

**Západočeská univerzita v Plzni**

**Fakulta pedagogická**

**Katedra anglického jazyka**

**Bakalářská práce**

**OBRAZ ŽEN V CHAUCEROVÝCH  
CANTERBURSKÝCH POVÍDKÁCH**

**Jan Vaščák**

**Plzeň 2013**

**University of West Bohemia**

**Faculty of Education**

**Department of English**

**Undergraduate Thesis**

**PORTRAYAL OF WOMEN IN CHAUCER'S  
CANTERBURY TALES**

**Jan Vaščák**

**Plzeň 2013**

Prohlašuji, že jsem práci vypracoval samostatně s použitím uvedené literatury a zdrojů informací.

*V Plzni dne 25. dubna 2013*

.....

Jan Vaščák

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my thanks to my supervisor, PhDr. Magdaléna Potočňáková, PhD., for all the advice and time spent on inspection of the thesis.

## ABSTRACT

Vašćák, Jan. University of West Bohemia. April, 2013. Portrayal of Women in Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. Supervisor: PhDr. Magdaléna Potočňáková, PhD.

The topic of this undergraduate thesis is *The Canterbury Tales* by English poet Geoffrey Chaucer. It is generally considered as one of the most prominent pieces of the English literature and this thesis is intended to assist with familiarity with this work. More precisely, it explores the role of women in the tales as well as their position and attitudes towards them in medieval society. Concerning the work, female narrators and woman characters in stories by male narrators are analysed separately.

The thesis is divided into four basic chapters. The first one defines whole medieval society. The second chapter is concerned with the author of the work. It analyses and then interprets the most important events of his life. The third part describes the female narrators out of all pilgrims. An analysis of their behaviour and manners is also included. The fourth part looks at women by view of the male narrators. It is done through their stories containing females as a considerable part of their telling.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction	1
1. Medieval Society	3
1.1. Church and Pilgrimages	4
1.2. Medieval Women	6
2. Life of Geoffrey Chaucer	11
2.1. Family Background and Service at Court	12
2.2. Chaucer's Travels	15
2.3. Final Decade	17
3. Woman as a Narrator	19
3.1. The Wife of Bath	20
3.2. The Prioress	22
3.3. The Second Nun	23
4. Women in Male Narratives	26
4.1. Griselda from the <i>Oxford Scholar's Tale</i>	27
4.2. Alison from the <i>Miller's Tale</i>	29
4.3. Emily from the <i>Knight's Tale</i>	30
Conclusion	32
Works Cited	34
Resume	35

## INTRODUCTION

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* rank among the most significant literary works in English Literature. It is generally agreed that Chaucer in his magnum opus created a highly valuable portrayal of English society in the fourteenth century. He provides faithful but at the same time critical and satirical depiction of medieval population and its life. Especially interaction of the pilgrims and their quarrels, which interrupt the actual tales, add elements of everyday life. Chaucer focuses on middle class society because he occurred in this sphere for the majority of his lifetime. According to Brewer's claim that Chaucer's "inner life is recorded in his poems, and he liked to put himself as a character into them" (7), which is confirmed by presence of Chaucer among pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*, it could be suggested that also other figures possibly represent people from his neighbourhood.

This thesis is concerned with an issue of women in *The Canterbury Tales*. It explores their roles in medieval society and consequently introduces male attitudes towards women. In fact, the work contains two sources of information, which altogether form the portrayal. These are the pilgrims themselves and their tales. The former provides a wide range of narrators and they are introduced by Chaucer in the *General Prologue*. He describes the appearance of the figures as well as their characteristics. However, the qualities, which are mentioned indirectly, also appear there. Actually, there are only three female narrators in *The Canterbury Tales*. They are the Wife of Bath, the Prioress and the Second Nun. With the aid of these characters, Chaucer offers only two roles – role of a wife and of a nun. This is a sufficient number to capture the real opportunities of medieval women. The latter reflect various attitudes towards females. There occur representatives of faithful and obedient wives; their opposites, wicked and disobedient and the third group, which consists of women who become objects of love.

The first chapter provides a brief description of medieval society in England. It includes information about lifestyle in the fourteenth century, specifies particular occupations and defines position of women in this society. The second chapter focuses on the personality of Geoffrey Chaucer. It brings the most important details of his life in connection with his writings. The third chapter explores female narrators. An analysis of their behaviour and manners is included. The fourth chapter deals with portrayal of women in the tales told by male narrators. This separation is necessary because the depiction differs depending on a narrator of a tale.



## 1. MEDIEVAL SOCIETY

Medieval times, also referred as the Middle Ages, lasted from the fifth until the fifteenth century. According to needs of this thesis, the most valuable part of this period is the Late Middle Ages with the focus on the fourteenth century because it is the age in which Geoffrey Chaucer lived. It was the period under Edward III's rule. He is noted mainly for his military success and for restoring royal authority after the reign of his father, Edward II. This historical period is shaped mainly by the Black Death and the Hundred Years' War. However, these two miseries did not affect the primary necessities of life in England. Brewer describes this period:

It is remarkable with what resilience European society recovered from the cataclysm. Italy is best documented, but in England, as elsewhere, there was no general panic, no general flight from the worst spots, only a brief dislocation of trade. (51)

Such a calm progression was caused mainly by a type of population in the Middle Ages. People could be qualified as an agricultural society and thus they exceeded in power to survive. They were familiar with death as it surrounded them and generally, the plague was perceived as a God's punishment. England in the Middle Ages was dependent on agriculture as well as the whole Europe. Fields provided among others grain, which was the main crude for bread baking, and extensive forests were boundless source of wood, heating and venison. Flocks of sheep and herds of cattle could be often seen on vast pieces of land. Farming is not generally considered as an easy work and it applied in the fourteenth century. People were less handy than nowadays, obviously the tools were not perfect. Consequently, hands became a basic tool. These people were, despite the big effort, which they had to make to survive, classified in medieval society as the poor and they usually lived in villages. Not only villagers but also people from towns were closely

connected to nature. Cities and villages were scattered throughout the whole England. The majority of people dwelled in villages and wilderness. Even Chaucer's poetry is full of images of countryside and the very beginning of *The Canterbury Tales* expresses compassion for peasants. "When the sweet showers of April have pierced / The drought of March, and pierced it to the root" (Chaucer 1). It reflects feelings of relief and relaxation after the winter ended and the spring is about to begin. This was a right time to celebrate for peasants because winters were tough and there is a very little what can be done on fields through winter. On the other hand, spring is generally considered a period full of optimism and it meant that work could start again.

