

The Medieval Poetics of Pilgrimage and Multiple Voices

Uirak Kim (Pusan University of Foreign Studies)

Scholars have long sought to identify the sources of T. S. Eliot's poetic development, a search that seems invited by the poet's essays on such writers as Dante, Spencer, Shakespeare, and Pope; his allusions to earlier texts; and his addition of the controversial Notes to *The Waste Land*. Such open invitations to source study, however, occasionally obscure those ties which are less explicitly referenced. Such is the case with the oblique allusion to Chaucer and the *Canterbury Tales* in the opening lines of *The Waste Land*: "April is the cruelest Month." While the allusion has received critical notice, it has never been addressed as a possible indicator of yet another significant Eliot source. An examination of archival materials relating to Eliot's Chaucer background presents immediate difficulties. His papers are scattered across the United States and Great Britain, and several archives have notably substantial holdings. No definitive, exhaustive catalogue of Eliot's papers has ever been compiled,

and since Eliot's study of Chaucer and the Middle Ages has escaped critical attention, there has been no previous effort to track materials related to this study. However, Eliot's background reveals a knowledge of Chaucer which arguably played a role in the modern poet's intellectual and poetic development. To explore the extent to which Eliot initially absorbed and later drew from Chaucer is the primary purpose of this essay.

Similarities between various aspects of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and Eliot's *Waste Land* are immediately recognizable. Both works can be considered fragmentary, though in a slightly different sense, and both have repeatedly defied critical attempts to impose on them a final, comprehensive structure. Similarly, each poem has been regarded as a revelation of its respective cultural milieu, and despite the more than five centuries which separate them, the poems are decidedly similar in other, fundamental ways. Eliot's poem, like Chaucer's, employs multiple voices, and the voice of a narrator/host is intermingled with the myriad speakers of both works. Similar characterization and structural devices also link these works, as does each poet's peculiar use of sources. I will probe these parallels, and I will argue that Eliot's strategically placed allusion to the *Canterbury Tales* invites the reader to contemplate the relationship between the two poems. Moreover, I will suggest that Eliot's inversion of the Chaucerian *reverdie* invites the reader to reconsider this poem, both structurally and thematically, as a modern pilgrimage.

The link between April and pilgrimage is an established one, and pilgrimage seems to have been a repeated motif in Eliot's writing. Eliot employs the idea of "pilgrimage" in his 1916 doctoral dissertation, *Knowledge and Experience in the Philosophy of F. H. Bradley*, where he discusses the utter subjectivity of knowledge and perception. According to Eliot, any human "interpretation" objects involves "a change of point of view,...a transmigration from one world

to another, and such a pilgrimage involves an act of faith" (*The Sacred Wood*, rpt, 163). Eliot again refers to "pilgrimage" in "Exequy," where "persistent lovers" undertake a "pilgrimage" to the tomb of a "deity of love." Initially authenticating *The Waste Land* as a modern pilgrimage, Eliot invokes not only the language of Chaucer, but also the idea of Spring beginnings. The introductory reference to April and "spring rain" in *The Waste Land* forecasts a spiritual journey; yet, the cruelty of the season and the sluggish response of nature is the antithesis of the Chaucerian *reverdie*. Eliot, in his inversion of the Chaucerian prologue, invokes the sterility of modern existence, and his dismal tone is underscored through the allusive contrast to Chaucer's tribute to Spring renaissance.

The journey in each poem provides a structural framework for a variety of voices, and Eliot achieves an effect not unlike Chaucer's through his employment of a polyphonous narrative technique. In the *Canterbury Tales*, the monologue of each teller is juxtaposed against dialogue among the pilgrims and the Host, all of which is a retelling of events by the pilgrim Chaucer. Thus the structure is a multi-layered meta-narrative, and one in which the reader must interact with the various levels of discourse in reconstructing the narrative event.

