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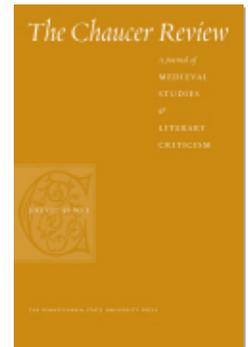
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THE CHRONOLOGY OF LYDGATE'S CHAUCER REFERENCES

by David R. Carlson

John Lydgate gives no direct evidence of having known or known of Geoffrey Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* until about 1421–22, when Lydgate wrote the prologue to his *Siege of Thebes*. In casting his narration as an additional new tale—or recasting it, if, as has been suggested, the prologue was written after the narration proper was finished—Lydgate coins the phrase “Canterbury talys” (18), *metri causa* perhaps, the only earlier reference being Chaucer's own slightly differing “the tales of Caunterbury,” in the prose *Retractions* (1086).¹ Lydgate here makes particular reference to the tales of “the Cook þe millere and the Reve” (28), “the pardowner, beerdlees al his Chyn” (33), and “the frere” (35).² He alludes indefinitely to the variety of other tale-tellings:

Some of desport some of moralité,
Some of knyghthode loue and gentillesse,
And some also of parfit holynesse,
And some also in soth of Ribaudye.

(22–25)

And he makes detailed reuse of various particulars from the *General Prologue*, especially the immediately exigent rules of the storytelling contest and the part in it of the Host (whom Lydgate does not call by the personal name Chaucer assigned him only the once, in the *Cook's Tale* headlink [1.4358]). In the body of the narrative later, Lydgate also refers twice by name to “the knyghtys tale” (4524 and 4531).

In his later *Fall of Princes* (ca. 1431–38), Lydgate manifests a still more thorough knowledge of the Chaucer canon. Lydgate gives an extensive enumeration of writings that Chaucer finished and would appear to have put into circulation during his lifetime: “Troilus & Cresseide” (1.287); “an hool translacioun” “Off Boeces book, The Consolacioun” (1.291–92); “a tretis . . . Vpon thastlabre” “to his sone, that callid was Lowis” (1.293–95); “the deth eek of Blaunche the Duchesse” (1.305); the English

verse translation of “the Romaunce off the Rose” (1.308); “Off Foullis also he wrot the Parlement” (1.311); the complaint “Off Anneleyda and of fals Arcite” (1.320); and “the broche” of “Thebes” (1.322–23);³ not to mention the numerous “souereyn balladys of Chauceer” (9.3405),

ful many a fressh dite,
Compleyntis, baladis, roundelis, virelais
Ful delectable to heryn and to see.

(1.352–54)

In addition, Lydgate here also manifests some knowledge of other Chaucerian writings that, like the *Canterbury Tales*, may have remained unfinished at the time of Chaucer’s death. The picture is clouded by Chaucer’s own witness, on which Lydgate may have been drawing. Lydgate mentions Chaucer’s “Origen vpon the Maudeleyne” (1.318), for example, and “off the Leoun a book” (1.319) in adjacent lines, both of which Chaucer mentions himself, in the *Legend of Good Women* prologue (F 428 = G 418) and in the *Retractions* (1087), respectively, though they are not otherwise known. Lydgate may also make mention of Chaucer’s *House of Fame* here—if this is the reference of his phrase “Dante in Inglissh” (1.303)⁴—and he supplies a good deal of detailed information about the *Legend of Good Women*, both of these being, to judge from the received texts, evidently imperfect, though Chaucer himself would nevertheless appear to have regarded them both as complete and published (in some sense), inasmuch as he lists each of them twice as parts of his own literary corpus.⁵ Lydgate’s remarks about the Chaucerian *Legend of Good Women* are detailed. He repeats twice that they number nineteen (1.332 and 1.1801), though Chaucer himself may have counted twenty-five (*Retr* 1086: “the book of the XXV. Ladies”);⁶ and Lydgate makes apology for the fact that, though he was stipulating nineteen legends, Chaucer had not been able to fill the number up:

But for his labour and his bisynesse
Was inportable his wittis to encoumbre,
In al this world to fynde so gret a noumbre.

(1.334–36)

Lydgate makes particular reference to the legends of Philomela (1.1793–99), Lucrece (2.974–80), and Cleopatra (6.3620–26). Finally, using the *Canterbury Tales* title here again (1.337), Lydgate repeats his own earlier remark about the variety of the tale-tellings:

Summe off knythhod, summe off gentillesse,
 And summe off loue & summe off parfitnesse,
 And summe also off gret moralite,
 Summe off disport, includynge gret sentence.