### 1.1.CHURCH AND PILGRIMAGES

Chaucer's England was a Catholic country and thus church was a great influence. For clear understanding of Chaucer's works, it is important to know religious beliefs and position of church. The majority of people were believers and only a few could declare themselves as non-believers and die without the fold. Church held a central position in medieval life, which was evident even when looking at towns. Villagers' small houses, made mostly from daub and wattle and not very beautifully, contrasted with a church building towering over them. People felt church as a matter of course and would not imagine their life without attendance at church and dependence on their parish. The signs of church were apparent everywhere when a person left a town, it appeared in the form of a cathedral, an abbey, a holy well or a wayside cross. Bennett demonstrates this presence of church, "no one could live a day in Chaucer's England without coming into contact with people whose life was bound up in the service of the needs of the Church, both on its spiritual and temporal sides" (12). Pilgrims in group or as individuals were frequently to be seen, monks and prioress' on their travels or wandering summoners, usually seeking for their victims.

Another main element of the Middle Ages was travelling. The reasons were often religious; people were setting out on pilgrimages, usually towards some of local shrines to do penance for a perceived sin or to search for a relief from an illness. As said earlier, shrines were scattered throughout the country and situated in close distance to cities, but there also occurred pilgrims who took longer distances towards particular churches or cathedrals. The most important ones were in Glastonbury, Winchester and in Canterbury. Religious pilgrims were not the only travellers on medieval roads. Others were taking journeys because of trade. They visited markets in neighbourhood to sell their goods. Other group was soldiers, both performing their duties or their individual wants. There were also beggars presented on the roads. For more official reasons appeared king's messengers whose only mission was to deliver given message. Even Chaucer set out for several diplomatic missions, mainly for needs of a particular court. When a king decided to set forth from time to time, he was accompanied by a long parade, which could not be compared, to any other. In general, pilgrims were representatives of the middle class. People who were in service and thus unfree could not leave manor of their lord. That is why Chaucer created an unforgettable picture of the medieval middle class. People travelled a lot and means of transport or roads did not change this fact. Roads in the Middle Ages evoked more paths than real roads and they were in a bad condition. Paved roads appeared very rarely, usually it was just mud and marsh what pilgrims of all kinds had to cope with on their travels. Spring rainy weather sometimes made a situation on the roads so bad that the less important journeys had to be postponed until the weather became more pleasant to travel. It was extremely difficult for medieval society to repair the roads. When it was a few days travel, pilgrims, except the highest socially ranked persons, usually slept at inns which were situated on bigger roads and also Chaucer did so. It is likely that he always sent his servant to provide an accommodation. Those inns were adapted to

accommodate a great number of attendants and they commonly involved rooms with several beds inside. When it was full, the less lucky guests had to share one bed. There is no evidence how women dealt with this phenomenon. Means of transport in those times were indeed simple. The poor had to walk and those who travelled regularly and could afford a horse rode on horseback. Horses became a sign of wealth and people were judged according to the horse, which they owned. Even Chaucer involved horses when describing figures in the *General Prologue*. All the goods were also transported on horseback. Carts already occurred but they were used mainly in farming. The most comfortable but at the same time the most expensive means of transport probably was a carriage. Because of its price, there were only few of them. These were owned principally by kings and used mainly by their wives.

## 1.2.MEDIEVAL WOMEN

The Middle Ages society, especially in England, was patriarchal and thus men held the central position in it. Women were pushed aside according to contemporary beliefs about their gender and authority. Their position in medieval society was changing throughout the Middle Ages and varied depending on several factors, such as which social class they belonged to, which part of the country they lived in or another very important fact was their marital status, whether a woman was married, unmarried, widowed or remarried. Women had two opportunities, marriage or entering a church. They were married in a very young age, such as the Wife of Bath who claims that she was first married at twelve, and their partners were usually much older. This age difference caused that widowhood became fairly common and therefore the second or third marriages frequent. Chaucer's grandmother was married three times and it is possible that she became a model for the Wife of Bath. The age difference was not the only reason. The other was an early death caused by any of diseases. For instance, John of Gaunt was

married three times as two of his wives died early. Remarriage often followed very soon after the death of the preceding partner. However, when a man did not want her wife to profit from his inheritance with someone unrelated, he stated his disfavour for remarriage in his will. Divorce was a different phenomenon, as Rudd states it was “all but unheard of and annulments rare: each was shameful and expensive, requiring dispensations from the Pope as well as legal palaver, making such things the preserve of the rich” (33). The unequal position resulted in less legal rights for women, difficulties when accessing any of trades or even employment and consequently considerably limited life-choices for this gender. In the Early Middle Ages they usually worked on fields as a part of an agricultural society or as brewers and bakers. However, this role had changed. The work on land was firstly split and gendered. Hard work, such as ploughing, was men’s issue and women dominated primarily in diary production. Later, in the Late Middle Ages, women definitely moved from land to houses. There they performed work more suitable for them but still women’s opportunities of employment were limited. Generally, their occupations included victuating, spinning or making clothes. Others were frequently employed as servants. Some women had kept their occupation in breweries but not for a long time, men pushed them out from this business in the fifteenth century. In those times an interesting phenomenon occurred. Women started to appear beside their husbands and they often worked together on their shared business. This fact suggests that women’s position rapidly changed and they started to enlarge their authority. The next group of females was noblewomen. A contrast between the former and the latter was extensive. The latter enjoyed appreciable rights and status particularly in the absence of their husbands. Although women were not allowed to lead military forces, queens, especially Anglo-Saxons, defend their states and towns several times. Chaucer proves this position of noblewomen a few times. In the *Knight’s Tale*, a duke Theseus finds two young knights,

Palamon and Arcita, fighting each other. One escaped from Theseus' prison and the second was exiled. That is why Theseus wants to execute both of them, however, the queen and his sister start to cry for mercy and thus the king spares their lives. A very similar situation happens in the *Wife of Bath's Tale* when king takes mercy on a knight by the advice of his queen.

