

**Richard III's Books: II. A Collection of
Romances and Old Testament Stories:
4 *Palamon and Arcite* and *Griselda*
by Geoffrey Chaucer
5 The Collection and Its Purpose**

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4. The two stories from Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* chosen for the anthology owned by Richard Duke of Gloucester were those told by the Knight and the Clerk, both tales in the courtly genre, *Palamon and Arcite* (*Arcite and Palomon*) and *Patient Griselda* (*Grisild*) respectively. The overall scheme of Chaucer's *Tales* is generally irrelevant to the anthology because the stories were lifted without reference to the main work and indeed without any proper reference to the author. Only the addition of the five verses of 'Ienvoie Chaucer' to the tale of *Griselda* admits his authorship. Neither is called the Tale of the Knight or the Clerk.

The fifteenth-century person who enjoyed these tales did so with no desire or thought to pick them apart like the modern critic.¹ After 600 years, however, we probably do need the help of scholarly studies to understand and appreciate them in the same way as Chaucer's contemporaries.

Palamon and Arcite.

Chaucer took the story of *Palamon and Arcite* from Boccaccio's poem *Il Teseida*, an ambitious account of the fabulous adventures of Theseus. Boccaccio in his turn relied primarily on the *Thebaid* of Statius written in the first century A.D. Chaucer also made direct use of Statius and drew substantially on Boethius' *De Consolatione Philosophiae*. Before he composed the *Knight's Tale* in the form we know it, Chaucer also made a verse translation of *Il Teseida*, or a redaction of it, which does not survive, his final version being about a quarter of the length of Boccaccio's work. Chaucer's poem was popular and admired; in its turn it became a source for Shakespeare's *A Midsummer Night's Dream* and more precisely for *The Two Noble Kinsmen* by John Fletcher, probably in collaboration with Shakespeare. It was also the poet Dryden's favourite among Chaucer's *Tales*.²

The story can be briefly told: Palamon and Arcite are two kinsmen of the royal house of Thebes taken prisoner by Theseus, Duke of Athens, during his capture of their city (Theseus' victory concluded Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*, the preceding story in this manuscript). They are incarcerated at Athens without hope of ever securing their release. Emily, the sister of Theseus' Duchess, Hippolyta, is seen by both the young men from their prison and both fall instantly in love with her. Their love makes them insanely jealous of each other and they forget all their former friendship. Arcite is eventually freed by the intercession of a friend and returns to Thebes under threat of death if he ever returns to Athens. He pines for sight of Emily so much that he becomes unrecognisable. Finally, he decides to risk everything and return to Athens, where he enters her service and eventually secures a position of honour near Theseus. One day he goes to collect green boughs in a wood — the very day that Palamon has escaped from his gaol and in the very wood where he is hiding. They meet and their jealous passion drives them to fight a private duel. Theseus finds out and stops it. He orders them to return to his court in fifty weeks time with 100 knights each, when a proper tournament will be held under his aegis. The victor will marry Emily. Elaborate preparations are made. Arcite prays to Mars for victory, but Palamon prays to Venus, the goddess of love, for Emily; both receive omens of victory. The tournament duly takes place: Palamon is captured by Arcite's knights and Arcite is declared victor, but in his triumphant enthusiasm Arcite is thrown by his horse and mortally injured. Before he dies he commends Palamon to Emily. A magnificent funeral is held and after a decent interval Theseus arranges the marriage of Palamon to Emily.

The story is a romance, a courtly and chivalric tale about exploits of arms and love. As such it was considered suitable for the Knight to tell — the gentry was expected to like romances and chivalry.³ There has been considerable debate among scholars as to Chaucer's precise intentions and meaning. Only a few details of some of the theories can be attempted here.⁴ The poem has been seen as a 'philosophical romance' about the ordering of the world.⁵ Richard Neuse has emphasised the brilliant comic interplay between the world of the humans and the exactly complementary world of the pagan gods, the latter supposedly directing the fortunes of the former. 'It has been aptly called a 'loveless love-story' by the same writer.⁶ The question has been asked whether the tale is anything but a poetic pageant of noble life,⁷ and it has been maintained that it is primarily an exposition of a courtly love problem: which of two equally worthy young men should win the lady?⁸ Much of the controversy has its origins in the problem of Chaucer's characterisation, or lack of characterisation, of the main persons in the story, notably the shadowy personalities of Palamon and Arcite so hard for the reader (particularly the casual reader) to distinguish or sympathise with. Recent work has to some extent overcome this particular criticism by drawing attention to shades of definition that would have been readily apparent to the medieval reader, although lost on those of the twentieth century without academic guidance. These definitions were achieved by Chaucer's elaborate and systematic use of astrology, the four humours and the ages of man; a medieval reader would presumably have recognised Palamon as sanguine and subject to Venus and Arcite as choleric and subject to Mars.⁹ Recently one of the most profitable

efforts to understand Chaucer's intentions has examined the differences between his version and that of his source, *Il Teseida* of Boccaccio, and how much he owed to Boethius. After all the opinions are taken, the poem remains undisputedly one of Chaucer's greatest achievements: 'this great though somewhat uneven poem', to cite Derek Pearsall.¹⁰

At a literal level it is undoubtedly the question of who will win in love that primarily engages the interest of the reader, but the narrator, the Knight, does seem to have a greater interest in other aspects of the story and, as Chaucer arranges at least some of the details of the story to suit him,¹¹ it is perhaps the Knight's emphasis that comes over most directly to the ordinary reader, both in the twentieth and the fifteenth centuries. This is the face-value of the story. Chaucer not only heavily abbreviated Boccaccio's story, he also described the ancient world of Theseus as though it were the late fourteenth-century world of the courts of Edward III and Richard II which he knew personally, the world of Froissart's Anglo-French war. Concerned to give his Knight a good tale to tell and to 'allow' him to tell it in his own way, Chaucer emphasised the court pageantry of the tournament, dwelt lovingly on the passages of arms, especially the duel, and made witty comments, from the safety of the Knight's middle age and superior experience, on the folly of the two young men obsessed with their passion for a woman who has never even seen them. Theseus, the wise prince and a mature man like the Knight, is made the most realistic of the main characters, in contrast to the lovers, who are scarcely distinguishable from each other, and Emily who is merely fairer than a lily on its green stalk. Both the Knight and Theseus see love primarily as a useful motivator of youth towards deeds of arms — a sentiment already noted in the *Ipomedon*. Love is a good excuse to hold a tournament.¹² Given the directives of the Knight, any reader of the tale in the anthology once owned by Richard Duke of Gloucester would be aware that the behaviour of the lovers was not entirely to be admired, although sympathy for their predicament might be aroused.