In "The Idea of the Canterbury Tales," Donald Howard explains that "these multiple viewpoints and multiple degrees of closure make the inner form of the tales seem a maze of contradictions in which the individual is left to find his own way" (189). There is no reliable narrator to guide the reader to a "correct" point of view, and what is set up in one tale may be drastically undercut in the next. Such a maze of contradictions is comically demonstrated in the first fragment of the *Canterbury Tales*, where the *Knight's Tale* is "retold" from the perspective of the drunken Miller, who, in turn, is rebutted by the incensed Reeve. In each subsequent tale, the reader is prompted to reconsider the

previous tales in the fragment from various points of view.

Eliot similarly scrambles his narrative, offering a plethora of perspectives from which readers can extract their own conceptions of the topic and theme of the poem. *The Waste Land* moves from the breadth of Tiresias' vision to the myopia of Mrs. Porter, Marie, or the typist. In discussing this Eliotic "cubist perspective," H. M. McLuhan asserts that it "renders, at once, a diversity of views with the spectator always in the center of the picture" (281). The irresolution of each poem recalls both poets' penchant for unresolved debate, but in *The Waste Land* and the *Canterbury Tales*, the voices and issues have been multiplied. Moreover, this narrative technique distances each poet from his respective work and absolves him from responsibility for his portrayal of contemporary life.

The characters of each poem--those contemporary representations of the poets' respective worlds--share far more similarities than may be first assumed. Eliot's personae have commonly been regarded as mere "voices," and their characters seem shallow indeed when compared to the extensive development of Chaucer's pilgrims: the gap-toothed Wife, the pock-marked Summoner, or the Monk with his oily head. Yet, with methods reminiscent of Chaucer's, Eliot deftly renders characters who are multi-dimensional and distinctly memorable (if one knows how to read them): the hyacinth girl, the young man carbuncular, or the woman who "fiddled whisper music on her long, black hair" (100). Moreover, Eliot's gallery of characters is presented through ambiguous, though descriptive, details. Mr. Eugenides, the Smyrna merchant, is a case in point. His "unshaven" face, pocket full of currants, and demotic French are definitive aspects of his personality, but the significance of these details lies beyond what is textually available to the reader. Chaucer's own Merchant, with his forked beard, his accrued debts, and his covert business dealings ("his wit was well

beset" 117) similarly resists readers' attempts to pin him down. Such is true with characters in both poems, where the reader is provided with details, distinct, though always elusive.

Further, the characters in both poems are drawn from a cross-section of society. The social comprehensiveness of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* has long been noted and is in some ways prefigured by his reliance on estates satire as a literary model. Eliot, too, fills his poem with individuals of various estates, from the upper-class Marie, cousin to the archduke, to the lower-class Albert and Lil. And like Chaucer, Eliot partially renders his pilgrims through reference to their respective vocations--the clerk, the typist, the fortune teller, the Phoenecian sailor. Moreover, Chaucer and Eliot are closely attuned to speech patterns, and both evidence this linguistic sensitivity through the distinctive voices of their characters. The colloquial speech of Chaucer's Miller and Reeve is noticeably different from the language and style of the high-ranking Knight, and the Prioress' "Stratford atte Bowe" French undermines her social pretensions. Similarly, in *The Waste Land*, the cockney dialect of Lil and her "friend" distinguishes them linguistically and socially from the upper-class couple at the beginning of "A Game of Chess," and Marie's assertion that she is German ("Bin gar keine Russin, stann' aus Litauen, echt deutsch" (312) adds definition and depth to her character. These "sondry folk," with their particularized voices and views, offer multiple levels of interpretation in both poems, and as Howard explains in speaking of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, "all of the meanings are part of one truth, but the unity of that truth can only be grasped through multiplicity" (320). Such a technique provides a rounded and comprehensive view of each poet's world.

