

UNIVERSITY COLLEGE LONDON

University of London

EXAMINATION FOR INTERNAL STUDENTS

For the following qualifications :-

B.A.

Chaucer and his Literary Background

COURSE CODE : ENGLN01

DATE : 02-MAY-02

TIME : 10.00

TIME ALLOWED : 6 hours

02-N0096-3-120

© 2002 *University of London*

TURN OVER

Answer three questions: Question 1 or Question 2 (not both) and two other questions.

Candidates must not present substantially the same material in any two answers, whether on this paper or in other parts of the examination.

A plain text of Chaucer (Robinson's edition) is provided.

Between 1.00 p.m. and 1.45 p.m. candidates will be able, if they wish, to leave their desks to have lunch. The examination will finish at 4 p.m.

Candidates should not discuss the paper during the lunch break.

TURN OVER

1. Write about one of the following passages. You should include such explanations of the language, style and subject matter as seem important for a full appreciation of it.

(a)

The god Priapus saw I, as I wente,
Withinne the temple in sovereyn place stonde,
In swich aray as whan the asse hym shente
With cri by nighte, and with hys sceptre in
 honde.
Ful besyly men gonne assaye and fonde 5
Upon his hed to sette, of sondry hewe,
Garlondes ful of freshe floures newe.

And in a prive corner in disport
Fond I Venus and hire porter Richesse,
That was ful noble and hautayn of hyre port. 10
Derk was that place, but afterward lightnesse
I saw a lyte, unnethe it myghte be lesse,
And on a bed of gold she lay to reste,
Til that the hote sonne gan to weste.

Hyre gilte heres with a golden thred 15
Ibounden were, untressed as she lay,
And naked from the brest unto the hed
Men myghte hire sen; and, sothly for to say,
The remenaunt was wel kevered to my pay, 20
Ryght with a subtyl coverchef of Valence —
Ther nas no thikkere cloth of no defense.

The place yaf a thousand savours sote,
And Bachus, god of wvn, sat hire besvde,
And Ceres next, that doth of hunger boote,
And, as I seyde, amyddes lay Cypride, 25
To whom on knees two yonge folk ther cryde
To ben here helpe. But thus I let hire lye,
And ferther in the temple I gan espie

That, in dispit of Dyane the chaste,
Ful many a bowe ibroke heng on the wal 30
Of maydenes swiche as gonne here tymes waste
In hyre servyse; and peynted overal
Of many a story, of which I touche shal
A fewe, as of Calyxte and Athalante,
And many a mayde of which the name I wante. 35

Semvramis, Candace, and Hercules,
Biblis, Dido, Thisbe, and Piramus,
Tristram, Isaude, Paris, and Achilles,
Elevne, Cleopatre, and Trovlus,
Silla, and ek the moder of Romulus: 40
Alle these were peynted on that other syde,
And al here love, and in what plyt they dyde.

The Parliament of Fowls, 253-294

CONTINUED

(b)

The wordes of the Hooste to the Phisicien and the Pardoner.

Oure Hooste gan to swere as he were wood;
"Harrow!" quod he, "by nayles and by blood!
This was a fals cherl and a fals justise.
As shameful deeth as herte may devyse
Come to this juges and hire advocatz! 5
Algate this sely mayde is slayn, allas!
Allas, to deere boughte she beautee!
Wherfore I seye al day that men may see
That yiftes of Fortune and of Nature
Been cause of deeth to many a creature. 10
Hire beautee was hire deth, I dar wel sayn.
Allas, so pitously as she was slayn!
Of bothe yiftes that I speke of now
Men han ful ofte moore for harm than prow.
But trewely, myn owene maister deere, 15
This is a pitous tale for to heere.
But nathelees, passe over, is no fors.
I pray to God so save thy gentil cors,
And eek thyne urnals and thy jurdones,
Thyn ypocras, and eek thy galiones, 20
And every boyste ful of thy letuarie;
God blesse hem, and oure lady Seinte Marie!
So moot I theen, thou art a propre man,
And lyk a prelat, by Seint Ronyan!
Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme; 25
But wel I woot thou doost myn herte to erme,
That I almoost have caught a cardynacle.
By corpus bones! but I have triacle,
Or elles a draughte of moyste and corny ale,
Or but I heere anon a myrie tale, 30
Myn herte is lost for pitee of this mayde.
Thou beel amy, thou Pardoner," he sayde,
"Telle us som myrthe or japes right anon."
"It shal be doon," quod he, "by Seint Ron-
yon!
But first," quod he, "heere at this alestake 35
I wol bothe drynke, and eten of a cake."
But right anon thise gentils gonne to crye,
"Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!
Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere
Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere." 40
"I graunte, ywis," quod he, "but I moot
thynke
Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke."