The tale is notable for its vivid and realistic descriptions of court pageantry culminating in the magnificent tournament. Perhaps the splendour is more expressive of the ideal which Edward III and Richard II hoped to achieve in their ceremonies, than any real life ceremonial Chaucer may have witnessed at such events as the 1390 London tournament, but it has been convincingly argued that Chaucer's gift for realism is most evident in these descriptions, and that he was faithfully depicting what he had seen of the courts and wars of his time, just as his Theseus is cast in the realistic mould of a fourteenth-century king such as Edward III.¹³ The details of such chivalric events had changed little by the time of Richard Duke of Gloucester: Edward IV staged a magnificent Anglo-Burgundian tournament in 1467, and another for the marriage of his son the Duke of York in 1480, and he consciously fostered the Order of the Garter founded by Edward III. The main preoccupations of Chaucer's Knight were probably those of many of his audience, both in his own day and in the late fifteenth century.

Griselda.

Chaucer cites as his source for this story Petrarch's *De Obedientia ac Fide Uxoriam Mythologia*, which was in its turn a rendering of a story in Boccaccio's

Decameron. Alongside the original Latin text Chaucer used an anonymous French translation of Petrarch called *Le Livre Griseldis*.¹⁴ The three versions of this tale by such eminent authors testify to its appeal, as do the several other versions that appeared in Italy and France before Chaucer wrote his.¹⁵

The story is a simple one but notoriously difficult to understand and interpret:

Walter, an Italian marquis, is persuaded unwillingly to marry. He makes the socially eccentric choice of the peasant girl, Griselda, after observing her loving and obedient character. He exacts from her a promise of complete obedience to all his commands without question or complaint. Griselda becomes the perfect wife and mother and the perfect marchioness dispensing justice and benevolence. Walter decides to test her. He takes their two children from her pretending that they will be murdered. She submits without complaint. Some years later he puts her from him, sending her back to her peasant home, and sets about finding a younger bride for himself. She goes home without complaint. He then insists she receive the new bride and praise her publicly. After a slight demur she obeys. Seeing her obedience and patience Walter finally relents and takes her back as his wife, the pretended bride turns out to be the daughter taken from her years before, and her son is also restored to her. They all live happily ever after.

This pathetic tale of unreasonable cruelty and unreasonable patience is rendered understandable, to modern readers at least, by a knowledge of its real origins as an other-world folktale before it entered literature in Boccaccio's version. In justice to Boccaccio it must be said that it may well have already lost its supernatural element before he used it.¹⁶ The folktale was widely known in Europe with several variants, the male version being the tale of Melusine and the female version the myth of Cupid and Psyche. A human and a being from another world fall in love, marry and live happily together, but the mortal swears never to break a certain taboo imposed by the other-world being. The taboo is inevitably broken, both partners are thrown back to their lives before their marriage. After accomplishing a series of impossible tasks or completing an impossible journey the human regains acceptance and the happy marriage is resumed.¹⁷

The medieval reader, however, knew nothing of the folklore origins of the tale and had to cope with its startling aspects by other means. Boccaccio's intense and realistic version had expressed little sympathy for the tyrannical Walter whose behaviour is found to be monstrous. Petrarch was so moved by the triumph of beauty and goodness that he rewrote the story elevating its moral tone, removing the licentiousness of Boccaccio's version and further emphasising the pathos of the plot. Petrarch did not regard the story as anything but mythology, like Boccaccio he wrote to entertain, to elevate and affect his audience. Both were careful to say that no wife owed such obedience to such a husband.¹⁸ A medieval audience was undoubtedly affected by the pathos of the tale for Petrarch informs us that some were moved to 'compassion and wonder', although others felt 'contempt and disbelief'.¹⁹ Some might also be affected by the romantic elevation of a peasant girl to riches and title and not be unduly surprised that a peasant should need to prove again and again her worthiness of such an elevation.

Chaucer made his own impact on the story. He made Walter more obstinate and cruel, perhaps to show the Clerk's (his narrator) opinion of the average aristocrat and gentleman. The Clerk expresses disapproval of Walter's unnecessary trial of his wife and also of Walter's sycophantic courtiers. Similarly Chaucer makes Walter's servant who carries out his orders more brutal and Griselda more meek.²⁰ Walter is made worse, Griselda is made better. Undoubtedly Chaucer's choice of narrator is significant: the celibate, academic cleric of Oxford always buried in his books and full of the correct philosophy and teaching of the Church with little or no experience of human relationships and the real world. The Clerk's Griselda is made the perfect example of what a woman ought to be, obedient, never changing in face, emotion or humour, and never questioning her lord and master — a secular Virgin Mary. The Clerk proposes an antithesis to the Wife of Bath's noisy, jovial, domineering — and heretical — view that everyone is much happier if the woman rules in marriage. He asserts the *right* order of the world as supported by the Church. He concludes on a cynical note in his envoy (also called Chaucer's envoy), where he notes no man is likely to find a Griselda in the real world, and sarcastically advises no woman to behave like her. He ends by saying that his Griselda is an example to all Christians on how they should submit to God and all tribulations that he sends them. This assertion by the Clerk undoubtedly reflects the *intended* purpose of the story, without any interference from subsidiary meanings produced by the dramatic surround of the pilgrimage. Nevertheless this dramatic surround instructs us in what other reactions to the story were possible among a medieval audience — after all the result does not always reflect the intention.²¹

The way the cynical conclusions of the Clerk is seized upon by the next narrator in the *Tales*,²² the Merchant, who proceeds to describe his own sour experience of marriage and to tell a story of an elderly husband cuckolded by his much younger bride, indicates what must have been a common reaction to the story of Patient Griselda. The virtue of a secular saint could be used as an excuse for a sexual joke, unlike that of the sacrosanct Virgin Mary. Sympathy, tears and joy at the victory of beauty and goodness were not the only reactions to Griselda's tribulations.