(1.342–45)

He also makes explicit particular reference to “the Tale off Melibe” (1.346), the *Clerk’s Tale* “off Grisildis parfit pacience” (1.348), and the “Pitous tragedies” “in the Monkys Tale” (1.349 and 9.3427), including the story of Zenobia there among (8.673–79).

Miscellaneous other late references—all post-dating the *Siege of Thebes* prologue (ca. 1421–22)—likewise manifest particular knowledge on Lydgate’s part of Chaucer’s *Canterbury Tales* as such, or component parts of it. In the *Serpent of Division* (December 1422), Lydgate makes a close verse paraphrase of part of the *Monk’s Tale* Caesar tragedy, attributing it by name to “my maister Chaucer,” the “floure of poetes in our Englysshe tonge;”⁷ in *A Mummyng at Hertford* (December 25, 1427), Lydgate mentions “þe worthy Wyff of Bathe” (168) and alludes to the textually troublesome envoy to the *Clerk’s Tale*, wherein the *Clerk’s Tale* is unequivocally linked to the Wife’s tale-telling:

Þer pacyence was buryed long agoo,
 Gresylde story recordeþe plainly soo.

(175–76)⁸

And in the *Debate of the Horse, Goose, and Sheep* (ca. 1436–37) comes an allusion to the *Squire’s Tale* attached to Chaucer’s name:

Chaunser remembrith the swerd, the ryng, the glas,
 Presentid wern vpon a stede of bras.

(76–77)

Lydgate’s references to Chaucer and to Chaucer’s writings in work of his own antedating the 1421–22 *Siege of Thebes* prologue are different. In these earlier writings occur Lydgate’s vague, fetishistic invocations of Chaucer’s name, coupled sometimes with praise for some vague, putative quality or other of Chaucer’s work—the reference to “my maister Chauser,” “the noble Rethor, poete of Brytayne” in the *Life of Our Lady* (written at some point between 1415 and 1422), for example, mentioning “the golde dewe, dropes, of speche and eloquence” that Lydgate’s “maister” had infused “Into our tunge, thurgh his excellence” (2.1628–34)—not needing to have been based on much or any acquaintance with the Chaucerian writings. The extremer cases may be those of Eustache

Deschamps, *circa* 1380, and Stefano Surigone, *circa* 1475, earlier and later: the fact that neither of them would have had enough English to read Chaucer did not prevent either from writing at some length about the qualities of Chaucer's poetry.⁹ As Derek Pearsall points out, Lydgate himself admits that some of what he knows of Chaucer comes only of "hearsay," and it may be that some at least of Lydgate's earliest Chaucer *encomia* are similarly based.¹⁰ The *Life of Our Lady* mentions only unspecified "dyteȝ withoutyn eny pere" (2.1641) that Chaucer had written. It does not show (and so need not be taken to manifest) particular direct knowledge.

Other remarks of Lydgate, from various periods of his lengthy career, make mention of other specific Chaucerian writings, but exclusively of writings that Chaucer finished. Lydgate's *Troy Book* (ca. 1412–20)—with praises for the "gold dewe-dropis" of Chaucer's "rethorik so fyne" (2.4699) and so on again—also makes repeated specific reference to "his boke of Troylus and Cryseyde / Whiche he made longe or þat he deyde" (3.4199–4200). As Lydgate suggests, Chaucer's *Troilus* had been in circulation since about 1385, when Thomas Usk used it.¹¹ The *Troy Book* also uses the phrase "þe house of fame" (3.4254) in a way that might be taken as a reference to the Chaucerian poem. Likewise, Lydgate's version of the *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man* (ca. 1426–28) incorporates Chaucer's "Off Our lady the .A. b. c." (19790) wholesale—thought possibly to have been Chaucer's earliest work—attributing it to him by name.¹² However, there are no references in Lydgate's writings to Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, even to what need be regarded as parts of the *Canterbury Tales*, necessarily or demonstrably earlier than the *Siege of Thebes* prologue. The evidence is that intelligence of the *Canterbury Tales* as such, and particular familiarity with its contents, came to Lydgate belatedly, only *circa* 1420.