The word school stood for all educational institutions in the fourteenth century, from elementary schools to universities. People started to attend schools in a very different age as the exact age was not in the Middle Ages distinguished. Girls were educated primarily at home, in elementary schools, which boys attended between seven and fourteen years, or in nunneries. Although they mostly achieved only basic school education, young girls often could read. On the other hand, writing was a much more difficult task and only some of girls, especially those who entered convents, were taught to write. Nunneries and church in general provided the last part of women society. Women who entered a church and thus contracted marriage to God became nuns or prioresses. Many of them were placed in church by their families. There appeared also widows who decided for this way of life after the death of their husband. The other group was women who entered convent on their own demand. Power claims that "it has indeed been insufficiently recognised that the medieval nunneries were recruited almost entirely from among the upper classes" (4). Female occupations in the Middle Ages were intended mainly for lower class women and thus one of opportunities of noblewomen was to enter convent.

The last part of this chapter deals with literature in the Middle ages and it helps to create an image of major literary symbols in that time. From a broader sense, the central position held France and Italy. The medieval literature was formed mainly by authors coming from these two countries, such as Guillaume de Machaut, admired also by Chaucer, Eustache Deschamps and Italians Dante Alighieri and Boccaccio. England was

slightly behind. This period is relevant primarily for the development of vernacular languages. They were in use in France and England since the eleventh century and in Italy since the fourteenth century. There was a significant contrast between educated part of population and those regarded as illiterate. The minority of the educated could often speak two or even three languages. In the Middle Ages Latin was commonly used for any kind of writings, because the only source of education was church. More precisely the Roman Catholic Church, which was using Latin among its members. Vernacular languages were generally spoken among common people and Chaucer was a cause of establishing English as a literary language. Perhaps because of a low birth and respect towards the church, a large number of medieval writers published their works anonymously and they have never been found. The Middle English literature includes both religious and secular writings. However, theological themes dominated as the church represented the centre of education. Those texts usually recorded biographies of saints and served often as guidelines to virtuous life. Secular literature involved notable less number of writings than the former. However, in the fourteenth century the amount of secular books highly increased, also because of copying books into English. This growth is considered to be major in the history of English language. In those texts, a subject of courtly love for the first time started to appear. The Arthurian motive started to be frequently used. Carter and McRae describe this period:

In Middle English literature the hero of earlier times now became the man of romance, as love poetry began to come in, first of all from the south of France. Women began to appear more in poetry, usually as objects of desire and perfection, but later also as very human beings with feelings of their own. (*The Penguin Guide* 8)

This paragraph confirms an import of foreign texts, especially from France, as well as the strengthening of women's position in the society mentioned in the previous section.

Women started to appear not only in love poetry but some of them even wrote and involved themselves in religious literature. Those were usually nuns, later canonized as saints, publishing their reflections and prayers.



## 2. LIFE OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER

The life of Geoffrey Chaucer is from a major part known and even recorded in more details than that of Shakespeare. However, an orthodox occurs when establishing the exact date of Chaucer's birth. At this point, a lack of information does not allow finding of the truth about his age. Birth certificates did not exist yet and thus every person was responsible for keeping and remembering his or her age. In consequence of that fact, people often provided misleading information about how old they were. The strongest evidence about Chaucer's birth comes from his deposition at lawsuit on 15<sup>th</sup> October 1386 in which he claimed that he was 40 years et plus. This suggests that he was older than 40 at that time. Then Chaucer added another important information that he was wearing armour for 27 years. The exact age when men could enter the army was not specified but it was quite common to do that at the age around twenty-one. Chaucer as the son of a merchant probably joined the colours slightly younger than twenty-one. According to these two Chaucer's statements and a few other studies, Chaucer's date of birth is believed to be in the early 1340s. The issue of his death is far clearer and even the exact date is certain because of records of a retirement he received. His death is agreed to be on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1400. Gillian Rudd considers the source of this date in a sixteenth century inscription on Chaucer's tomb in Westminster Abbey and confirms this belief by "the lease of the house occupied by Chaucer passed to a Master Paul some time between 28 September 1400 and 28 September 1401" (6). Chaucer died at the approximate age of 60, which was an average for a man in his position in the fourteenth century. While the previous two dates are connected with uncertainty, the life of Geoffrey Chaucer is from a major part documented in chronicles. Records about his contemporaries, the Gawain Poet and William Langland, almost do not exist. Since Chaucer was a court servant and the fourteenth century England was a pedantic country, where everything had to be recorded, there has been known so

much about his life nowadays. Writings of medieval courts represent the main source and provide the largest amount of information. Chaucer was in service at two courts during his life and thanks to their documents a sufficient amount of facts about him has been preserved.

## 2.1.FAMILY BACKGROUND AND SERVICE AT COURT

Geoffrey Chaucer was a son of John Chaucer who was a vintner. An important fact is that in the fourteenth century vintners belonged to the higher middle class and they were usually people of means. Bennet confirms the position of John Chaucer and claims that he “was evidently an important person in the civic life of London, for his name frequently occurs in the city documents and he was also an officer of the customs (as his father and stepfather before) charged with the office of collecting the duty on wines at various south coast ports” (29). Chaucer’s mother, Agnes, inherited several properties and thus she was also a wealthy person. They probably lived in a house in The Upper Thames Street in the Vintry ward. In this area many of vintners lived, as the name implies, and it was frequented by local merchants as well as those coming from foreign countries. In his childhood, Chaucer had the opportunity to observe and come across people who travelled from foreign countries to England primarily for trade. It is likely that here Chaucer acquainted himself with the basis of foreign languages, such as Italian. There is no evidence that Chaucer went to school. In the fourteenth century, it was quite common that children were taught at home, by their parents or in the wealthier families by a tutor. However, he could also attend a song-school, similar as the one mentioned in the *Prioress’s Tale*. The prestigious St. Paul’s school, located in a short distance from The Upper Thames Street, could seem as the best choice for Chaucer’s parents to send there their son. The first thing what children were usually taught was prayers in English and the alphabet. This was followed by learning to read, to write and probably to count. Some pupils were possibly

taught the basis of Latin, which was then developed in later years until a pupil reached fluency.