Another affinity between the two poems is that each is essentially a story collection. Cooper defines the story collection genre as "a collection of

separable tales compiled and written, or more probably re-written, essentially by a single author; and it circulates in a recognizably coherent form" (9). Chaucer's poem precisely fits this definition, and he derived numerous tales from earlier writers and then "re-wrote" and "compiled" them in the *Canterbury* collection. Moreover, in addition to the explicit stories related by the various pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales*, there are allusions and references to other, less-explicitly revealed stories that the characters seem only to hint at. The *Miller's Tale*, for instance, recounts the activities of an old carpenter, his young wife, and their boarding student, and in a typically fabliauesque plot, the clerk tricks his aged landlord and sleeps with the youthful wife. While the surface action of this tale is lively and engaging, another story involving an old carpenter, his young wife, and a "visiting" interloper plays in the background. Specifically, the tale of the Miller intimates popular medieval legends regarding the holy family, where the aged carpenter, Joseph, is cuckolded by the holy spirit who impregnates Mary, Joseph's young wife. Chaucer subtly juxtaposes the "sacred" story with one that is thoroughly secular, and the background legend provides an added, contrasting dimension to the *Miller's Tale*.

Additionally, there seems to be another story echoing behind the mutual antagonism of the Miller (Robyn) and the Reeve. When the Miller announces to the pilgrims that he "wol telle a legende and a lyf / Bothe of a carpenter and of his wyf," (232) the Reeve responds "Stynt thy clappe!" The Reeve, himself a former carpenter, implies that he is somehow involved in the Miller's story, and several details support this same idea. According to Robinson, "Pratt conjectures that there may have been some factual background for the episode in the Miller's own life. This might explain the Reeve's fury, but it is only a surmise" (684). Other of the *Canterbury Tales* intimate extra textual stories, but many of the tales hinted at are never fully revealed. In each case, the stories

that comprise Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* have multiple dimensions, and Chaucer's layering of stories demonstrates the extent to which his poem is thoroughly a collection of tales within tales.

The Waste Land is also a story collection. Marie, the first speaker in the poem, begins the tale-telling with her account of travelling through the mountains and childhood sledding. Her narrative is followed by a brief story involving the hyacinth girl, which is, in turn, followed by the tale of Stetson, who planted a corpse in his yard last year. These stories are brief, but like Chaucer's tales, Eliot's vignettes tend to intimate "larger" stories behind the narratives presented in the poem. Critics have attempted to identify the background sources of the three aforementioned tales, and Marie's story seems to involve the events surrounding Marie Larisch, a countess with whom Eliot corresponded. The hyacinth girl has been posited as a reference to Hyacinthus, Greek god of fertility, and although Stetson's real-life counterpart has not been located, his burial of a corpse intimates stories of pagan rituals, tales that Eliot presumably adopted from Frazer or Weston. Like Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, the stories compiled in *The Waste Land* spring from myriad sources, and they often achieve a multi-dimensional quality through intimating the "larger" stories behind them.

Among Eliot's collection of stories is a series of tales which comprise a "Marriage Group." In Chaucer's poem, issues of marriage and interpersonal relations touch almost all of the stories, but the four tales designated by Kittredge as the "Marriage Group" deal directly and wholly with the complexities of connubial arrangements. In Chaucer's poem, the pilgrims participating in the marriage debate provide examples of conjugal relations which may or may not be "ideal," and though various "scenarios" are presented, no marital model of happiness is ever hit upon. *The Waste Land* similarly

offers a diversity of views regarding personal and sexual relations, and like the *Canterbury Tales*, Eliot's poem probes marriage and its alternatives through carefully rendered exemplar. Moreover, as in Chaucer's Marriage Group, "A Game of Chess" provides a concentrated group of four stories that deal with intimate relations. The upper-class woman, whose "nerves are bad to-night," is generally considered to be the wife of her rather aloof companion, though the fact is not specified in the poem. Regardless, their relationship, or lack of one, suggests a complete breakdown between the sexes, for these two cannot connect on any level. The woman pleads:

"stay with me. / Speak to me. Why do you never speak? Speak," but her partner rejects her request. The second marriage depicted in "A Game of Chess" is Albert and Lil's. "He wants a good time," but the "good times" Lil has "given" Albert in the past have taken their toll on her, for she has had five children "and nearly died of young George"(160).

