiness, and which casts a chilling shadow over the gayest home. Nature loves to describe happy scenes where love and sport and the delights of sweet music and the light laughter of girls reign supreme, but very rarely can he leave such a scene without that reminder that all this must pass away. This tinge of fatalism is paganistic. There is not the conventional Christian attitude of looking at life, even in the Christian foms. All earthly things must change and die; beauty will fade, youth flee and love fall, and this death is looked upon as the final end. There is no sustaining hope of a better life beyond; there is at most only a suggestion of such a
possibility. This sense of dreariness is apparent even in the Prologue. We are introduced to persons whom we see to be old, careworn, bent with years and with faces furrowed by lines deeper than years cantrace. Their story serves but to accentuate the impression of gloom. How different this is from the Prologue of the Rerterbury Tales, with its clever bits of characterization, its flashes of fun and that atmosphere of mirth and good feeling.

The thought of death appears very often in the Earthly Paradise, even in the early volumes. These lines in the song to March are an instance: ‘Oh, what wepteth all this storm of life?

But Death himself, who weeping solemnly, Even from the heart of woe to woe Forgetfulness With us, Reprieve, lest Pleasureless ye die.’
The same idea occurs in the song for May, one of the most beautiful despite its melancholy:

"I held my breath
And shuddered at the sight of End and Death.
Alas! Love faced me in the twilight dust,
Her music hushed the wakening soul.
But on this terrain shone out the golden sun,
And in their heads the brown child's tune was strong.

As shivering, twist the trees they stale along;
Some rooted aught their wildless passing by.
The world had quite forgotten of must die."

The resemblances to Chaucer in the work of Morris are most clearly marked in the first volume of the Earthly Paradise. After this volume one can notice a difference of spirit. This is easily felt, hard easily explained. But there is less of the Fireness and essentiality, the careless prescience, the ease and freedom which we are
accustomed to associate with the Chaucerian manner. We can not fail to believe that this change is the appearance of the real Morris.

What then was Chaucer's influence on Morris? First, Morris had always a passionate love for everything pertaining to the age of Chaucer—as exemplified in his manner of life, his home-surroundings and the atmosphere of his writings—and a special love for Chaucer as the most delightful representative of that age. Always fond of story-telling, after he had read Chaucer the notion very naturally came to Morris of retelling some of the old tales from various lands—rooks of the world's literature, with the purpose of giving some pleasure and enjoyment to his English people. That the series was wisely suggested by the Canterbury Tales seems beyond question, and as Morris wrote it at

likely that he modeled his work not unconsciously on that of the man whom he liked to call his master. But as he went on, his own strong personality could not fail to become predominant, and the work begun in Chaucer’s manner ended in Morris’s—which is peculiarly the own. They are alike in many ways. The flowers of autumn resemble those of the spring in certain general ways. They have borrowed something of their colors and perfumes, but they never affect us as the springtime blossoms do. The sky above them is turning gray and the wind is beginning to moan in a sad minor key. They suggest death, not life; sorrow, not joy. We are unwilling to take our straining gaze from their passing beauty, for already our anxious eyes have imagined a fading of their bright petals, and the garden promises
we no more. Chaucer suggests the Spring, Morris the autumn, which
flames for a moment with the blaze
and glory of summer before it fades into
the cold dreariness of winter.