The earliest record about Chaucer is from 1357. At that time, he was a member of the court of Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster. Elizabeth was a wife of Lionel, a son of King Edward III. This suggests that Chaucer had moved closely to the royal family since the young age. The document is concerned with expenses of the court and it contains a record that Chaucer was given four shillings for a coat and three shillings for a pair of hose and a pair of shoes. An amount of money that he received for clothing foreshadows a position, which he had. Seven shillings was a sum of money appropriate for page servants and personal assistants. The age of pages does not match when interpreting different sources, Rudd ranges them between the age of ten and seventeen (11), in contrast to Brewer, who is convinced they were “aged from twelve to their late teens (66). As members of court, they were given accommodation and clothing, plus a day reward, which was three pennies and food; however, they were still economically dependent on their parents. In return for their service they were educated. Latin and French were languages of politeness and formal conversation and Chaucer as a page had to learn manners and behave according to them. Bennet introduces particular duties of Chaucer and pages in general:

As a page, he found himself one of a number of youths whose duty it was to be in constant attendance on their masters. They were to be found busy in the hall, serving the various dishes, carrying round the wine flagons, and at the end of the meal kneeling with waterbowl, while their masters washed the fingers had served them as forks. They attended their masters in their chambers, acting as valets, brushing and polishing their clothes and accoutrements. Much of their time was spent waiting in attendance until

something was wanted, meanwhile listening to the conversation of their betters, or playing one with another, if a lenient discipline so allowed. (4-5)

As mentioned above, French and Latin was frequent and used primarily for the formal conversation at court unlike English, which was spoken in more relaxed moments.

However, the education received from a tutor could not be compared to the opportunity to learn from visitors of court. Leisure moments were usually spent by reading literature, because libraries of courts were far better equipped than those at schools, or playing a musical instrument, often viol but also other.

Two years later, in 1359, Chaucer participated at his first battle. He was a member of Lionel's invading army in France in September 1359 and served as one of prince's attendants. At that time, he was already a valletus or a yeoman. As such, Chaucer was bearing arms and was receiving a soldier's pay which consisted of six pennies a day and food. On his first military service, it came to an incident, which helped to determine Chaucer's position. He was captured and afterwards ransomed on 1<sup>st</sup> March 1360. The value of ransom differed according to the position, which a prisoner held. Chaucer, as a yeoman, was worth £16. Ransoming of prisoners was common and this procedure usually continued by repayment of money by captives back to the king after the end of a contemporary mission. After the return, as records indicates, Chaucer was paid nine shillings for carrying letters for Lionel. This was a standard employment for a valletus and it is likely that Chaucer was concerned more with a delivery of personal letters rather than official documents. This suggests that his position at court strengthened and he occurred in a closer relationship with Lionel. There are no existing records about Chaucer from the period between 1360 and 1367. However, a few hints closely connected to him preserved. He possibly went on another mission abroad; however, the exact place is unclear. It is for certain that in 1366 Chaucer suffered the death of his father. In the very same year, he

married Philippa Roet, according to records where she hitherto started to appear as Philippa Chaucer. She was a lady-in-waiting to Queen Philippa of Hainault, wife of Edward III. Unfortunately, there exist no records with details of their personal life and relationship. It is believed that she was higher born than her husband. They probably met at court as they both served there and it is likely that their marriage was arranged by Queen Philippa. It seems as a tradition for queens to arrange marriages within their household and that of ladies-in-waiting and esquires were thus a common phenomenon. After that, the couple was granted a lifetime annuity by the king and together with Chaucer's own annuity it helped them to set up their household within the royal one. Chaucer's position at court in this period again slightly differs according to the source. Rudd provides household expenses from 1368 as a proof that Chaucer moved up in the social ladder, being listed as a squire which he was to remain until 1378 and "as such he was part of 'secreta familia', a kind of household, which travelled with the king wherever he went" (15). Brewer confirms Chaucer's position as a squire in 1369, however, on the contrary to Rudd, he argues that Chaucer was not a member of 'secreta familia' at that time (95), neither mentions Chaucer's eventual entering this group some time later.

## 2.2. CHAUCER'S TRAVELS

A significant event in Chaucer's life happened after the death of Lionel in 1368. From the late 1360s, a figure of John of Gaunt participated in Chaucer's bibliography. John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster, was the third son of King Edward III and at that time the wealthiest man in England. His first wife, Blanche of Lancaster, died in 1368 and Chaucer commemorated her death in his work *The Book of the Duchess*. The relationship between both even strengthened when in 1396 John married his third wife, Katherine Swynford, who was a sister of Chaucer's wife. By this marriage, Chaucer and John of Gaunt became brothers-in-law and John was often considered as Chaucer's patron since then. However,

because of lack of facts at this point this claim has never been fully confirmed. Back in 1368, Chaucer entered John of Gaunt's household and participated in his military mission in France the following year. Also Philippa Chaucer moved to the court of Constance of Castile, who became John of Gaunt's second wife. Although they were both attached to the same household, they spent much time apart, respectively because of Chaucer's travels. His first diplomatic mission, about which several records have preserved, was a visiting of Italy as one of three commissioners. Chaucer was probably chosen for this mission because of his already good knowledge of Italian. Initially, they had visited Genoa, where they negotiated with the Duke of Genoa. The subject of negotiations was an appointment of a special seaport for Genoese merchants. Then Chaucer went to Florence. The purpose of this journey is unknown; however, it is possible that he was charged with some secret mission. It is generally believed that during his stays in Italy he encountered writings of Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio, which later significantly influenced his literary work. Dante died in 1321 but his works were widely known in fourteenth century Florence. Boccaccio and Chaucer probably shared the same interest in types of writing, as Boccaccio's Decameron is also a collection of tales, narrated as a frame story. The fact that Chaucer was familiar with Petrarch is proven by the direct reference to Petrarch in the *Prologue of The Oxford Scholar's Tale*:

I shall tell you a tale, a tale that I  
 Learned at Padua from an excellent  
 Scholar—his every word and action went  
 To prove it. He's now dead, nailed in his coffin;  
 God grant, I pray, his soul may rest in heaven!  
 'His name was Francis Petrarch, laureate  
 Poet, whose most eloquent rhetoric

### Illumined Italy with poetry. (Chaucer 278-279)

After the return from Italy, Chaucer had been granted a daily ration in a form of a gallon of wine, which he later converted into cash. He also received a house over Aldgate in London and was established a Controller of Customs and Subsidy of Wools, Skins, and Hides in the port of London. At that time, he and his wife lived in very comfortable circumstances. In the forthcoming years, England suffered the death of Edward III and thus Richard II became a king. Chaucer was engaged by another travels and in 1378 he visited Italy for the second time, at that time going to Milan. This stay is more than the first one considered as significant in terms of Chaucer's knowledge of Petrarch and Boccaccio. "Chaucer's own poetry now begins to reflect the influences of Petrarch and Boccaccio whereas his earlier writing owes more to Dante and Classics" (Rudd 16). With the aid of his Italian sources, he composes one of his major works, *The House of Fame*.

