



International Conference on Education, Psychology and Humanities

Hosted Online from Moscow, Russia

Date: 28th September, 2026

Website: <https://econferencia.com>

ARTISTIC THINKING AND CREATIVE PRINCIPLES IN THE WORKS OF GEOFFREY CHAUCER

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Abstract

This article examines the specific features of artistic thinking and creative principles in the works of Geoffrey Chaucer, one of the most prominent representatives of Middle English literature. Particular attention is paid to the ways in which Chaucer reflects the social, cultural, moral, and intellectual realities of medieval England through artistic representation. The study focuses primarily on *The Canterbury Tales*, which demonstrates the author's innovative approach to characterisation, narrative organisation, genre interaction, and the representation of social reality. Chaucer's creative principles are analysed in relation to the medieval literary tradition, with particular emphasis on the interaction between inherited literary conventions and emerging forms of individual artistic expression. The article argues that Chaucer's artistic thinking is characterised by the combination of medieval worldview, realistic observation, social diversity, irony, and psychological individualisation. His creative method demonstrates a gradual transformation of traditional medieval literary patterns and contributes to the development of new principles of literary representation.

Keywords: Geoffrey Chaucer, Middle English literature, medieval literature, artistic thinking, creative principles, literary representation, *The Canterbury Tales*, characterisation, medieval worldview, social reality.



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Introduction

Geoffrey Chaucer occupies a significant position in the history of English literature as one of the major representatives of Middle English literature and an important figure in the transition from medieval literary traditions towards new forms of artistic representation. His works reflect the complex intellectual and social environment of fourteenth-century England, a period characterised by considerable changes in social relations, cultural consciousness, religious attitudes, and literary expression. Chaucer's significance is determined not only by his contribution to the development of the English literary language but also by his innovative approach to the representation of human beings and social reality.

The study of Chaucer's artistic thinking is particularly important because his works demonstrate a complex interaction between traditional medieval literary principles and emerging forms of individual artistic consciousness. His literary world combines religious and moral ideas with everyday experience, conventional literary models with individual characterisation, and allegorical traditions with detailed observations of social life. Consequently, Chaucer's works provide valuable material for examining the transformation of medieval artistic thinking.

One of the most important characteristics of Chaucer's creative approach is his ability to represent society as a complex and internally diverse system. In *The Canterbury Tales*, representatives of different social groups participate in a common narrative space. Knights, clergy, merchants, craftsmen, intellectuals, and ordinary members of society are presented through their speech, behaviour, appearance, social position, and personal values. This diversity allows Chaucer to create a broad artistic panorama of medieval English society.



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The aim of this study is to analyse the specific features of artistic thinking and creative principles in Geoffrey Chaucer's works, with particular attention to The Canterbury Tales. The research focuses on the relationship between medieval literary tradition and Chaucer's individual artistic innovation.

Artistic Thinking in Medieval English Literature

Medieval literary culture was strongly influenced by Christian theology, religious symbolism, moral didacticism, and established literary conventions. Medieval authors frequently interpreted human existence within a religious and ethical framework. Literary works often presented conflicts between good and evil, virtue and sin, earthly desires and spiritual values.

However, medieval literature cannot be reduced exclusively to religious or didactic writing. It also contains a wide range of secular genres, including romances, fabliaux, chronicles, lyric poetry, and narratives dealing with social life. The development of these genres contributed to the gradual expansion of literary representations of human experience.

Chaucer's artistic thinking emerged within this cultural environment but demonstrated significant individual characteristics. He inherited numerous elements of medieval literary tradition while simultaneously transforming them through irony, social observation, psychological detail, and narrative experimentation.

The coexistence of different literary traditions is particularly visible in The Canterbury Tales. The work incorporates elements of romance, fabliau, exemplum, saint's legend, sermon, tragedy, comedy, and moral narrative. Such generic diversity reflects Chaucer's broad conception of literary representation and his interest in different forms of human experience.



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Creative Principles in Chaucer's Works

One of the central creative principles in Chaucer's works is the interaction between tradition and innovation. The author frequently employs established medieval genres and motifs but modifies them according to his own artistic purposes. Traditional narrative structures are transformed through complex characterisation and multiple perspectives.

The principle of individualisation is another important feature of Chaucer's artistic method. His characters are not merely representatives of abstract moral categories. They possess individual voices, social identities, desires, contradictions, and personal motivations. This approach creates a more complex representation of human nature.

For example, the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* are distinguished not only by their occupations but also by their speech patterns, narrative preferences, attitudes, and behaviour. The Knight represents the ideals of medieval chivalry, while the Wife of Bath challenges conventional expectations concerning female identity, marriage, and authority. The Pardoner, meanwhile, illustrates the contradiction between religious discourse and personal greed.