Introduction to the Pardoner's
Tale, 287-328

TURN OVER

2. Make a critical comparison of one of the following pairs of passages.

(a)

(i)

This markys wondred, evere lenger the
moore,
Upon hir pacience, and if that he
Ne hadde soothly knowen therbifoore
That parfitly hir children loved she,
He wolde have wend that of som subtiltee, 5
And of malice, or for crueel corage,
That she hadde suffred this with sad visage.

But wel he knew that next hymself, certayn,
She loved hir children best in every wyse.
But now of wommen wolde I axen fayn 10
If thise assayes myghte nat suffice?
What koude a sturdy housbonde moore devyse
To preeve hir wyfhod and hir stedefastnesse,
And he continuyng evere in sturdinesse?

But ther been folk of swich condicion 15
That whan they have a certein purpos take,
They kan nat stynte of hire entencion,
But, right as they were bounden to a stake,
They wol nat of that firste purpos slake.
Right so this markys fulliche hath purposed 20
To tempte his wyf as he was first disposed.

He waiteth if by word or contenance
That she to hym was changed of corage;
But nevere koude he fynde variance.
She was ay oon in herte and in visage; 25
And ay the forther that she was in age,
The moore trewe, if that it were possible,
She was to hym in love, and moore penyble.

For which it semed thus, that of hem two
Ther nas but o wyl; for, as Walter leste, 30
The same lust was hire plesance also.
And, God be thanked, al fil for the beste.
She shewed wel, for no worldly unreste
A wyf, as of hirself, nothing ne sholde
Wille in effect, but as hir housbonde wolde. 35

The Clerk's Tale,
687-721

(ii)

In Armorik, that called is Britayne,
Ther was a knyght that loved and dide his
payne
To serve a lady in his beste wise;
And many a labour, many a greet emprise
He for his lady wroghte, er she were wonne. 5
For she was oon the faireste under sonne,
And eek therto comen of so heigh kynrede
That wel unnethes dorste this knyght, for
drede.

Telle hire his wo, his peyne, and his distresse.
But atte laste she, for his worthynesse, 10
And namely for his meke obeysaunce,
Hath swich a pitee caught of his penaunce
That pryvely she fil of his accord
To take hym for hir housbonde and hir lord,
Of swich lordshipe as men han over hir wyves. 15
And for to lede the moore in blisse hir lyves,
Of his free wyl he swoor hire as a knyght
That nevere in al his lyf he, day ne nyght,
Ne sholde upon hym take no maistrie
Agayn hir wyl, ne kithe hire jalousie, 20
But hire obeye, and folwe hir wyl in al,
As any lovere to his lady shal,
Save that the name of soveraynetee,
That wolde he have for shame of his degree.

She thanked hym, and with ful greet hum-
blesse 25
She seyde, "Sire, sith of youre gentillesse
Ye profre me to have so large a reyne,
Ne wolde nevere God bitwixe us tweyne,
As in my gilt, were outhere werre or stryf.
Sire, I wol be youre humble trewe wyf; 30
Have heer my trouthe, til that myn herte
breste."

Thus been they bothe in quiete and in reste.
For o thyng, sires, sauffy dar I seye,
That freendes everych oother moot obeye, 35
If they wol longe holden compaignye.
Love wol nat been constreyned by maistrye.
Whan maistrie comth, the God of Love anon
Beteth his wynges, and farewel, he is gon!