### 2.3.FINAL DECADE

A court document from 1380 confirms that Chaucer, at that time back in London, faced to the charge of raptus brought by Cecily Champaign. Many speculations occurred about the exact meaning of the charge of raptus in this case. Modern definition suggests a physical rape as the most accurate explanation of this term. However, there exists a possibility that Latin expression could mean abduction and thus not a sexual assault. What is important is that Cecily Champaign cleared Chaucer of all responsibility. This is all what the court record contains. It is uncertain whether Chaucer really committed such a crime or Cecily just wanted to benefit from Chaucer's position, being already a public figure. In the last period of his life, Chaucer devoted himself to composing and translation. He remained at his current post, extending his competencies by an appointment of Controller of Petty Customs on Wines, for a few next years and in 1386 he relinquished this post. He became Justice of the Peace and Knight of Shire. This allowed him to represent Kent, where he

moved earlier in that year, in the Parliament. By this time, Chaucer was already a well-respected poet. He translated *Le Roman de la Rose*, composed for instance *Troilus and Criseyde* and completed his dream poems. The following year was definitely a significant for him as it was the year of Philippa Chaucer's death and it is believed that he began work on his magnum opus, *The Canterbury Tales*. He then continued with writing and translating works. In 1389 being appointed Clerk of the King's Works, however only for two years, after which he was replaced and he accepted a position of Deputy Keeper of the Royal Forest of North Petherton, which secured him more rest. He died on 25<sup>th</sup> October 1400, leaving *The Canterbury Tales* unfinished, and was buried in Westminster Abbey. It is agreed that he had four children. Thomas, born in 1367, became a chief butler to four kings. Elizabeth, considered as his daughter according to her nickname Chaucy, was a nun at Barking Abbey. Other two were Agnes, an attendant at Henry IV's coronation, and his son Lewis, about whom nothing is known.



### 3. WOMAN AS A NARRATOR

The group of pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* contains three women and author uses them as a tool for creating a portrayal of women in medieval England. The women are the Prioress, the Wife of Bath and the Nun and each of them tells her tale – the *Prioress's Tale*, the *Wife of Bath's Tale* and the *Second Nun's Tale*. The first chapter of this thesis concluded that women in the fourteenth century could either marry or enter the convent, thus their only possible roles were that of a wife or a nun. Chaucer offers portraits of both and uses individuals as representatives of a majority. He was aware that none of the real women from his surroundings represents a perfect impersonation of an ideal wife or a nun. That is why neither wife nor nun is depicted as an ideal. This issue is analyzed separately, according to the particular narrator, in following sections of this chapter. Looking on both roles separately, the *Wife of Bath's Tale* contains not only one but in fact five different wives and the portrayal of a nun significantly differs in comparison to the Prioress and the Second Nun.

This chapter uses the *General Prologue* as the main source of information for creating a portrayal of these three woman narrators. There Chaucer introduces all the pilgrims and provides their brief but extremely valuable description. It is then extended and developed in the prologues to the particular tales that are told by the pilgrims themselves. In addition, the tales sometimes contain some pieces of information about its narrator but it is not a rule. Brewer found that “the stories still retain a certain independence of their tellers; none is entirely a dramatic expression of the teller's character, and some are merely generally appropriate. Sometimes there are contradictions between teller and tale” (197). For instance, the *Sea-Captain's Tale* was initially written for a woman narrator, probably for the Wife of Bath, as it suggests pronouns ‘us’ and ‘we’ when talking from a female perspective. However, the tale changed its narrator as the character of the Wife of Bath

developed and she was given a more fitting story. That is why the tales of these three woman narrators will not be taken into consideration when describing their personality, because they could provide misleading information, which would then affect the final portrayal.

### 3.1. THE WIFE OF BATH

The Wife of Bath ranks among the most developed characters in *The Canterbury Tales*. Initially she should tell a different tale, a plainer one, but as her significance increased, Chaucer decided to give her the present story. However, in this case the tale does not appear as the crucial and the most important part. The *Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale* represents the major point of interest, primarily for being twice as long as her tale and providing an extremely valuable characteristic of the Wife of Bath. This characterization does not describe only her but at the same time it uses her as an individual representing a majority and depicts the role of wife in medieval England. In fact, the Wife tells two tales. The first of them is concerned with her life story and it is told in the prologue of her actual tale. After that she continues by telling her actual tale, which participates in the competition. As mentioned at the beginning of this chapter, this thesis will use especially pieces of information given in the *General Prologue*, in this case combined with the *Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale* and thus the former tale is the major one. Rudd found out that “her first words sum up the two opposing sides of a debate Chaucer engaged in in various ways throughout his works: which is the more reliable source of knowledge – experience or the authority of books?” (120). She is evidently for experience, “Experience—and no matter what they say / In books—is good enough authority” (Chaucer 219). The first lines of her prologue and later an argument with her fifth husband Jankin, which ends up when she tears out a page from Jankin's book and lets

it burn, suggests that she is rather for experience and thus the body than books and intellect.

The Wife of Bath's name is Alison and a reader learns that she is a noblewoman also titled as a businesswoman from Bath. As such, she benefits from her wealth, which she gained as she was five times widowed during her life. Chaucer emphasises her clothes with handkerchiefs from the finest weave and scarlet red stockings. Her pride makes her the most generous person at almsgiving but her main reason for that is only to show her fortune. She was respected for all her life. The Wife of Bath is characterized as extremely talkative, amusing and sociable person. These qualities secure her attention of all the pilgrims, because most of them are men and in effect they learn from her experience. Even the Pardoner admits it after he interrupts her talk. Her pride and self-confidence is evident from her speech, when she talks about differences between both genders. Her physical appearance is defined by her enormous hips and her face is not a beautiful one. The strong point of the Wife of Bath is her vivacity; she is gap-toothed which signifies her lascivious nature. She travels a lot and sets to pilgrimages very often. The purpose of her pilgrimage to Canterbury does not express her devoutness to religion but there are more obvious reasons for a just widowed wealthy woman. Andrew Moore mentions "love of adventure and the social opportunities these trips bring". The majority of pilgrims are men and the only two other women are nuns which suggests that there she might find the next husband.