Without the dramatic and explanatory background of the *Canterbury Tales*, the tale of Griselda, standing alone, as it does in the Collection owned by Richard Duke of Gloucester, was as liable to provoke the crude music hall joke, as to be taken as an example for Christian behaviour or to provoke pity as a courtly story midway between a romance and a saint's life.²³ The last word should be given to the Goodman of Paris, the elderly bourgeois husband and a near contemporary of Chaucer, who copied out a French translation of Petrarch's story into his book of household advice for his inexperienced young wife. He explains to her that the author was intending to persuade women to be patient with all the tribulations they suffer at the hands of their husbands, for love of those husbands, and above all to accept all the tribulations that God may send, without complaint. He himself does not expect such obedience from her — he is not worthy and he is not a nobleman nor mad nor stupid nor so arrogant as to think that he has any right to assault her in any way! He concludes that in his opinion the story is too cruel (but he tells it!).²⁴ This is the

forbearing view of an ordinary man who has achieved some contentment and wisdom, not that of the academic celibate, the bitter disillusioned husband or the multi-married wife. One can hope that the Goodman represented the majority of those medieval people who placed Griselda's story in their collections of moral tales — just as it appears to have been Chaucer's in his final words on the marriage debate in his *Franklin's Tale* — but he wanted his joke, too.

5. The Collection and its Purpose.

The Manuscript and its Contents.²⁵

The manuscript of the anthology of Romances and Old Testament stories is at present owned by the Marquis of Bath and kept in his library at Longleat House. It now measures 12 by 8.5 inches, has 187 folios (but once had 212) and was written in the third quarter of the fifteenth century in two very similar hands. Most pages, both in prose and verse, have 46 lines. The volume was last rebound in the nineteenth century. Now Longleat Ms. 257, but formerly Ms. 25, it is likely to have been in the Thynne family's possession for a long time.

The volume consists of two main parts: the first contains Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes* (the *Sege of Thebes*),²⁶ Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (*Arcite and Palamon*) and *Clerk's Tale* (*Grisild*) and the unique prose version of *Ipomedon*²⁷ in that order; the second has the Old Testament stories.²⁸ Several pages are now missing from the manuscript, *Ipomedon* is incomplete at its end and the Bible stories lack their beginning. The decoration of folio 1 is the most elaborate in the book and it is likely therefore that this was the front page from the first; the present first page of the Old Testament stories starts in the middle of the text and gives us no such clue. It is not certain when the two parts were first bound together, but since handwriting and decoration are so very similar in both they were probably produced in one workshop and may have been companion volumes or in one volume from the time they were made.

The prologue and the three books of *The Sege of Thebes* fill folios 1-48b (f.28 and a considerable number of single lines are missing).

The prologue begins:

'Whan that Phebus passed was the Ram
Mid of Aprill and into the bole cam',

and the third book ends:

'Oute of citees and royall tounes
Comen all the ladies and women of estate
Ful hevy chered and disconsolate
In this assemble afforn as i you told'.

Folios 49-52 are lost and some 300 lines of the poem are consequently missing at the end.

On folio 53 *Arcite and Palamon* begins:

'Whilome as olde stories tellen us
There was a duke that hight thescus'.

It is complete (apart from f.68 missing in the middle) and duly ends on folio 77: 'Explicit Arcite and Palomon'.

Grisild is on folios 77b to 89b (ff.81-2 and 87-8 are lacking) and begins:

'There is at the west side of Italie
Down at the rote of Vesulus the old',

which means that it does not have the Clerk's Prologue. It ends with 'lenvoie Chaucer': 'Grisild is dead and eke hir pacience . . .' and 'Explicit Grisild full of Pacience'.

The incomplete *Ipomedon* fills folio 90 to folio 105b, the last 'properly' used page of the first part of the manuscript; folio 101 is lost.²⁹ Richard of Gloucester's signature and motto are on folio 98b, more or less in the middle of the story and of the volume as a whole.³⁰ Folio 106 is lost and the end of the tale with it. In the other versions of *Ipomedon* the story ends soon after the hero's fight with Capanius and one leaf could have contained the final events in this edition.

The verse paraphrase of the Old Testament is on folios 119-212. Folios 111-8, 145-8, 151, 154-5, 188 and part of folio 211 are lost. The work is not complete: the parallel text of Bodleian Ms. Selden Supra 52 starts with the author's introduction and the creation of the world, but Longleat Ms. 257 begins well into the story of Moses from Exodus. A quire of eight leaves (ff.111-8) could have contained exactly the 1,472 lines now missing. The full text had — and still has in the Bodleian manuscript — 1,531 stanzas of twelve lines, paraphrasing Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus (not given a separate title in Longleat 257), Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1-4 Kings, Job, Tobit, Esther, Judith and parts of 2 Maccabees (6, 10 and 18-31; 7, 1-42 and 9, 4-29, called *De matre cum septem pueris* and *De Anthioco*, the latter not given a separate title in the Longleat text).³¹

Apart from its main contents Longleat 257 contains several leaves, mainly between the two halves of the book, filled with scribbles and other items added at various times in various hands. Though these have given rise to a number of conjectures the present authors think they do not give any clues to the earliest ownership of the volume or its place of production, or warrant any conclusions about the activities of Richard of Gloucester in his youth.

