

Jana Malá Štěpánková
Chivalry in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales
(ÚALK, FF UK, Praha 2012, 91 pp.)

Supervisor's review

The thesis represents a well-structured, coherent survey of the problematics announced in the title. It isolates and comments on the numerous reflections of chivalry in *The Canterbury Tales*, which are located on a range from a perfunctory endowment of high-status characters with a knightly title (Manciple's Tale) to complex negotiation of chivalric values (Knight's Tale). While a full and detailed treatment of such a broadly conceived theme would far exceed the scope of a BA thesis and in that respect the choice of topic might appear infelicitous, Jana Malá Štěpánková has chosen an approach that produces, in my opinion, a legitimate alternative – a comprehensive preliminary charting of this large territory, identifying the basic issues which can serve as a vantage point for an in-depth analysis of individual tales and problems. Though the thesis is for this reason more descriptive than analytical, it shows ability in terms of the organization of the material and an awareness of its complex nature.

The author adopted a socio-literary perspective, focusing on correspondences between the narrators and their tales in terms of status, genre and concept of/insight in chivalric values, respectively. The discussion of the topic thus points in two directions – on the one hand it proposes a specific viewpoint on *The Canterbury Tales* in line with an established general perspective (connection narrator - tale), on the other it attempts at drawing larger conclusions concerning the currency and understanding of chivalric values in English society of Chaucer's time. Though the introduction recognizes the complications inherent in drawing a straightforward parallel between the image of society in *The Canterbury Tales* and contemporary social reality (the concept of *The Canterbury Tales* as a "realistic" work), the analyses of individual tales do not always manage to sustain that distinction, which may lead to a reductive view of Chaucer's text.

While I do not perceive the overall concept of the thesis as problematic in itself, it has to be said that the choice of secondary sources appears eclectic and not exactly sufficient for the task at hand. The second chapter, which offers a survey of the development of the concept of the knight, his status, social role and literary reflection, serves its purpose in establishing a good basis for the socio-literary approach, but its balance would benefit from moving the focus closer to Chaucer's time and literary sources of inspiration.

Conclusion: The work fulfils the criteria set for a BA thesis. With regard to the reservations outlined above I recommend the thesis for defence with the preliminary mark VERY GOOD (velmi dobře).

Prague, 17 June 201ě

Helena Znojemská, Ph.D.