In the *Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale*, she introduces all the husbands, which she had during her life. She was married five times, for the first time when she was twelve, and in youth she had also other loves. Three marriages were good and two bad. In those three, she got married to rich and old husbands. Then she speaks about her last husband, whom she loved the most. His name was Jankin and he was formerly a student of Oxford. From this marriage she suffers from deafness when he struck her for tearing a page from

his book. A reader learns that the Wife is a bit deaf in the *General Prologue* but the explanation comes in the end of the *Prologue of the Wife of Bath's Tale*. Another big issue in her prologue is justifying the marriages in front of the God. She finds arguments in the *Bible*, mentions Apostles and several citations of Solomon's wives. She even cites the God when she claims that there is no specific number, which says how many husbands she is allowed to marry: "All I one know for sure is, God has plainly / Bidden us to increase and multiply—" (Chaucer 219). At this point, it needs to be said that despite her five marriages, the Wife of Bath does not have any children and thus this citation loses its principle.

### 3.2. THE PRIORESS

The second woman narrator in *The Canterbury Tales* is the Prioress. She travels with a nun, who is her companion, and three other priests. The Nun and one of the priests also tell a tale. The *General Prologue* offers almost ideal characteristic and even Power mentions Chaucer's portrayal to illustrate a typical medieval prioress and comments on her behaviour at meals as "ne plus ultra of feudal table manners" (8). However, it is believed that the portrayal of the Prioress is rather sarcastic and that Chaucer is even mocking the Prioress. Definitely her depiction is not fairly positive. She symbolizes the church in *The Canterbury Tales* but the work includes yet another character, who is the Parson, and he is the one that represents an ideal religious figure. A considerable contrast occurs when comparing these two pilgrims and their sections from the *General Prologue*. While he is considered to be good by practising what he preaches, every positive fact about the Prioress is immediately lightened.

Her name is Madame Eglantine and she tries hard to seem courtly: "Though at pains to ape the manners of the court, / And be dignified, in order to be thought / A person well deserving of esteem" (Chaucer 4). Chaucer then lists several situations in which she appears when achieving her aim. Her behaviour always seems like her virtue at first but it

is exaggerated or lightened immediately in the next line. Her pretty singing is followed by the fact that she sings through her nose. She speaks French well, which is considered as a positive until a reader learns that she does not speak properly and cannot understand the French spoken in Paris. She expresses her absolute politeness even when swearing by using the curse By St. Eloi! Her good table manners, which were mentioned earlier, suggest that she is a person strongly interested in detail and with a pleasure in etiquette. The next of her qualities is her sensibility which is however immediately disconfirmed. A mouse in a trap would make her weep but on the other hand, she keeps dogs, which she feeds with a roast meat. Nuns were generally forbidden to keep pets, though Linda Alchin argues that they commonly “enjoyed such forbidden luxuries such as dancing, fine foods, and lapdogs”. Chaucer’s reason for mentioning the dogs was probably to point at the sins of nuns. This privilege suggests that the Prioress maintains a secular lifestyle more than a religious one. She confirms this claim also by a coral rosary with a brooch hung on her arm. It is expected for a nun to wear a rosary with a cross on the end instead of her coral one with a gold brooch. The brooch even has an inscription ‘Love conquers all’. Carter and McRae claim that by the brooch “Love of Christ and sensual love are brought together in one very vivacious female character” (*The Routledge History* 33). Speaking about physical appearance, the Prioress can seem dainty but in fact, she is a strong woman, which is foreshadowed by her fine forehead. When Chaucer describes the Wife of Bath and the Prioress, he glorifies the beauty of both women, but in fact they are large women and not really beautiful.

### 3.3. THE SECOND NUN

The Second Nun is not a widely explored character in comparison to other pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales*. The lack of her description comes from the fact that she is not mentioned in the *General Prologue* and thus she is not introduced as other pilgrims. She

even neither participates in any debate with other figures nor interferes in any of their tales, which would provide information for further research. There appears only one reference to her in the *General Prologue* and it is when introducing the Prioress. At the end of the Prioress's personal prologue Chaucer adds that there are yet three priests and also a nun travelling with the Prioress and serving as her chaplain and companion. In consequence, the *Prologue of the Second Nun's Tale* represents the only source of information about the Second Nun. It is divided into three parts. In the first section, she advises people to avoid sin and the devil. Then an invocation to the Virgin Mary follows and at last, she interprets the name of Cecilia in the purpose of proper understanding of the following tale concerning the life of Saint Cecilia. She emphasizes idleness as the worst sin and encourages people to work otherwise they will be caught by the devil:

For he, that with his thousand subtle snares  
 Is ever watching, ready to entrap  
 Any indolent idler that he sees,  
 Can easily and quickly spring the trap,  
 So you won't know he has you in his grip  
 Till he has fairly caught you by the lapel:  
 So work hard as you can, and don't be idle. (Chaucer 411)

She continues with an invocation to the Virgin Mary, whom she considers as an ideal, "maid and mother" (Chaucer 412). The Second Nun serves as a representative for all the nuns who chose their vocation themselves and are satisfied with being brides of the Christ. She is devout to the God and prays all the time.

In the *Prologue of The Second Nun's Tale*, a reader learns that she translated her tale just by herself. She states her reason as avoiding of idleness and thus becomes an example of what she claims in the first section. This emphasizes her purity but at the same

time translation of a tale suggests that she gained some education in convent. The possibility of education in convents for nuns is mentioned in the first chapter of this thesis. By the Prioress and the Second Nun Chaucer offers two portrayals of religious women and it urges for a comparison of both images. Each woman represents a different attitude and thus they are sharply contrasted. It is generally agreed that the Prioress enjoys many secular pleasures, which are forbidden or at least unacceptable for nuns, for instance fine food or keeping lapdogs. On the other hand, the Second Nun behaves properly and prays very often. There is probably a difference even in their reasons for entering church. The Second Nun is happy and satisfied with her own choice in contrary to the Prioress who was supposedly placed in convent by her family. The name introduces the next field of comparison; Madame Eglantine evokes more a romantic person than a nun and the Second Nun, who has no name at all, loses her individuality by this lack. The Prioress pays great attention to her behaviour and table manners in achieving her aim, her dress and the rosary with the brooch makes her rather an individual than a representative of church. The Second Nun seems more intelligent and according to her translation, it is likely that she is far more educated than the Prioress. Although she speaks French, the final effect of her speech is rather negative. Her emotion has priority to her intelligence and not vice versa as in the case of the Second Nun.