On folio 107 a fifteenth-century scribe tried out his pen³² and on the verso side of this leaf a sixteenth-century owner, the antiquarian Francis Thynne, unburdened his soul in nineteen lines of appallingly bad verse. One side of folio 108, which is badly damaged and which at some stage went astray and was bound before folio 1, was used by several people to try their pens on, and the other bears the first lines of the *Ave Maria*, an uninviting recipe to cure constipation and some lines of advice on the materials needed to build a dyke, each in a different hand. On folio 109 are two sets of household rules, one on each side, the first headed: 'the order how a jentyllman hysher schall scerwe hys gret master in doying the sarwyse for the afternon', and the second: 'howe and in wat maner a jentyllman howsschar schalle sarwe hys greet master or mestres ther lewery for alle nyt',³³ both are written in a large careless late fifteenth- or early sixteenth-century hand. On the opposite page (f.110) a neater, smaller sixteenth-century hand copied out the second set again, rather pointlessly and with several errors. This hand appears to be again that of Francis Thynne (died

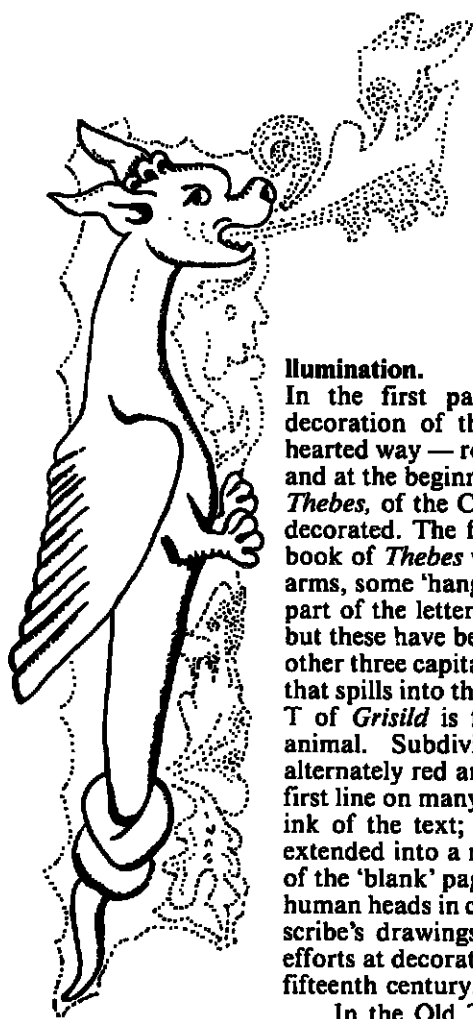
1608) who wrote the doggerel on folio 107b and also the few lines at the top of the next page (f.110b), which give the date '1597'. This last page once contained other lines of verse but all except the last four have been erased — by the look of what remains without great loss to English literature. Both the hand and the subject, which appears to have been women and their 'lust', identify the scribe as Francis Thynne, who had matrimonial troubles and disliked women.³⁴ The erasure was probably done to 'clean up' the book by a later owner. Finally, at the end of the Old Testament stories, on folio 212b two neat fifteenth-century hands wrote out some facts about weights and measures used in England and 'a medicine for the axes' (ague).

Dialect.

Since the modern editors have noted many peculiarities in the dialects and spelling of the several texts, these need to be briefly considered. Manly and Rickert found 'numerous Northern features' in this copy of Chaucer's tales of the Knight and the Clerk; Ekwall found Northern spelling in the copy of Lydgate's *Siege of Thebes*; Kölbing also noted 'Scottish' spelling in *Ipomedon*, though he found the dialect to be from the Midlands and concluded that the resulting mixture was never actually spoken but merely a concoction of the scribe.³⁵

The Old Testament paraphrase presents an entirely different story: this is a text that originated in the North with a Northern author, and here Northern features have not been added, but on the contrary smoothed out. The two manuscripts of these Bible stories that survive are identical — except for missing pages and lines overlooked by the copyists — and go back to a common source which was not, however, the poet's own version.³⁶ In the Longleat copy discussed here a scribe (perhaps a Midlands man) has consciously tried to remove the Northern peculiarities — still present in Selden 52 — to the extent of occasionally spoiling the metre or the rhyme.³⁷ Ms. Selden 52, though produced later than Longleat 257, is closer in language to the original and was chosen by Herbert Kalén as the basis for his edition of the poem.

Since the Romances are of Southern and Midlands origin they must, between the time of their creation and the date of production of the present manuscript, have moved North to undergo the Northern influence noted by their editors. In the North they became connected with the heavily Northern Old Testament paraphrase; at a later stage again scribes were compelled to emend the peculiar, and perhaps by their time old fashioned, language of the Bible stories to produce a text more acceptable to a prospective, possibly non-Northern, purchaser. The two halves of the book may have been together from the time they 'met' in the North, and they certainly came together about 1450-70 when this particular copy was made. The present manuscript was perhaps produced in the North by able and foresighted scribes or in the Midlands by men who merely corrected what they found too outlandish; at all events it is unlikely to have been the product of a Southern or London workshop.



Illumination.

In the first part of the book, the Romances, the decoration of the front page continues — in a half-hearted way — round the entire text, and the initials here and at the beginning of the several books of *The Siege of Thebes*, of the Chaucer stories and of *Ipomedon* are all decorated. The first three capitals (the one of the third book of *Thebes* was on the missing f.28) have shields of arms, some 'hanging' by a buckled strap from the upper part of the letter; all no doubt contained coats of arms, but these have been erased and cannot be identified. The other three capitals are decorated with a pattern of leaves that spills into the margin. The upper stroke of the initial T of *Grisild* is formed by an elongated and fabulous animal. Subdivisions of the text are marked by alternately red and blue small capitals. The initial of the first line on many pages is decorated with penwork in the ink of the text; on folios 6 and 73 such capitals were extended into a man's face and on folio 54b and on one of the 'blank' pages (f.110) an owner (?) drew some ugly human heads in childish imitation of the more competent scribe's drawings. There is no regularity in the scribal efforts at decoration, but it is typical penwork of the late fifteenth century.³⁸

In the Old Testament part, all Bible books except Deuteronomy are introduced by initials very similar to

The initial I from Longleat Ms. 257, f.176. (Actual size).