Through such characters, Chaucer creates a multifaceted representation of medieval society. His artistic principle is therefore based not on a single authoritative interpretation of reality but on the coexistence of different perspectives.

The Representation of Social Reality in *The Canterbury Tales*

The representation of social reality is one of the most significant features of Chaucer's literary works. *The Canterbury Tales* presents a broad social panorama of fourteenth-century England. The pilgrimage narrative provides a structural



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framework within which individuals from different social backgrounds can interact.

Chaucer's representation of society is characterised by observation and irony. He frequently reveals contradictions between social appearance and individual behaviour. Characters may claim to represent particular moral or religious values while their actions demonstrate entirely different motivations.

This discrepancy creates an important source of irony in the text. Chaucer does not always explicitly condemn or praise his characters. Instead, he allows their words and actions to reveal their personalities. As a result, the reader is encouraged to interpret the characters independently.

The artistic representation of social reality therefore becomes closely connected with Chaucer's narrative strategy. Social observation, irony, dialogue, and characterisation work together to produce a complex literary image of medieval England.

Characterisation and Individual Artistic Expression

Chaucer's approach to characterisation represents an important development in Middle English literature. His characters demonstrate a combination of social typification and individualisation. They belong to recognisable social categories, but at the same time they possess distinctive personal qualities.

The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales provides numerous examples of this principle. Chaucer describes the pilgrims through their clothing, occupations, physical appearance, habits, speech, and moral qualities. Such details create recognisable social types while simultaneously giving each character an individual identity.

The Knight, for instance, embodies the traditional values of chivalry, including honour, loyalty, courage, and service. In contrast, the Merchant is presented



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through his economic interests and professional identity. The Prioress reflects aspects of religious culture but also demonstrates features associated with aristocratic manners and social aspirations.

The Wife of Bath is particularly significant because her character demonstrates Chaucer's interest in individual experience and social gender relations. Her extensive discussion of marriage, authority, and personal experience gives her a distinctive voice within the narrative framework. Thus, characterisation becomes one of the principal instruments through which Chaucer's artistic thinking is expressed.

Irony as a Creative Principle

Irony occupies a central position in Chaucer's artistic method. It enables the author to represent contradictions between appearance and reality, social norms and individual behaviour, and stated moral principles and actual actions.

Chaucer's irony is often subtle. Instead of directly criticising a character, he may describe the person in apparently positive terms while providing details that encourage the reader to recognise the contradiction. This technique creates multiple levels of interpretation.

The Pardoner provides a particularly striking example. He preaches against greed while openly acknowledging his own desire for money. The contradiction between his professional religious role and his personal motivation produces a powerful ironic effect. Through irony, Chaucer avoids a purely didactic representation of society. His characters become complex figures whose meanings cannot always be reduced to a single moral interpretation.



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The Interaction of Medieval Tradition and Innovation

Chaucer's artistic thinking should be understood within the broader development of medieval European literature. He was influenced by classical authors, French literary traditions, Italian literature, Christian writings, and English vernacular traditions. Nevertheless, he did not simply reproduce these influences. His creative principle involved adaptation and transformation. Existing literary forms were reshaped to express new social and psychological observations. This process can be seen in his use of pilgrimage as a narrative framework, his combination of different genres, and his creation of distinctive individual voices. Chaucer's works therefore demonstrate a transitional character. They remain deeply connected to medieval culture while simultaneously introducing literary approaches that anticipate later developments in English literature.

Conclusion

The analysis demonstrates that Geoffrey Chaucer's artistic thinking is characterised by a complex synthesis of medieval literary tradition and individual creative innovation. His works reflect the intellectual, social, religious, and cultural realities of fourteenth-century England while offering new ways of representing human personality and social relations.

The major creative principles identified in Chaucer's works include the interaction of tradition and innovation, individualised characterisation, social observation, genre diversity, irony, and the representation of multiple perspectives. These principles are particularly evident in *The Canterbury Tales*, where representatives of different social groups construct a multifaceted image of medieval English society through their stories and interactions.

Chaucer's artistic achievement lies in his ability to transform established medieval literary conventions into a more flexible and complex form of literary



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representation. His characters combine social typification with individual identity, while his narrative technique allows different viewpoints to coexist within a single artistic structure.

Therefore, Chaucer's works occupy an important position in the development of English literary thought. His artistic thinking reflects the transition from predominantly conventional medieval forms of representation towards increasingly individualised and socially observant literary expression. The study of these features provides significant insight into the development of medieval English literature and the evolution of artistic principles in the history of English literary culture.

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