Finally, this evidence (such as it is), for Lydgate being possessed of knowledge of the *Canterbury Tales* only after 1420, may also clarify the chronology of Lydgate's own erotic-narrative "dyteȝ," the *Flower of Courtesy*, the *Complaint of the Black Knight*, and the *Temple of Glass*. These are not known to have been occasioned or commissioned, and the tendency has been to regard them as early writings, most appropriate (if at all) to a young rather than a senior Benedictine. Pearsall, however, has cautioned against such presumption in the absence of evidence, "the undated love-poems" becoming "associated by default with Lydgate's early career." It is "dangerous to assume that the undated love-poems, such as the *Complaint of the Black Knight* and the *Flower of Courtesy* should be assigned to this early period," Pearsall wrote; Lydgate's "poetic style shows no change or development," and "such poems would have been appropriate for Lydgate only when he had secured a measure of freedom from monastic restraint, in the 1420s."¹³

These are Chaucerian writings, though deriving their conceptions from pre-*Canterbury Tales* writings of Chaucer: the first dependent on the *Parliament of Fowls*, the second on the *Book of the Duchess*, the other on the *House of Fame*.¹⁴ The poems make divergent representations of the canon of Chaucer's writings, nevertheless. The *Flower of Courtesy* is evasive, praising Chaucer by name but vaguely:

Chaucer is deed, that had suche a name
Of fayre making, that, withouten wene,
Fayrest in our tonge, as the laurer grene.

We may assay for to countrefete
His gaye style, but it wyl not be.

(236–40)

There may be allusion to Chaucer's Franklin's Dorigen in it (192), but the *Flower of Courtesy* does not make direct reference to any of the master's writings.

The *Complaint of the Black Knight*, which has no Chaucer *encomia* in it, lists Palamon and Arcite amongst other worthies of the erotic tradition, but does not refer to any Chaucerian work directly:

What shal I say of yonge Piramus?
Of trwe Tristram for al his high renovne?
Or Achilles or of Antonyus?
Of Arcite, or of him, Palamovne?
What was the ende of her passion
But after sorow, deth and then her grave.
Lo, her the guerdon that thes louers haue.

(365–71)¹⁵

Chaucer himself put the title-like phrase, "al the loves of Palamon and Arcite," in the list of his own writings in the *Legend of Good Women* prologue (F 420 = G 408). Since Chaucer's *Legend of Good Women* list wants reference to the *Canterbury Tales*, or to anything that need have been part of work in progress even on what would later be the *Canterbury Tales*, the reference to a "Palamon and Arcite" in the *Legend of Good Women* list has been taken to imply a pre-*Canterbury Tales* state of Chaucer's adaptation of Boccaccio's *Teseide* that would date from the 1380s—the time when Chaucer began his Italian-period labors at adapting the Boccaccian romances, which yielded a *Troilus and Criseyde* in circulation circa 1385—before the *Legend of Good Women* and before work began on the

Canterbury Tales, into which the “Palamon and Arcite” would eventually have been refit, *compilatio*-wise, in the form of the *Knight's Tale* that survives.¹⁶ There is no direct or clearer witness to a pre-*Canterbury Tales* book of “Palamon and Arcite” than Chaucer’s own remark about it. Still, it can only have been from such a work that John Clanvowe was quoting in the *Book of Cupid*, which, if it is Clanvowe’s work, must have been written before his death in 1391.¹⁷ There was no such thing as the *Canterbury Tales* at that time, nor, evidently, at the time of Chaucer’s *Legend of Good Women*. Since its reference to “Palamon and Arcite” could (though need not) be to a pre-*Canterbury Tales* Chaucerian narrative writing, and since it makes no mention of anything else appertaining to the *Canterbury Tales*, the *Complaint of the Black Knight* would antedate Lydgate’s acquaintance with the *Canterbury Tales*. Like the *Flower of Courtesy*, the *Complaint of the Black Knight* would antedate *circa* 1420.

Lydgate’s *Temple of Glass* may again make mention of such a work, perhaps troublingly still using “Palamon and Arcite”-type appellations, rather than the *Knight's Tale* title that Lydgate does use elsewhere. Still, Lydgate summarizes more accurately here than in the *Complaint of the Black Knight*, and he does link the story, “as Chaucer tellith us,” expressly to the master’s name:

There saugh I also þe sorow of Palamoun,
 That he in prison felt, and al þe smert,
 And hov þat he, þurugh vnto his hert,
 Was hurt vnwarli þurugh casting of an eyȝe
 Of faire fressh, the ȝunge Emelie,
 And al þe strife bitwene him and his broþir,
 And hou þat one fauȝt eke with þat oþir
 Wiþin þe groue, til þei bi Theseus
 Acordid were, as Chaucer telliþ us.

(102–10)

In the same poem, moreover, Lydgate unequivocally uses materials that can only have been drawn from the *Canterbury Tales*, materials that can only have been parts of the *Canterbury Tales*. Though the poem does not name Chaucer author of the items in question, the *Temple of Glass* incorporates reference to the *Clerk's Tale* of “Grisildis innocence, / And al hir mekenes and hir pacience” (75–76):

Grisilde was assaied atte ful
 That turned aftir to hir encrease of ioye.