The Franklin's Tale,
729-766

CONTINUED

(b)

(i)

(ii)

And shortly, al the sothe for to seve,
 He was so fallen in despeir that day,
 That outrely he shop hym for to deye.
 For right thus was his argument alway:
 He seyde, he nas but lorn, so weylaway!
 5
 "For al that comth, comth by necessitee:
 Thus to ben lorn, it is my destinee.

"For certeynly, this wot I wel," he seyde,
 "That foresight of divine purveyaunce
 Hath seyn alwey me to forgon Crisevde,
 10
 Syn God seeth every thyng, out of doutaunce,
 And hem disponyth, thorough his ordinaunce,
 In hire merites sothly for to be,
 As they shul comen by predestyne.

"But natheles, allas! whom shal I leeve?
 15
 For ther ben grete clerkes many oon,
 That destyne thorough argumentes preve;
 And som men seyn that, nedely, ther is noon,
 But that fre chois is veven us everychon.
 O, welaway! so sleighe am clerkes olde,
 20
 That I not whos opnyoun I may holde.

"For som men seyn, if God seth al biforn,
 Ne God may nat deceyved ben, parde,
 Than moot it fallen, theigh men hadde it sworn,
 That purveiance hath seyn before to be.
 25
 Wherefore I sey, that from eterne if he
 Hath wist byforn oure thought ek as oure dede,
 We han no fre chois, as thise clerkes rede.

"For other thought, nor other dede also,
 Myghte nevere ben, but swich as purveyaunce,
 30
 Which may nat ben deceyved nevere mo,
 Hath feled byforn, withouten ignoraunce.
 For yf ther myghte ben a variaunce
 To writen out fro Goddis purveyinge,
 35
 Ther nere no prescience of thyng comynge,

"But it were rather an opnyoun
 Uncerteyn, and no stedfast forseynge.
 And certes, that were an abusioun,
 That God sholde han no parfit cler wytynge
 40
 More than we men that han doutous wenynge.
 But swich an errour upon God to gesse
 Were fals and foul, and wikked corsednesse.

Troilus and Criseyde,
 IV, 953-994

A col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee,
 That in the grove hadde woned yeres three,
 By heigh ymaginacioun forncast,
 The same nyght thurghout the hegges brast
 Into the yerd ther Chauntecleer the faire
 5
 Was wont, and eek his wyves, to re-
 paire;

And in a bed of wortes stille he lay,
 Til it was passed undren of the day,
 Waitynge his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle,
 10
 As gladly doon thise homycides alle
 That in await ligen to mordre men.
 O false mordroun, lurkyng in thy den!
 O newe Scariot, newe Genylon,
 False dissymulour, o Greek Synon,
 That broghtest Troye al outrely to sorwel
 15
 O Chauntecleer, acursed be that morwe
 That thou into that yerd flaugh fro the
 bemes!

Thou were ful wel ywarned by thy dremes
 That thilke day was perilous to thee;
 But what that God forwoot moot nedes bee,
 20
 After the opinioun of certein clerkis.
 Witnesse on hym that any parfit clerk is,
 That in scole is greet altercacioun
 In this mateere, and greet disputisoun,
 And hath been of an hundred thousand men.
 25

But I ne kan nat bulte it to the bren
 As kan the hooly doctour Augustyn,
 Or Boece, or the Bisshop Bradwardyn,
 Wheither that Goddes worthy forwityng
 Streyneth me nedely for to doon a thyng, —
 30
 "Nedely" clepe I symple necessitee;
 Or elles, if free choys be graunted me
 To do that same thyng, or do it nocht,
 Though God forwoot it er that was wrought;
 Or if his wityng streyneth never a deel
 35
 But by necessitee condicioneel.

I wol nat han to do of swich mateere;
 My tale is of a cok, as ye may heere,
 That tok his conseil of his wyf, with sorwe,
 To walken in the yerd upon that morwe
 40
 That he hadde met that drem that I yow tolde.