#### 4. WOMEN IN MALE NARRATIVES

In comparison to the female narrators, issue of women in the stories told by men spreads on a largely wider field. Therefore, only women with crucial roles in the particular stories were taken into consideration. These pivotal figures were classified into groups. This separation was done according to position of a character in a tale. Next criteria were the fact how a heroine was treated and finally yet importantly, her qualities were taken into account. The major quality, which determined the classification, proved to be obedience. In the patriarchal society there had to be always a man above a woman. Males were those who decided about future of women and ruled them. For example, arranging of marriage was men's business and women were rarely asked about their opinions and feelings. This separation provided three main types of medieval women. The first group contains obedient wives. This type represents good women who are faithful to their husbands and do not trick them. They could be also referred as religious ideals. The representatives of this type are Griselda from the *Oxford Scholar's Tale* and Constance from the *Sergeant-at-Law's Tale*. Contrary to this group, there appear disobedient women. These are very wicked wives who are generally dissatisfied with their position and thus do not want to be under the rule of men, initially of their husbands. They are often very young and beautiful and they want to achieve their own aims and not those of their men. This group is represented by Alison from the *Miller's Tale*, May from the *Merchant's Tale* and the Merchant's wife in the *Sea-Captain's Tale*. These two groups stay as edges and there occurs one type between them. Women in the third group become more objects than personalities with their feelings. Usually two battling opponents fight over one lady who is their object of love, as it was common in knight's duels. However, these women do not always stay for objects of love, for instance the heroine in the *Reeve's Tale* becomes a main object of revenge. They have no other major significance in tales and their



personalities are often only slightly mentioned. This type is shown in the *Knight's Tale* through Emily, through Dorigen in the *Franklin's Tale* and through Malyn in the *Reeve's Tale*. These three types reflect various male attitudes towards women. The approaches are introduced in the following sections through selected figures. Each group is represented by one heroine.

#### 4.1. GRISELDA FROM THE *OXFORD SCHOLAR'S TALE*

Griselda is the main female protagonist in the *Oxford Scholar's Tale*. She is believed to be the poorest girl in Walter's land. She is the main hero of the tale. Despite her low birth and growing up in bad circumstances, her nobility roots in her character:

But when it comes to virtue and beauty,  
 Then there was none more fair beneath the sun  
 Than she, brought up in want and poverty;  
 Luxurious pleasures were to her unknown.  
 It was not from the winecask, but the spring,  
 She used to drink; since she loved virtue, work  
 Was better known to her than idle comfort. (Chaucer 284)

She emphasizes avoiding idleness, which suggests connection to the Second Nun. Consequently, Walter chooses her as his future wife. When arranging the marriage, Walter first asks Griselda's father and then they negotiate further details. This procedure was common but unexpected phenomenon occurs when Walter asks Griselda whether she wants to become his wife. As mentioned earlier, it was primarily men who arranged marriages and thus this is a rare example of asking a woman about her opinion. The other two cases do not contain such interest about female feelings; Alison was most likely married by her father as her husband is much older than she is and Emily is determined to become a wife of the winner of a duel, no matter what her thoughts are. When she agrees

to the marriage, she has to promise total obedience to Walter. This determines her to stay faithful, devoted to her husband and to satisfy his every wish. The promise of total obedience secures her a lot of pain in the following marriage and she does not know what she is about to endure. After the marriage, she becomes popular and very well accepted by population. However, Walter's trials begin. Griselda is extremely passive throughout the whole story and thus her personality remains hidden. Even when her both children are taken away, she stays calm, relying on God's protection, gives them blessing and kisses them. It could be suggested that she abandons her mother's sense and will but she made her choice when entering the marriage. All she has to do is perform anything what her husband desires regardless of her personal feelings. In the effect, she gives priority to her role of a wife before that of a mother. This change in social attitude confirms Rudd, claiming that "in the fourteenth century children were more explicitly attached to the father, and a woman's duty as wife came before those as mother" (127). Her role as a mother thus loses its significance, as she is almost all the time isolated from her children.

The tale does not emphasize only Griselda's boundless obedience. Its true reason is in Griselda's patience. Because of this quality, she can endure any hardship, counting also those prepared by Walter. The tale ends with return of both Griselda and Walter's children and Walter keeps henceforth Griselda as his wife. The return and continuation of their marriage represent Griselda's reward for her obedience. However, she could not become such an obedient wife without a considerable amount of patience presented in her personality. Even Chaucer suggests that patient women are those admired by men and he admits that men cannot be compared to them regarding this quality:

Though scholars give but little praise to women,  
As far as patience is concerned, there's no man  
Can behave as well as women can, or be

One half so true—if so, it's news to me. (Chaucer 304)

#### 4.2. ALISON FROM THE *MILLER'S TALE*

Alison from the *Miller's Tale* reflects a total opposite of Griselda. These two heroines share very little. One common feature is their young age and another one is their low status. From this point, their portrayals differ considerably and Alison is rather compared to Emily from the *Knight's Tale*. Alison is a young girl, not older than 18. She is introduced as a local beauty but already married with much older carpenter John who loves her more than his life. This fact makes him extremely jealous and therefore she becomes more subject of her husband than a person who he loves so much. At this point, it is likely that Griselda would remain faithful and obedient to her husband. However, Alison represents a much different personality. She rebels against her position because she as a young beautiful girl does not feel really satisfied in her marriage with an old jealous carpenter. The heroine even lies to John at the end about the forthcoming floods and together with Nicholas, they cause that all neighbours consider John mad. Her behaviour is not noble when she presents her bottom at a window to be kissed by Absolon. Alison is depicted as wild, wicked and unattainable. However, it is because she is already married and not because of the fact, she is a lady, as it could be expected.

At the beginning of the tale, Chaucer provides a wide description of Alison. When speaking about parts of her body, he uses metaphors. However, it is an interesting issue that he compares her to animals. “Her body slim and supple as a weasel” (Chaucer 82), which captures her thin waist at one hand but at the other hand it can also reflect her personality. Then a reference occurs in a few lines to a swallow bird and later to a colt, “But when she sang, it was as brisk and clear / As any swallow perching on a barn. . . . She was as skittish as a frisky colt” (Chaucer 83). These metaphors to animals provide association with sexuality and thus they are rather used in description of a lowborn woman

than of a noblewoman. It is evident that she cannot control her lust and has a come-hither eye, which is both confirmed as she cheats her husband with young scholar Nicholas. He convinces her to have sex with him but he even does not need to try hard as she agrees very soon. At the end of the tale, all the main characters except one are somehow punished. The conclusion misses Alison and thus she is the only one who remains unpunished. It is agreed that she would deserve it probably the most, though.