(405–6);

to the *Squire's Tale*:

Hov with hir ring, goodli Canace
 Of euere foule þe ledne and þe song
 Coud vndirstond, . . .
 And hou hir broþir so oft holpen was
 In his myschefe bi þe stede of bras.

(138–42);

to the *Merchant's Tale* of “fresshe May . . . coupled to oold Ianuari” (184–85); and to the *Franklin's Tale*, “Of Dorigene, flour of al Britayne” (410). The same consideration that tends to imply an early date for the *Flower of Courtesy* and the *Complaint of the Black Knight*, before *circa* 1420, might likewise be taken to imply that the *Temple of Glass*, albeit still an erotic Chaucerian *dit*, was written rather later, after *circa* 1420, when Lydgate was in possession of the knowledge of the enhanced, greater canon of Chaucer's writings, including the *Canterbury Tales*, which he delineated in the *Siege of Thebes* prologue and the *Fall of Princes*.

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This article makes use of the following editions of Lydgate's writings: for the *Siege of Thebes*, Axel Erdmann and Eilert Ekwall, eds., *Lydgate's Siege of Thebes*, 2 vols., EETS ES 108, 125 (London, 1911, 1930); for the *Fall of Princes*, Henry Bergen, ed., *Lydgate's Fall of Princes*, 4 vols., EETS ES 121, 122, 123, 124 (London, 1924–27, repr. 1967); for *A Mumming at Hertford*, the *Debate of the Horse, Goose and Sheep*, and the *Flower of Courtesy*, Henry Noble MacCracken, ed., *The Minor Poems of John Lydgate. Part II Secular Poems*, EETS OS 192 (London, 1934); for the *Life of Our Lady*, Joseph A. Lauritis, gen. ed., Ralph A. Klinefelter and Vernon F. Gallagher, eds., *A Critical Edition of John Lydgate's Life of Our Lady* (Pittsburgh, 1961); for the *Troy Book*, Henry Bergen, ed., *Lydgate's Troy Book*, 4 vols., EETS ES 97, 103, 106, 126 (London, 1906–35); for the *Pilgrimage of the Life of Man*, F. J. Furnivall, ed., *The Pilgrimage of the Life of Man, Englished by John Lydgate*, 3 vols., EETS ES 77, 83, 92 (London, 1899–1904; repr. 1975); and for the *Complaint of the Black Knight* (called “A Complaynt of a Lovers Lyfe”) and the *Temple of Glass*, John Norton-Smith, ed., *John Lydgate: Poems* (Oxford, 1966). For Chaucer's writings, I cite *The Riverside Chaucer*, ed. Larry D. Benson, 3rd edn. (Boston, 1987). For Lydgate chronology, I rely on Derek Albert Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-bibliography* (Victoria, 1997), summarized at 50–52, and, for Chaucer chronology, the same scholar's *The Life of Geoffrey Chaucer* (Oxford, 1992), esp. 306–13. For Lydgate's references to Chaucer, I rely on the listings in Caroline F. E. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion 1357–1900*, 3 vols. (1925; repr. New York, 1960), vol. 1, though bearing in mind that Spurgeon's dates are often significantly wrong and her citations are unreliable.

1. Robert A. Pratt, “Chaucer's Title: ‘The Tales of Caunterbury,’” *Philological Quarterly* 54 (1975): 19–25. For the suggestion that the *Siege* prologue is belated, see John M. Bowers, *The Canterbury Tales: Fifteenth-Century Continuations and Additions* (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1992), 11. Such a hypothesis would necessitate regarding the references to the Canterbury pilgrimage in the *Siege* proper (e.g., 324, 1044–60) as intercalations.

2. Lydgate's apparent confusion of Chaucer's Pardoner and Summoner is not random but knowledgeable, howbeit imperfectly so: Chaucer associates the two closely, in a way that would account for Lydgate's assimilation. Cp. Derek Pearsall, *John Lydgate* (Charlottesville, Va., 1970), 66.

3. On Lydgate's witness to this item, see Rodney Merrill, "Chaucer's *Broche of Thebes*: The Unity of 'The Complaint of Mars' and 'The Complaint of Venus,'" *Literary Monographs* 5 (1973): 1–61, at 14–15.