By courtesy of the Marquis of Bath. The drawing is by Geoffrey Wheeler.

those of the Romances. Some are simple to the point of clumsiness, some fairly elaborate; half of them have shields. In the first of these, a very small one on folio 135, the arms have been erased,³⁹ in the others they were never painted. The books of 3 and 4 Kings and Job all begin with a large capital I extending down 18 lines of text and, after a very poor effort for 3 Kings, the painter has produced both a creditable wyvern breathing leaves and with a knot in its tail for 4 Kings (illustrated), and a neat leaf-wrapped initial I for Job. Each stanza of six double lines is headed by a blue or red one-line capital. On some pages the hand of the text has added marginal notes, drawing attention to a particular event in the story: *Sampson natus est* (Samson is born), *Salamon mortuus est* (Solomon dies). In a few cases a later owner (?), perhaps the one who also added chapter numbers according to the Vulgate, made comments in Latin on the inexactness of the translator: 'Note that he digresses from the story', or 'let the reader beware, because here the translator errs, as in many other cases'. The commentator's warnings are only concerned with factual errors, divergences from Comestor or the Vulgate, not with theological problems.

Scholars have expressed very different opinions about the quality of the illumination. Kalén, the editor of the Bible paraphrase, called the capitals . . . 'big, very fine and elaborate . . . painted in many colours' but to Margaret Rickert twenty years later, they represent the 'pitiable state into which English work had fallen at the end of the fifteenth century'⁴⁰ and there is also the extraordinary statement by Dr. Henry Ward⁴¹ that the illumination was the work of a Southern French or Italian artist. This theory may be dismissed as fanciful and remembered merely as a warning of how subjective the judgments of individuals can be on medieval illumination. There appears to be no reason to suppose that any such exotic foreigner worked on the manuscript although one authority on illumination has called the English style prevailing at this date Italianate-French.⁴² As the only discernible linguistic elements in the text are Midland and Northern it is likely that it was written in the provinces and decorated there.⁴³ It can be seen as a pleasant, unpretentious, reasonably priced production of the provincial market for a provincial purchaser.

Margaret Rickert's description of the illumination is brief and to the point, but it is only concerned with the two demi-vinets of the Chaucer Tales. Her comment that the colouring is 'ugly' seems a little harsh — bright green and orange, but also blue, pink and yellow (meant to suggest gold) were used throughout, and the overall effect is lively and fresh and the paint is well preserved. The initials should be regarded as no more than decoration — it is no use comparing them to the life-like brilliance produced by some Burgundian ateliers in the same period. They are set against and surrounded by a dark mass of entwined leaves, stiff and formal, rather sharply folded and turned back and around themselves in a way strongly reminiscent of the heraldic mantling in the last forty years of the fifteenth century. Prolongations usually end in trumpet shaped flowers and are meagre and clumsy. The main objection to the style could be the extreme stiffness and angularity of the leaves — slightly less in the second part of the manuscript — and the failure of these heavy-looking extensions to fill the margin in a harmonious way.

Ownership and purpose of the collection.

The contents of the manuscript, its composition and its theme (if there is one) are all closely related to the question of original ownership. Additional data given by the book itself are Richard of Gloucester's signature, Francis Thynne's poetic efforts and the manuscript's eventual ownership by the Marquises of Bath. The scribbles on the 'blank' pages and the erased or vacant shields of arms give no help at all. On the strength of the fact that the armorial bearings *were* erased it has been claimed that the manuscript belonged to someone else before it came to Gloucester,⁴⁴ but it might as well be said, in accordance with the prevailing eagerness to suppose that *his* arms in particular were always obliterated by later owners, that this suggests the contrary. The language of all items points to Northern regions, but it is impossible to say at what stage the various copyists exercised their peculiar influence, or to associate these facts with Richard's position in the North.⁴⁵ The date of the illumination and the script, however, make it unlikely that the book passed through many hands before he could inscribe it with his *tant le desiree*.⁴⁶

An obvious candidate as the first Thynne owner is William, collateral ancestor of the Marquis of Bath and the first editor of Chaucer (1532 and 1542). He was Clerk of the Kitchen and Master of the Household to Henry VIII and combined his official duties with an enthusiastic study of Chaucer's works. He spent much of his time collecting such texts and according to his son Francis 'he had comission to serche all the libraries of Englande . . . , so that oute of all the Abbies of this Realme . . . he was fully furnished with multitude of Bookes'.

William died in 1546. Francis tells us that he inherited twenty-five of his father's Chaucer manuscripts, he was himself a book-collector as well as an antiquarian of note and Lancaster Herald. He died childless in 1608. The family line was continued by the descendants of John Thynne, the son of William's brother and the builder of Longleat, who died in 1580. Some of Francis' literary books may have been inherited by them and despite the depredations he says his library suffered in the 1570s Richard of Gloucester's anthology was probably among them. Francis' antiquarian and heraldic note-books were dispersed elsewhere.⁴⁷

William Thynne's position in the royal household makes it possible that *he* came across a book once owned by Richard of Gloucester; *he* may have been interested enough to jot down the two pages of rules for a gentleman usher. His ownership may again suggest — like the script and the illumination — that the Old Testament stories were always part of the present volume, for though his primary interest was with the *Canterbury Tales*, he would have taken the rest of the contents into the bargain.⁴⁸

In the nature of its contents the volume does not differ from many other collections of the period in which one or two of the *Canterbury Tales* were included outside the context that we take for granted.⁴⁹ All such anthologies appear to prove that the moral or moral/courtly stories were preferred reading — and were probably taken at their face value. Pieces by Lydgate are often found alongside Chaucer, as well as religious items. Though the evidence is slight, the edifying *Clerk's Tale* appears to be the one most frequently included, while none of Chaucer's fabliaux occurs; apparently the latter were not considered 'appropriate companions, literally or allegorically, for the explicitly

moral pieces'.⁵⁰ It is worth remembering while emphasising the commonness of such anthologies, that this collection contains the only surviving copy of the prose *Ipomedon* and one of the two manuscripts of the Old Testament paraphrase.

