

# Five British Writers

## Day 7



# Deadly Dangers of Authorship

Read the *Manciple's Tale*, *Sir Topas* and read *Melibee* extract. Read extract from Barthes.

- A) Re-read the Manciple's Prologue after reading the Manciple's tale. How does the Manciple come across as a character—does his tale reflect his behaviour here? How do his tale and his behavior relate to his mother's advice at the tale's end?
- B) Comment on the conversation between the Host and the narrator after the interruption to tale of *Sir Topas*: how does it affect your reading of the rest of the tales?
- C) Barthes asserts that we should not read texts as “the voice of a single person, the author” but rather as “a multi-dimensional space in which a variety of writings, none of them original, blend and clash” a space defined only in the mind of a reader. What kind of textual reading is invited by the narration of the *Canterbury Tales*?
- D) Write your own discussion question about any of the material we have read so far! We will discuss our questions in our day of discussion next Thursday.

# What is an Author?

## Medieval

“Fourfold is the manner of making a book. For one writes another's words, by adding and/or changing nothing; and that one is called merely a **writer**. Another writes another's words, by adding, but not from his own; and that one is called a **compiler**. Another writes both his own words and another's, but the other's as the principle ones, and his own as those annexed for evidence; and that one is called a **commentator**, not an author. Another writes both his own and another's, but his own as the principle ones, the other's as things annexed for confirmation; and such ought to be called an **author**.”

—Bonaventure, 13<sup>th</sup> c.

“I know what will happen after I am gone. When I shall be decaying, then, for the first time, it shall be salted; and every defect in it remedied by my decease, and in the most remote future its antiquity will cause the authorship to be credited to me, because, then as now, old copper will be preferred to new gold... In every century its own present has been unpopular, and each age from the beginning has preferred the past to itself”

—Walter Map, 12<sup>th</sup> c.

## Modern

“the explanation of a work is always sought in the man or woman who produced it, as if it were always in the end... the voice of a single person, the author, confiding in us.”

“a text is not... the message of the Author-God... a text is made up of multiple writings drawn from many cultures”

—Roland Barthes, 20<sup>th</sup> c.

## How does Chaucer present Authorship?

“Turne overe the leef and chese another tale”  
(Miller's Prologue 3177)

“Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys”  
(Miller's Prologue 3181)

“Al that is writen is writen for oure doctrine”  
(Retractions 1083)

# 'Be non auctour newe': Authorship in the Manciple's Tale

*Who controls speech and its consequences?*

But he that hath mysseyd, I dar wel sayn,  
He may by no wey clepe his word agayn.  
Thyng that is seyde is seyde, and forth it gooth...  
(353-5)

Compare Chaucer's account with Ovid's tale (p. 466)

*Phebus's Anger*

Traitour, quod he, with tonge of scorpoun,  
Thou hast me broght to my confusioun;  
Allas, that I was wroght! why nere I deed?  
O deere wyf! o gemme of lustiheed!  
That were to me so sad and eek so trewe,  
Now listow deed, with face pale of hewe,  
Ful gilteless, that dorste I swere, ywys!  
(271-277)

*The Crow's Punishment*

I wol thee quite anon thy false tale.  
Thou songe whilom lyk a nyghtyngale;  
Now shaltow, false thief, **thy song forgon**,  
And eek thy white fetheres everichon,  
**Ne nevere in al thy life ne shaltou speke**.  
Thus shal men on a traytour been awreke;  
Thou and thyn ofspryng evere shul be blake,  
**Ne nevere sweete noyse shul ye make**,  
But evere crie agayn tempest and rayn,  
In tokenynge that thurgh thee my wyf is slayn.  
And to the crowe he stirte, and that anon,  
And pulled his white fetheres everychon,  
And made hym blak, and **refte hym al his song**,  
And **eek his speche**  
(293-306)

# Can one speak truth? Should one speak truth?

## *The Manciple on Language*

The wise plato seith, as ye may rede,  
The word moot nede accorde with the dede.  
If men shal telle proprely a thyng.  
The word moot cosyn be to the werkyng.  
I am a boystous man, right thus seye I,  
Ther nys no difference, trewely,  
Bitwixe a wyf that is of heigh degree,  
If of hir body dishonest she bee,  
And a povre wenche, oother than this –  
If it so be they werke bothe amys –  
But that the gentile, in estaat above,  
She shal be cleped his lady, as in love;  
And for that oother is a povre womman,  
She shal be cleped his wenche or his lemman,  
And, God it woot, myn owene deere brother.  
Men leyn that oon as lowe as lith that oother.  
Right so bitwixe a titlees tiraunt  
And an outlawe, or a thief erraunt,  
The same I seye, ther is no difference.  
(207-25)

## *The Manciple quotes his Mother's Advice*

My sone, God of his endelees goodnesse  
Walled a tonge with teeth and lippes eke,  
For man sholde hym avyse what he speeke.  
(322-324)

Kepe wel thy tonge (362)

Right as a swerd forcutteth and forkerveth  
An arm a-two, my deere sone, right so  
A tonge kutteth freendship al a-two  
(340-342)