However, "poor Albert" must be "satisfied" ("He's been in the army four years"), and if Lil doesn't do it, "there's others will." Although this marriage depicts a sexually active couple, the circumstances and implications of their involvement (another pregnancy could kill Lil) have nothing to do with love, friendship, or consideration. Two final tales referenced in this section are equally dismal and involve the stories of Cleopatra and Philomel, two women included in Chaucer's *Legend* who suffered as a result of marriage. Cleopatra's marriage to Antony incited a war in which Antony died, and Cleopatra subsequently committed suicide in a famous scene with asps. Philomel, though herself a maiden, was raped by her sister's husband, another marriage which resulted in tragic consequences for even those outside the primary participants. All four of the relationships proffered in "A Game of Chess" bespeak of "the wo that is in marriage" (or anything akin to it), but the alternatives to marriage

seem equally dismal, as illustrated in the relations of Mrs. Porter and Sweeney, the young man carbuncular and the typist, or Mr. Eugenides and the male narrator. As with so many of the issues raised in Eliot's poem, the marriage debate is never resolved, and no attractive example of interpersonal relations is provided.

Eliot displays another peculiarly Chaucerian tactic in his manipulation of sources from the past. "Read Augustine," Chaucer tells us, "or Ovid, or Dante, to illuminate my work" (*The Sacred Wood* 124); and in some cases, it seems that Eliot followed Chaucer's advice. In *The Waste Land*, moreover, Eliot uses sources which he identified in Chaucer, and Eliot also gives attribution to his "thefts," telling his readers to explore the *Confessions*, the *Metamorphoses*, or the *Commedia* in his published Notes. Both poets modify the originals, extracting fragments from previous works and incorporating them into a new schema. Chaucer's manipulation of Ovid's tale of Midas in the story of the Wife of Bath--she attributes Midas' wife with disclosing the news of his ass's ears, when in fact, Chaucer's audience was expected to know that it was the barber who revealed this information--is well known. Likewise, in Chaucer's description of the Prioress, his allusion to la Vielle's advice on female etiquette takes on new meaning when applied to a woman of the cloth. In his annotations, Eliot recognized these and other of Chaucer's allusions, and in a number of cases, Eliot cites and/or discusses the original from which Chaucer has borrowed.

Eliot also manipulates classical allusions and expects his audience to recognize these modifications. For example, at the end of "The Fire Sermon," Eliot alludes to Augustine's *Confessions*: "To Carthage then I came / Burning burning burning burning" (232). This reference to the fires of lust reflects the carnality of the wasteland citizens: Mr. Eugenides, the typist, the young man

carbuncular, and the character who raises "knees / Supine on the floor of a narrow canoe" (131). In Augustine's original context, he repeatedly expresses remorse for such physical depravity, but the wasteland citizens exhibit no feelings of guilt for their fleshly sins. The allusion provides a contrasting point of reference for Eliot's depiction of modern moral decay.

Similarly, in "A Game of Chess," Eliot points the reader to Ovid's *Metamorphoses* to elucidate his own reference to the "change of Philomel, by the barbarous king / So rudely forced" (144). In Ovid, the story is a horrifying account of Tereus' rape and mutilation of his beautiful sister-in-law, Philomela. Tereus is characterized as the ultimate villain, premeditatively breaking his promise to his father-in-law to protect the girl, breaking his vows of marriage, and defiling Philomela, whose tongue he subsequently rips out with pincers to prevent his being discovered. For Eliot's upper-class couple, the story, painted "as though a window gave upon the sylvan scene," (153) is indelibly captured for aesthetic enjoyment. In fact, the scene is the focal point of their richly-appointed room, commanding recognition "above the antique mantel" (166). The image offers an objective correlative for the frigid, antagonistic couple's twisted sexual ideals; simultaneously, it contrasts with their own lack of physicality. Moreover, Eliot's juxtaposition of this "sylvan scene" with its original context again suggests the entropy of modern culture, where a story of utter human depravity has become a subject for artistic expression. A full understanding of the text is contingent on knowing the sources behind both Chaucer's and Eliot's works. These poets demand of their readers an uncommon dexterity with intertextual interpretation, for each poem is a compilation of earlier "tales," tales that have been reformulated to fit the thematic framework of their new environment.