The *Siege of Thebes* represents history as well as a 'mirror for princes' and it teaches many lessons: truth, kindness and generosity should be a ruler's virtues; vice and falsehood will come to no good end; every man suffers from the evils of war. The *Knight's Tale* and the *Clerk's Tale* are both courtly and moral, in the first the emphasis is on courtliness, in the second on an almost religious morality. The *Knight's Tale* may even have been considered 'history': its events follow after those of *Thebes* and partly overlap. *Ipomedon* is the most courtly of all the texts, but also morally above reproach: the protagonists are loyal in their love and their affection duly leads to marriage. The Old Testament stories in their turn add elements of heroism, loyalty and perseverance to their patently religious content.

One motif may perhaps be considered common to most or all of these stories: the concept of order, how the world should be organised to avoid moral and social chaos. In *Thebes* all crimes, even those committed in ignorance, are punished and in the end Theseus, the wise prince, arrives to cut away 'all the tangled foulness' to which war had degraded the city.⁵¹ In the *Knight's Tale* itself the same Theseus rules that 'men cannot be left to fight in the woods like animals, they must settle their differences like gentlemen in the tourney' and 'sexual passion must eventually submit' to matrimony.⁵² *Griselda* has been taken to stress that everyone should live according to his degree and that God's law must be kept in this world (and in marriage).⁵³ The importance of loyalty to God's law is finally also very evident in the stories selected from the Old Testament.⁵⁴

The image emerging from this Collection appears to be one of a world in which the imposed, general benefits of order and law are hoped to preserve it from ever-threatening disintegration, helped by voluntary, personal loyalty, 'the binding element of society',⁵⁵ and spontaneous individual love (as in *Ipomedon*), none of these elements being able by itself to keep the world going.

An anthology containing items of this nature could in its entirety have been made for Richard of Gloucester in his youth. Script and illumination are of a piece throughout the manuscript, its composition is in no way unique, and it also appears to be a well-balanced collection, half secular, half religious texts, both dominated by moral preoccupations. Though the volume may originally have been put together from separate items (two or more) in a stationer's shop, they were probably chosen and collected or commissioned in one such shop and with one person in mind as an educational volume that combined instruction with entertainment.

NOTES AND REFERENCES

1. Kemp Malone, *Chapters on Chaucer*, Baltimore 1951, p. 163.
2. F. N. Robinson (ed.), *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, second edition Oxford 1957, pp. 4-5, 669-670. The text of the tale is on pp. 25-47. Derek Pearsall, *The Canterbury Tales*, Oxford 1985, pp. 2-4 on Chaucer's use of an existing work of his for the Knight; he also deals in detail with Chaucer's use of his sources, pp. 117-138. J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers and their Work. Middle English Literature and its Background 1100-1500*, Oxford 1982, pp. 57-8, 130.
3. Burrow, p. 78.
4. Robinson *op. cit.*, pp. 669-70, for a general rehearsal of the views expressed by scholars and his own views up to 1957.
5. R. Neuse, The Knight: the First Mover in Chaucer's Human Comedy, *University of Toronto Quarterly*, vol. 31 (1962), reprinted in J. A. Burrow, *Chaucer: A Critical Anthology*, Harmondsworth 1980, p. 242 n.1. See also Pearsall (n.2) on the planets' influence, pp. 125-9, 131.
6. Neuse, pp. 242-263, and p. 254.
7. Charles Muscadine in 1950 and reprinted 1959, cited by Douglas Brooks and Alastair Fowler, The Meaning of Chaucer's *Knight's Tale*, *Medium Aevum*, vol. 39 (1970), p. 123. Pearsall *op. cit.* (n.2), pp. 130, 131.
8. J. R. Hulbert, What was Chaucer's aim in the Knight's Tale?, *Studies in Philology*, vol. 26 (1929), pp. 375-85.
9. Pearsall (n.2), pp. 130, 131-7. Brooks and Fowler, *The Meaning* (see n.7), pp. 123-42, with some modifications proposed by J. A. Burrow, Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* and the Three Ages of Man, in his *Essays on Medieval Literature*, Oxford 1984, pp. 27-48.
10. Pearsall (n.2), pp. 115-138; quotation p. 137.
11. See Malone, *Chapters* (see n.1), pp. 163-235, on the dangers of seeing the stories too relentlessly as self-characterisation by the pilgrims. Derek Pearsall (n.2) also warns against this, especially as this Tale was written in some form before *The Canterbury Tales* as such, pp. 115-6.
12. Burrow, Chaucer's *Knight's Tale* (see n.9), pp. 32-3, 47.
13. Stuart Robinson, Elements of Realism in the *Knight's Tale*, *Journal of English and German Philology*, vol. 14 (1915), pp. 226-55.
14. Robinson, *The Works* (see n.2), pp. 8-9, 709-10; the text of the tale is on pp. 101-14. J. Burke Severs, *The Literary Relationship of Chaucer's Clerk's Tale*, Yale 1942, pp. 3, 33-7, 134, 186. Severs also prints the texts of Petrarch and *Le Livre Griseldis*, pp. 254-89.
15. Severs, *The Literary Relationship*, pp. 3, 31.
16. D. D. Griffiths, *The Origin of the Griselda Story*, University of Washington Publications in Language and Literature vol. no. 1, Washington 1931, pp. 119-20. Severs, *op. cit.*, pp. 6-7.
17. Griffiths generally, and especially pp. 23-5. See also Robinson, *The Works* (see n.2), pp. 7-10, for some modifications of Griffiths' theories.
18. Griffiths, pp. 10-17. Severs, *The Literary Relationship* (see n.14), pp. 7-14.
19. James Sledd, The Clerk's Tale: the Monsters and the Critics, *Modern Philology*, vol. 51 (1953) pp. 73-82. His article comments on some of the various views and theories on this tale held by the critics.
20. Severs, *The Literary Relationship* (see n.14), pp. 229-45, discusses Chaucer's treatment of the story.
21. S. K. Heninger, The Concept of Order in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 56 (1957), pp. 382-95. Pearsall (n.2), pp. 41-2, 265-276.
22. J. Burke Severs, Did Chaucer rearrange the Clerk's Envoy? *Modern Language Notes*, vol. 69 (1954), pp. 472-8.
23. J. A. Burrow, *Medieval Writers* (see n.2), pp. 114-6, on the story as an exemplum and its extraordinary aspects, and p. 82 for this definition of the story as half romance and half saint's life.
24. Eileen Power (ed.), *The Goodman of Paris*, London 1928, pp. 136-8. Perhaps the Goodman's attitude to the story was more unique than we would like to think: in 1395 Philippe de Mézières, an advisor of Charles VI of France, composed a letter to Richard II of England pleading for peace between the two countries; a marriage of the French king's daughter to Richard was desirable and in this context de Mézières hoped that the King of England would be granted a wife 'such as Griselda . . . who was but the daughter of a poor working man, yet, . . . there is no record, from the beginning of the world until today, apart from the saints, of a woman of such great virtue, nor so loving towards her husband, nor of such marvellous patience . . .'. He puts the story among his biblical and historical examples of good wives and calls it a 'chronicle'; one wonders how much he and his circle actually believed in this male ideal picture of a married woman; he fails to question Walter's

