



Chaucer and the Subject of History

By Lee Patterson

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Renowned scholar of medieval literature, Lee Patterson, presents a compelling vision of the shape and direction of Geoffrey Chaucer's entire career in *Chaucer and the Subject of History*.

Chaucer's interest in individuality was strikingly modern. At the same time he was profoundly aware of the pressures on individuality exerted by the past and by society—by history. This tension between the subject and history is Patterson's topic. He begins by showing how Chaucer's understanding of history as a subject for poetry—a world to be represented and a cultural force affecting human action—began to take shape in his poems on classical themes, especially in *Troilus and Criseyde*. Patterson's extended analysis of this profound yet deeply conflicted exploration of the relationship between "history" and "the subject" provides the basis for understanding Chaucer's shift to his contemporary world in the *Canterbury Tales*. There, in the shrewdest and most wide-ranging analysis of late medieval society we possess, Chaucer investigated not just the idea of history but the historical world intimately related to his own political and literary career.

Patterson's chapters on individual tales clarify and confirm his provocative arguments. He shows, for example, how the Knight's Tale represents the contemporary crisis of governance in terms of a crisis in chivalric identity itself; how the Miller's Tale reflects the social pressures and rhetoric of peasant movements generally and the Rising of 1381 in particular; and how the tales of the Merchant and Shipman register the paradoxical placement of a bourgeois class lacking class identity. And Patterson's brilliant readings of the Wife of Bath's Tale—"the triumph of the subject"—and the Pardoner's Tale—"the subject of confession"—reveal how Chaucer reworked traditional materials to accomplish stunning innovations that make visible unmistakably social meanings. *Chaucer and the Subject of History* is a landmark book, one that will shape the way that Chaucer is read for years to come.

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Editorial Review

From Library Journal

In this complex and scholarly study, Patterson, a leading medievalist, examines the tension between subject and history in Chaucer's works. He begins with an extended discussion of Troilus and Criseyde and looks at the ways Chaucer initially explored the subject of history using traditional material. Subsequent chapters analyzing "The Knight's Tale," "The Wife of Bath's Tale," and "The Pardoner's Tale," among others, show how this material was ultimately transformed in The Canterbury Tales to reveal unmistakable contemporary meanings dealing with the crisis of chivalric identity, the triumph of the spirit, and the subject of confession. Scrupulous notes and extensive bibliography accompany a text in which the author shares his own political views and exhibits an ability to extract underlying meanings and essential issues from specific literary instances. A substantial contribution to historical criticism and Chaucer scholarship that belongs in academic collections.

- Jacqueline Adams, Carroll Cty. P.L., Westminster, Md.

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Review

"*Chaucer and the Subject of History* is the product of one of the most original and powerful minds in medieval literary studies today. I predict that this will be the Chaucer book of our generation."—Peter W. Travis, Dartmouth College

About the Author

Lee Patterson is the Frederick W. Hilles Professor Emeritus of English at Yale University. He is the author of *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* published by the University of Wisconsin Press.

Users Review

From reader reviews:

Ernestine Worrell:

Here thing why this specific Chaucer and the Subject of History are different and reliable to be yours. First of all studying a book is good nevertheless it depends in the content of computer which is the content is as delightful as food or not. Chaucer and the Subject of History giving you information deeper and different ways, you can find any reserve out there but there is no reserve that similar with Chaucer and the Subject of History. It gives you thrill reading through journey, its open up your current eyes about the thing this happened in the world which is possibly can be happened around you. It is possible to bring everywhere like in park your car, café, or even in your technique home by train. When you are having difficulties in bringing the branded book maybe the form of Chaucer and the Subject of History in e-book can be your choice.

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