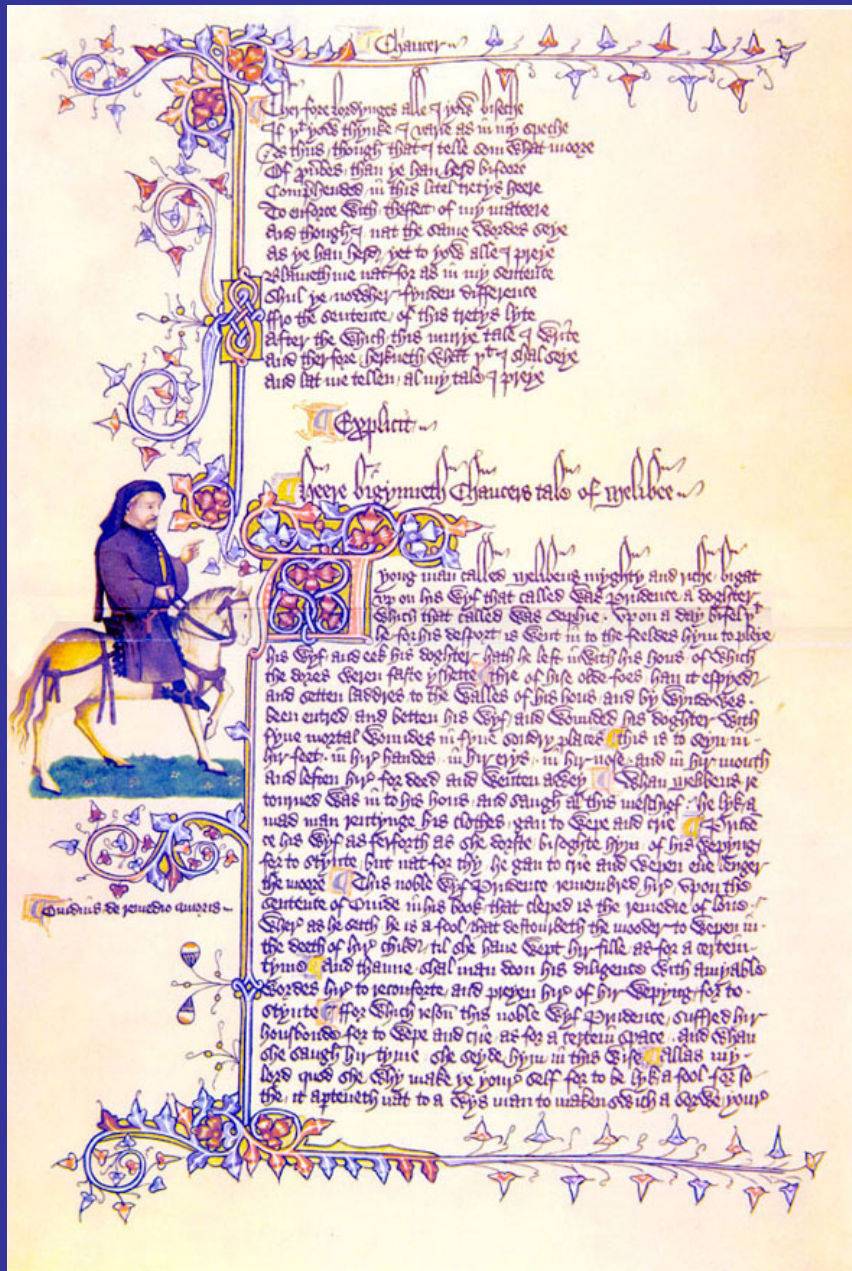
...be non auctour newe  
Of tidynges, whether they been false or trewe  
(359-360)

# *The Tales of Chaucer*

What are the differences between *Sir Topas* and the *Tale of Melibee*?

Why do you think the author depicts himself as telling such different tales?





¶Explicit.

Here begynneth Chaucers tale of Melibee

[Look at the pilgrim portrait in the left margin—what relation does it seem to have to the text? What about the Latin note beside the text below the portrait?]

¶Ovidus de remedio amoris

[Ovid from *Love's Remedy*]

**T**hancey  
 Approche neer/ and looke up mygh  
 wote say yowr eyes/ and lat this witu haue place  
 he in the chaast/ is chape/ as wel as q. . . . .  
 This seye a popet in an dyu teyngre  
 ffor any couetu smal and fayr of face  
 he semeth elyssh/ by his contenance  
 ffor du to no sight/ dooth he valaunte

Sei uote som what/ oon oother folk/ han sayd  
 Telle us a tale/ of myghte/ and that anon  
 hoost quod q. . . . .  
 ffor oother tale/ restes fan q noon  
 But of a wyu/ I demed longe agoon  
 ye that is good quod he/ noth schul ye heere  
 Som seynter thyng/ me thynketh by his cheere

**E**xplicit  
 Here bigynneth Chaucers tale of Thopas  
**T**hise lordes in good entente  
 And q. . . . .  
 Al of a myght/ was fayr and gent/  
 In bataille/ and in toumyment/  
 In floundres/ al biyonde the see  
 His lady was/ a man ful free  
 And lord he was/ of that countee  
 Thopas/ say a soghtry swayn  
 Whil was his face as payndemayn  
 His yode is lyf/ saylat in gayn  
 And q. . . . .  
 This lady/ his deye/ was lyf suffoun  
 That to his gydel/ laughtre adoun  
 Of cnyghtes/ saye his hosen doun  
 His yode/ was of oylatoun  
 The hounde hunte/ at wylde dey  
 And yode an hantynge/ for eu er  
 They to he was/ a good archer  
 Of shaftynge/ was they noon his peer  
 Ful many a mayde/ myght in bouy  
 They moorne for hym/ yamouy  
 But he was chaast/ and no lechouy  
 And othe/ as is the rembul flouy  
 And o bifol/ ypon a day  
 For cotte/ as q. . . . .  
 He stert/ ypon his creede gay  
 And in his hand/ a launcgay

¶ Explicit

¶ Heere bigynneth Chaucers tale of Thopas

[Look at the system of brackets and paraph markers on the page—what does this form of writing emphasize?]



Thursday:  
Our first day of discussion!  
We will be wrapping up our look at  
the *Canterbury Tales*.  
Read your classmates' questions and  
come in ready to discuss them.

Email with questions/proposals  
concerning your first essay.