- conduct and, again, he *does* refer to the story. *Philippe de Mézières, Letter to King Richard II*, ed. G. W. Coopland, Liverpool 1975, pp.xxix and n.53, 42 and 115.
25. The manuscript is described in: E. Kölbing, Ms. 25 der Bibliothek des Marques of Bath, *Englische Studien* vol. 10 (1887), pp.203-6; H. Kalén, A Middle English Metrical Paraphrase of the Old Testament, *Göteborgs Högskolas Årsskrift* vol. 28:5 (1923), pp.vi-x; J. M. Manly and E. Rickert, *The Text of the Canterbury Tales*, Chicago 1940, vol. 1, pp.339-42 and 580-1; P. Tudor-Craig *Richard III*, catalogue of the exhibition at the N.P.G., 1973, pp.63-4; A. Erdmann and E. Ekwall, eds., *Lydgate's Siege of Thebes*, vol. 2, EETS.ES. 125, 1930, pp.42-3. We have seen the manuscript, studied a microfilm of it and we would like to thank Dr. K. D. Harris, Librarian to Lord Bath, for additional information and for allowing us to read her draft description of the illumination.
 26. See *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 96 (1987), pp.376-8.
 27. See *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 95 (1986), pp.327-32.
 28. See *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 96 (1987), pp.371-5.
 29. F. 101 (the fifth leaf of the thirteenth quire) is lost and not f.102 as Kölbing, Kalén and Manly and Rickert (see n.25) describe it.
 30. See *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 95 (1986), pp.331-2.
 31. The order and choice of the Bible books (many from the *Apocrypha*) is mainly that of Peter Comestor's *Historia Scholastica*; see *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 96 (1987), p.372.
 32. See Manly and Rickert (see n.25), p.342: they put forward the 'interesting possibility' that the book was made in the priory of the Austin Canons at Hempton in Norfolk, because on f.107 is written: 'h h h hempton in the co co'. They assert that the 'Austin Canons were especially makers of books'. A connection with Richard of Gloucester is then made by stating that Anthony Woodville, Earl Rivers was patron of Hempton in 1483 and that Rivers was executed at Richard's command. The link with Rivers himself is strengthened by the presence of the names Elizabeth, A . . . and Thomas on f.108, supposed to be those of his first wife Elizabeth Scales and her brother or father, Thomas. Manly also makes a curious connection between the contents of the volume and both its supposed producers, the Austin Canons, and its hypothetical owners: 'the second part of the Ms. consists of biblical paraphrases, and the first, of stories of special appeal to knights and ladies'. Does this mean that both the tastes of the Canons and of the Rivers family were catered for? — We consider that the pen-trials on f.107 are casual efforts by a writer who enjoyed a complicated double-looped h; he is not necessarily the writer of the main text; indeed it seems unlikely that a professional scribe would have spoilt his manuscript by doodles. There are far too many Hamptons and Hemptons in England and the Christian names in question are too common to warrant any of the connections made by Manly and Rickert.
 33. Neither hand nor spelling, nor the contents of the text point to any connection with Richard of Gloucester, in his youth or later. The hand is large and sprawling, mature rather than youthful, hurried and careless and not suggestive of the theory advanced by Dr. Tudor-Craig (*Richard III* (see n.25), p.64) that Richard 'wrote out his duties himself' when serving in the household of the Earl of Warwick. The handwriting of neither of the texts about an usher's duties resembles that of Richard in his Castle Rising letter of 1469 (illustrated in P. W. Hammond and Anne F. Sutton, *Richard III. The Road to Bosworth Field*, London 1985, p.34), as Dr. Tudor-Craig seems to claim, nor, which is more relevant, that of his neat signature on f.98b of the present manuscript (illustrated *ibid.*, p.35). Dr. Tudor-Craig's final remark that 'Either he wrote out his duties himself, or they were written out for him by a tutor on whose hand he formed his own, unless they belong to Anthony Lord Rivers's (sic) apprenticeship' cannot be countenanced: the intrusion of Rivers appears to result from the equally untenable theory of Manly and Rickert outlined in note 32 above; no tutor would have written a text for a pupil in such a poor hand; the hands are much later than the 1460s.
 34. Francis Thynne was the son of William Thynne (see below), born in the 1540s. He seems to have had a deplorable habit of writing his own bad verse in his (and others?) manuscripts, notably this one and the so-called Ellesmere Chaucer (f.2). This habit does not appear to have been noticed by other commentators. For a detailed biography of him and for his marital problems which found frequent expression in anti-women verse, see Francis Thynne, *Animadversions upon the Annotations and Corrections of . . . Chaucer's workes . . .*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, Chaucer Society, second series, vol. 13 (1876), pp.xlvii-cxxvi. For his 'slender poems' (his description), Francis Thynne, *Emblemes and Epigrames*, ed. F. J. Furnivall, EETS. OS. 64 (1876).
 35. For the references of the comments of the several authors see n.25, and E. Kölbing, '*Ipomedon*' in *drei englischen Bearbeitungen*, Breslau 1889, pp.clxxviii-ix.

