

Generating Authority in The Canterbury Tales: Oxford Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture



Father Chaucer: Generating Authority in The Canterbury Tales (Oxford Studies in Medieval Literature and Culture) by David R. Slavitt

★★★★★ 5 out of 5

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Authority is a central concern in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's characters come from all walks of life, and they each have their own unique perspectives on the world. As a result, the *Tales* offer a rich and complex exploration of the different ways that authority can be generated and contested.

In this article, I will explore the concept of authority in *The Canterbury Tales*, focusing on how Chaucer uses various narrative techniques to generate authority for different characters. I will draw on insights from medieval literary theory and cultural history to provide a nuanced

understanding of the complex and multifaceted nature of authority in the text.

Narrative Techniques for Generating Authority

Chaucer uses a variety of narrative techniques to generate authority for different characters. These techniques include:

- **Point of view:** The point of view from which a story is told can have a significant impact on the authority of the narrator. For example, a first-person narrator is often seen as more authoritative than a third-person narrator, because the reader is able to experience the events of the story through the narrator's eyes.
- **Tone:** The tone of a story can also affect the authority of the narrator. A serious and didactic tone can lend an air of authority to the narrator, while a humorous or ironic tone can undermine the narrator's authority.
- **Language:** The language that a narrator uses can also affect their authority. A narrator who uses complex and sophisticated language is often seen as more authoritative than a narrator who uses simple and colloquial language.
- **Structure:** The structure of a story can also contribute to the narrator's authority. A well-organized and coherent story is often seen as more authoritative than a disjointed and fragmented story.

Chaucer uses these narrative techniques in a variety of ways to generate authority for different characters. For example, the Knight's Tale is told from the point of view of a first-person narrator who uses a serious and didactic

tone. This gives the narrator an air of authority, and the reader is more likely to accept the narrator's account of events as true.

In contrast, the Miller's Tale is told from the point of view of a third-person narrator who uses a humorous and ironic tone. This undermines the narrator's authority, and the reader is less likely to accept the narrator's account of events as true.

The Complex and Multifaceted Nature of Authority

The authority of a character in *The Canterbury Tales* is not always straightforward. Some characters have more authority than others, and the authority of a character can change over the course of the story. For example, the Pardoner is initially seen as a very authoritative figure. He is a learned man who has traveled widely and has a lot of experience with the world. However, as the story progresses, the Pardoner's authority is undermined. The reader learns that he is a hypocrite who is only interested in making money. This revelation undermines the Pardoner's authority, and the reader is less likely to accept his account of events as true.

The complex and multifaceted nature of authority in *The Canterbury Tales* reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of authority in medieval society. In the Middle Ages, there was no single source of authority. Instead, authority was distributed among a variety of different institutions and individuals. These institutions and individuals included the Church, the monarchy, the aristocracy, and the guilds. The authority of these institutions and individuals was constantly contested and negotiated.

The Canterbury Tales reflects this complex and multifaceted nature of authority. Chaucer's characters come from all walks of life, and they each

have their own unique perspectives on the world. As a result, the Tales offer a rich and complex exploration of the different ways that authority can be generated and contested.

The concept of authority is central to The Canterbury Tales. Chaucer uses a variety of narrative techniques to generate authority for different characters. However, the authority of a character is not always straightforward. Some characters have more authority than others, and the authority of a character can change over the course of the story. This reflects the complex and multifaceted nature of authority in medieval society.

The Canterbury Tales offers a rich and complex exploration of the different ways that authority can be generated and contested. The Tales provide a valuable insight into the complex and multifaceted nature of authority in medieval society.



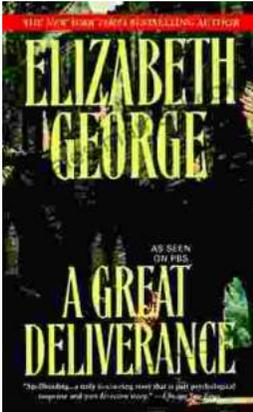
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