Nun's Priest's Tale,
 3215-3255

TURN OVER

3. Explore the relationship between writing and dreaming in Chaucer's poetry.
4. The narrator (or Chaucer), it is often suggested, fudges the issue. What issue or issues are fudged, and who is responsible?
5. 'Troilus executes writing's most solemn cultural assignment, which is to connect the past with the future' (Paul Strohm). What view of history do you find in Troilus and Criseyde?
6. 'Troilus, unlike many of Chaucer's works, is complete, but bears marked traces of the difficulty of completion' (A.C. Spearing). Write about the 'difficulty of completion' in one or more of Chaucer's works.
7. Glenn Burger speaks of Chaucer's 'complex and provocative explorations of the relationship between gender and power'. Write about some of them.
8.

Experience ... is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage.

Comment on Chaucer's representation of male experience of marriage in The Canterbury Tales.
9. Compare the performances of two of Chaucer's female narrators.
10. How important is the tavern as a location for the setting of The Canterbury Tales?
11.

For Paul, that writeth unto Thymothee,
Repreveth hem that weyven soothfastnesse,
And tellen fables and swich wrecchednesse.

Write about the interplay between 'soothfastnesse' and 'fable' in The Canterbury Tales, or any other work or works by Chaucer.
12. 'Genres are often said to provide a means of classification. This is a venerable error' (Alastair Fowler). How useful has the concept of genre been to you in your reading of Chaucer?
13. N.F. Blake (amongst others) has argued that medieval narratives are not based on consistent characters in the way modern readers expect, but constructed around 'themes', traditional literary set-pieces which could be added together in new patterns. To what extent have you found this to be true of Chaucer's narratives?
14. Does Chaucer's comedy invite us to question social norms and sympathise with transgression?

CONTINUED

15. Suppose a person well-drest should tumble in a dirty place in the street; I am afraid there are few who would not laugh at the accident. Now, what is this laughter other than a convulsive extasy, occasioned by the contemplation of our own happiness compared with the unfortunate person's? ... When we come to reflect on the uneasiness this person suffers, laughter, in a good and delicate mind, will begin to change itself to compassion.

(Henry Fielding)

Use this quotation as the starting-point for an essay on laughter and compassion in Chaucer.

16. Allas! this noble Januarie free,
Amydde his lust and his prosperitee,
Is woxen blynd, and that al sodeynly.

How blind are Chaucer's characters?

17. How courtly is Chaucer's presentation of love? Your answer should refer to at least two of his works.
18. For all their light touch and their decorative and fantastic scenes and figures, the dits amoureux offer profound and sophisticated explorations of subjective consciousness and passionate obsession.

(Helen Phillips)

What kind of response to the dits amoureux, or to any other French love poetry do you find in Chaucer's writings?

19. Nicholas Havelly asserts that:

We must never make the mistake of assuming that finding a source tells us the significance of a line or passage.

How applicable is this observation to Chaucer's use of a source or sources?

20. In 'Tradition and the Individual Talent', T.S. Eliot claims:

We shall often find that not only the best, but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work may be those in which the dead poets, his ancestors, assert their individuality most vigorously.

Explore this perception in relation to Chaucer's works, or those of a later writer significantly indebted to Chaucer.

21. We can only say that he lived in the infancy of our poetry, and that nothing is brought to perfection at first.

(John Dryden)

Consider Dryden's, or any other adapter's attempts to bring Chaucer 'to perfection'.

TURN OVER

22. 'Allas! I wepynge, am constreyned to bygynnen vers of sorwful matere' (Boece). Discuss the language of complaint in Chaucer's poetry.
23. Caroline Eckhardt asserts that Chaucer chose to use prose whenever he considered the clarity and educational content of his work was paramount. Did he?
24. Discuss some functions of the prologue, or proem, or both, in Chaucer's writings.
25. O sodeyn hap! O thou Fortune unstable!
 Lyk to the scorpion so deceyvable.

Write an essay on instability in Chaucer's writings.

26. Write on Chaucer's treatment of one of the following: hypocrisy, swearing, drunkenness, homicide, suicide.
27. 'The seedes that the sterre that highte Arcturus saugh, ben waxen heye cornes whan the sterre Syrius eschaufeth hem' (Boece). Write about some instances of the importance of time and place in Chaucer's writings.
28. Chaucer's shorter poems have attracted little critical attention (and less acclaim) until comparatively recently. What is there to be said for them?

END OF PAPER