36. See Kalén, *Paraphrase* (see n.25), p.xxxiv.
37. By changing for instance 'mikel' to 'much' and 'fele' to 'many'.
38. Comparable for example to the 1446 charter to Ipswich (in *Medieval Art in East Anglia*, catalogue of an exhibition, Norwich 1973, items 67 and 68) and later examples illustrated in *Richard III* (see n.25), plates 20-3, but less elaborate.
39. The erased arms on ff. 1, 2b, 12 and 135 cannot be identified. They were obliterated very thoroughly: in some cases part of the paint of the letter was rubbed off as well. It has been said (*Richard III* (see n.25), pp.63-4) that some of the shields that were never finished (f.2b and f.136 (mistakenly called f.136b, *ibid.*), show the underdrawing of a *barré* coat of arms, but the faintly visible horizontal lines are clearly part of the ruling drawn for the scribe: they continue outside the shield itself on a level with the written lines of the text. F.136 is illustrated at the beginning of Kalén's description of the manuscript (see n.25) and the ruling is perfectly discernible.
40. Margaret Rickert on the illumination of Chaucer's manuscripts in Manly and Rickert (see n.25), p.581.
41. Ward is quoted in Erdmann and Ekwall (see n.25), p.42. The editors of the *Siege* also state that the loss or theft of f.28 which may have contained a decorated initial of Book Three, could have been caused by the presence of such an initial. In view of the quality of the illumination and the random nature of the loss of other pages this is perhaps not likely.
42. Margaret Rickert on illumination in Manly and Rickert (see n.25), pp.571-4.
43. It is remarkable that the dialect of almost all similar anthologies described by Manly and Rickert (see n.25) is said to be (East-) Midland with Northern 'elements' ('features', 'influence', 'forms') and all manuscripts seem to have been made in the second half of the fifteenth century!
44. *Richard III* (see n.25), pp.63-4. The supposedly *barré* arms (see n.39) would point to Rivers' nephew, Thomas Grey, Lord Ferrers.
45. See n.43.
46. There is some uncertainty, however, about the date of production. Manly and Rickert (see n.25) on p.340 date the manuscript to 1450-70, but Rickert in her description of the illumination (*ibid.* pp.580-1) places it at 'the end' and 'the very end' of the fifteenth century. Since the decoration is such an uncertain and very subjective factor we prefer the earlier date, based on the script.
47. See *Dictionary of National Biography*, vol. 56, pp.373-4 and Furnivall, *Animadversions* (see n.34). The quotation about his father's book collecting activities is from Francis' *Animadversions*, themselves, criticism of Thomas Speght's 1598 edition of Chaucer's works. In 1602 Francis assisted Speght in making a revised edition. For Francis see also n.34 above.
48. Though there are other — less neat — solutions, this seems the most likely order of events. In 1577 a list was made of the books then in the Longleat library (Francis was living at Longleat about that time, Furnivall, *Animadversions* (see n.34), pp.lviii-lix). No Chaucer manuscript appears to be included in it, but since Francis died in 1608 this gives no clue as to where his books went. The former shelf-mark of Longleat 257 (that is 25) seems to put it among some other medieval manuscripts, none of which are on the 1577 list. One, Ms. 258 (formerly 21), contains Lydgate's *Temple of Glass*. Chaucer's *Anelida and Arcite* and *Parliament of Fowls*; on f.1 is written *Constat John Thynne* and on f.147b is the very faded inscription 'Maister William Thynne clerke of the Kitchen to oure soueraign lorde king henry the viijth'. Another, Ms. Longleat 29, contains several religious pieces and the *Parson's Tale* and has the name of John Thynne twice, said to be the autograph of the builder of Longleat (but his son was also called John and died in 1623).
- Dr. Harris (see n.25) informed us, however, that many medieval manuscripts bear a form of shelf-mark known to have been inserted in the time of the first Viscount Weymouth (died 1714) but 257 is not one of these. Either the shelf-mark disappeared, as shelf-marks do, or the manuscript was, after all, acquired by one of the later culture-loving Thynnes, for instance John Alexander, fourth Marquis (1831-96), who not only 'was a notable collector of Italian pictures' (*Richard III* (see n.25), p.63), but also served on the Historical Manuscripts Commission (*D.N.B.*, vol. 56, pp.366-7).
49. D. S. Silvia, *Some Fifteenth Century Manuscripts of the Canterbury Tales*, in *Chaucer and Middle English Studies in Honour of R. H. Robbins*, London 1974, pp.153-63, pays special attention to the nineteen manuscripts that contain one or two of the *Canterbury Tales* lifted from their context, Longleat 257 among them. He studied them to find out how the stories were read at the time, what attitude towards them prevailed. Some of his conclusions are included below. See also Pearsall (n.2), p.301 for the habit of excerpting Chaucer's work, with a preference for the didactic and religious tales.

50. Silvia (see n.49), p.157.
51. C. S. Lewis, *Allegory of Love*, Oxford 1958, p.55.
52. J. A. Burrow, (see n.9), p.47.
53. S. K. Heninger, The Concept of Order in Chaucer's *Clerk's Tale*, *Journal of English and Germanic Philology*, vol. 56 (1957), pp.382-95.
54. See *The Ricardian*, vol. 7, no. 96 (1987), p.374.
55. Anne F. Sutton, 'A Curious Searcher for Our Weal Publique . . .', in *Richard III: Loyalty, Lordship and Law*, ed. P. W. Hammond, London 1986, p.62.