#### 4.3. EMILY FROM THE *KNIGHT'S TALE*

The figure of Emily from the *Knight's Tale* remains slightly aside, separated from the two opposites, Griselda and Alison. From her position which holds itself in the middle and does not sympathize with any of the former sides she can be at particular points compared to both of the previous heroines. Emily and Griselda are both extremely passive throughout the tales in which they act and thus their personalities are not introduced. They barely express their will when asked about it, or even have any thoughts. Emily and Alison share common position as an object fought over. However, the social circumstances differ considerably. While Emily represents object of desire of two knights and a duel looks according to its etiquette, Alison is loved by a scholar and a parish clerk. Their rivalry seems rather funny than recalling any type of duel for a heart of a loved lady.

In contrary to the two former heroines, Emily is a beautiful noblewoman, determined as a reward for a worthy man. The tale lacks any broader portrayal of her. From the beginning a reader learns only what Arcita and Palamon, who are two knights later fighting over her, say about her. She becomes their object of passion. However, this image is influenced by the circumstances in which they all occur. Both knights, in fact cousins, are imprisoned in a tower and watch beautiful Emily how she walks in the garden below them and sings. Therefore, they desire more Emily's freedom than her love, which they both claim it has determined their lives since the day they saw her. When Emily firstly

expresses her will and thus that she wants to remain unmarried and if not, then to be won by the one who loves her most, this view is rather unexpected. As it was common, no one cared about women's opinion and everybody automatically suggested that there exist no other choice than agreement. She pronounces her will at Diana's temple who is the goddess of virgins and among others already mentioned she adds that she "would far rather roam the forests wild / Than ever be a wife, or be with child" (Chaucer 59). However, Diana can do nothing as her position between gods Mars and Venus, whom Arcita and Palamon pray to, is equal to Emily's between the two knights and therefore all wishes remain unheard. Emily shows herself as a sensitive soul as she wishes peace for the knights and by the fact of being the most sorrowful person at the funeral.

## CONCLUSION

Chaucer moved among the middle class society and that is why he chose pilgrims as they belonged to the same sphere. According to his occupation, he occurred in companion of people during his life and thus it is likely that he was interested in exploring people and their faith. His life is well recorded in court documents but unfortunately, any kind of information, which would foreshadow the relationship with his mother and his wife, is missing there. The vivid descriptions in *The Canterbury Tales* provide insight into hierarchy of medieval society. Relationships were rarely harmonious. It resulted from a patriarchal society that it was men who had the rule and supremacy over women in overwhelming majority of marriages. The Wife of Bath stands against this order. She compelled all her five previous husbands to obedience and thus it was she with supremacy. The number of her marriages evokes relation to Chaucer's great-grandmother who was married three times during her life. The Wife is without a husband at the time of the pilgrimage and the lack of children serves for her failing in the role of wife. Education is the only point when she approaches typical women as she supposedly gained one at home by her mother. The role of nun is impersonated by the Second Nun who is depicted as ideal. However, because of her passivity, she is overshadowed by the Prioress, although her portrayal does not reflect religious ideal at all. She is more interested in court manners than in religion and her depiction is rather ironical. As a result, none of two roles of medieval women is introduced by an ideal personalization.

The tales told by male narrators serve to demonstrate their attitudes towards women. The *Knight's Tale*, the *Oxford Scholar's Tale* and the *Miller's Tale* provide three major attitudes. The former two depict heroine rather positively. Passivity of these female figures reflects the actual position of women in patriarchal society and their approval of this hierarchy. Emily becomes just an object of desire, as she is not even asked about her

opinion. Griselda shows full obedience to her husband when she passes the trials without any sign of disapproval. Her deeds seem at least curious to a modern reader. In effect, she refuses role of a mother because it is very likely that an ideal wife would sorrow much more when losing her children. The *Miller's Tale* offers the third attitude, which is rather negative. Alison represents wicked and disobedient wife who is not satisfied with her position and rebels against it. However, she remains unpunished at the end of the tale as the only figure involved in the story. This fact suggests that Chaucer refuses qualification of women as sinners as it was common in the Middle Ages according to the biblical story of the first sin, which was made by Eve. He was aware that in patriarchal society men are those who are responsible for their deeds.

## WORKS CITED

- Alchin, Linda K. "Medieval Nuns." *The Middle Ages*. The Middle Ages, 20 Sep. 2012. Web. 27 March 2013.
- Bennet, Henry Stanley. *Chaucer and Fifteenth Century Verse and Prose*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1947. Print.
- Brewer, Derek. *The World of Chaucer*. *Download Ebooks Free*. Download Ebooks Free, March 2013. Web. 16 April 2013
- Carter, Ronald, and John McRae. *The Penguin Guide to English Literature: Britain and Ireland*. London: Penguin Books, 1996. Print.
- . *The Routledge History of Literature in English*. 2nd ed. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.
- Chaucer, Geoffrey. *The Canterbury Tales*. Trans. and Ed. David Wright. New York: Oxford University Press, 1986. Print.
- Ford, Boris. *Medieval Literature: Chaucer and the Alliterative Tradition*. London: Penguin Books, 1991. Print.
- Moore, Andrew. "The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale." *Andrew Moore's teaching resource site*. Teachit.co.uk, May 2005. Web. 25 March 2013.
- Power, Eileen. *Medieval English Nunneries*. *Open Library*. Internet Archive, 27 March 2013. Web. 27 March 2013.
- Rudd, Gillian. *The Complete Critical Guide to Geoffrey Chaucer*. London: Routledge, 2001. Print.



## RESUME

Tématem této bakalářské práce jsou *Canterburské povídky* od anglického básníka Geoffreyho Chaucera. Dílo je považováno za základ anglické literatury a tato práce je určena především k seznámení s tímto dílem. Přesněji, zkoumá role žen v příbězích, jejich postavení a přístupy k ženám ve středověké společnosti. Ženské vypravěčky a hlavní hrdinky příběhů mužských vypravěčů jsou analyzovány samostatně.

Práce je rozdělena do čtyř kapitol. První zachycuje středověkou společnost. Druhá kapitola se zabývá autorem. Představeny jsou zejména nejdůležitější události jeho života. Třetí část popisuje ženské vypravěčky mezi poutníky a obsahuje rozbor jejich chování a způsobů. Čtvrtá kapitola nahlíží na ženy pohledem mužských vypravěčů. Jako prostředek slouží povídky obsahující ženy v jedné z klíčových rolí příběhů.