4. On Lydgate's witness, see Howard H. Schless, *Chaucer and Dante* (Norman, Okla., 1984), 29–30.

5. Chaucer lists *HF* at *LGWF* 417 = G 405 and *Retr* 1086. He lists *LGW* at *MLT* 61 ("the Seintes Legende of Cupide") and *Retr* 1086. On the state in which Chaucer left these two pieces, see esp. N. F. Blake, "Geoffrey Chaucer: The Critics and the Canon," *Archiv für das Studium der neueren Sprachen und Literaturen* 221 (1984): 65–79, at 65–74.

6. Only nine legends survive, and estimates of the possibly intended number have varied. The number nineteen that Lydgate uses may derive from the "ladyes nyntene" said to be following the God of Love in the F prologue (F 283), omitted from the G prologue, or possibly from counting the legendary women whose names are mentioned in the prologue's inset ballad (F 249–69 = G 203–23), though it is by no means clear that the ballad was meant to be a kind of contents-list for the narratives to follow, and the significance of the number of "ladyes" in the God of Love's train is never explained. Also, there is textual uncertainty about the number given in the *Retr*: see Eleanor Prescott Hammond, "Chaucer's 'Book of the Twenty-Five Ladies,'" *Modern Language Notes* 48 (1933): 514–16.

7. Quoted from the *Serpent of Division* (London: Robert Redman, n. d. [ca. 1535] [*STC* 17027.5]), sig. C4v; cp. Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years*, 1:14. On the text, see Lister M. Matheson, "Historical Prose," in *Middle English Prose*, ed. A. S. G. Edwards (New Brunswick, N.J., 1984), 228–29.

8. See J. Burke Severs, "Did Chaucer Rearrange the Clerk's Envoy?," *Modern Language Notes* 69 (1954): 472–78.

9. For Deschamps, see William Calin, *The French Tradition and the Literature of Medieval England* (Toronto, 1994), 524n27; for Surigone, see David Carlson, "Chaucer, Humanism, and Printing: Conditions of Authorship in Fifteenth-Century England," *University of Toronto Quarterly* 64 (1995): 274–88, at 282.

10. Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-bibliography*, 14.

11. For Usk's access, see, e.g., David R. Carlson, "Chaucer's Boethius and Thomas Usk's *Testament of Love*: Politics and Love in the Chaucerian Tradition," in *The Centre and Its Compass: Studies in Medieval Literature in Honor of Professor John Leyerle*, ed. Robert A. Taylor, James F. Burke, Patricia J. Eberle, Ian Lancashire, and Brian S. Merrilees (Kalamazoo, Mich., 1993), 29–70, at 40.

12. On the authority of the evidence for an early date, see esp. George B. Pace, "Speght's Chaucer and Ms. Gg.4.27," *Studies in Bibliography* 21 (1968): 225–35, at 233–35. John Thompson shows evidence—some mutilated and otherwise necessarily inconclusive—possibly implying that, though Lydgate had heard of the Chaucerian abecedarium, he did not have access to any copy of it ("Textual Instability and the Late Medieval Reputation of Some Middle English Religious Literature," *Text* 5 [1991]: 175–94, at 178–80).

13. Pearsall, *John Lydgate (1371–1449): A Bio-bibliography*, 31, 14.

14. Cp. Pearsall, "Lydgate as Innovator," *Modern Language Quarterly* 53 (1992): 5–22, at 7–8.

15. This passage may imply a failure on Lydgate's part to distinguish between the fates of Arcite and Palamon, only one of whose passion, "after sorow," yields "deth and then" the grave. The same poem's later use of the phrase "the fals Arcite" (379) may allude to Chaucer's *Anel*, likewise pre-*CT* writing, though possibly unfinished; cp. Blake, "Geoffrey Chaucer: The Critics and the Canon," 70–71. On Lydgate's witness, see A. S. G. Edwards, "The Unity and Authenticity of *Anelida and Arcite*: The Evidence of the Manuscripts," *Studies in Bibliography* 41 (1988): 177–88, at 184–85.

16. The various evidence is analyzed in detail in John S. P. Tatlock, *The Development and Chronology of Chaucer's Works* (1907; repr. Gloucester, Mass., 1963), 44–83.

17. V. J. Scattergood, "The Authorship of *The Boke of Cupide*," *Anglia* 82 (1964): 137-49; and cp. Paul Strohm, "Fourteenth- and Fifteenth-Century Writers as Readers of Chaucer," in *Genres, Themes, and Images in English Literature from the Fourteenth to the Fifteenth Century*, ed. Piero Boitani and Anna Torti (Tübingen, 1988), 90-114, at 92-94, and *Social Chaucer* (Cambridge, Mass., 1989), 78-82.