In addition to their peculiar reliance on the writings of others, Chaucer and

Eliot also make new use of their own, earlier work. Chaucer recycles certain passages of his older poems in later works, and Eliot seems to have recognized this process. One example of Chaucer's reworking earlier material into a new context (and one which Eliot seems to have studied) is Chaucer's revision of the *Palamon* for the *Canterbury Tales*. The *Palamon* was Chaucer's early translation and revision of Boccaccio's *Teseide*, a tale which Chaucer later recast as *The Knight's Tale*. A similar pattern marks a number of the *Canterbury Tales*, and in this story collection, Chaucer draws material not only from myriad earlier writers, but also from a number of poems which he had written years prior to beginning the actual pilgrimage frame. Robinson repeatedly discusses this aspect of the *Canterbury Tales*, and he gives particular emphasis to the original date and subsequent genesis of various works, noting changes that Chaucer made before including them in the Canterbury group. Eliot's annotations to *The Student's Chaucer* reflect his similar attempts to place various tales chronologically and indicate that this aspect of Chaucer's poetry was a recurring point of discussion in the course.

Eliot's technique of reworking earlier poems into new contexts is most clearly demonstrated in *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. This manuscript includes a number of "pieces" written years prior to Eliot's beginning *The Waste Land* which Eliot later pulled together in composing his longer poem. "The Death of St. Narcissus," for example, was composed in 1914-15, but this poem was included in Eliot's original version of *The Waste Land*. The same is true with other excised sections of the poem, self-contained compositions from Eliot's earlier works including "Exeguy," "Elegy," and "Death of the Duchess." Martin Scofield reports in *T. S. Eliot: The Poems* that "*The Waste Land* was composed in fragments over a period of time, [and]... these were afterwards put

together and 'edited,' with the decisive help of Ezra Pound, into the final version that we know today" (108). This process exactly mirrors the evolution of the *Canterbury Tales*.

The ending of both poems shifts the focus from secular pilgrimage to a view to the eternal. In Chaucer's Retraction, he reminds the reader that "All that is written is written for oure doctrine" (45), and however ambiguous this phrase, at least one interpretation is that humans must turn from worldly concerns to a focus on the Divine. A similar transition is presented in the ending to *The Waste Land*, where the quest culminates in a combination of Augustine's and Buddha's fire sermons, and the poetic voice reminds the reader that religious ideals are the true object of this earthly quest. In each poem, a final view to the eternal is aligned with the overall pilgrimage motif, and the pilgrims arrive at the contemplative stage of their trip. As the Canterbury pilgrims draw near to the Cathedral which is shrine to St. Thomas, their sights are raised to God, their protector and assurance of a divine and benevolent order. In Eliot, the glories of Canterbury Cathedral have been superseded by the wasteland's "empty chapel," only the "wind's home" surrounded by "tumbled graves." The relics of St. Thomas have been replaced by the "dry bones" of a spirituality arid land. Eliot's twisting of the conventional pilgrimage shrine parallels his inverted, introductory ode to spring, but he offers a final glimmer of hope in his trilogy of Eastern ascetic ideals.

The religious ideals presented in the conclusions to the *Canterbury Tales* and *The Waste Land* reflect the periods of crises from which these poems spring, and the chaos surrounding their genesis is intimated in other, similar ways. In Chaucer's age, between one-third and one-half of the population was decimated by the plague. Further, his was an age of violence, with repeated confrontations in the Hundred Years War with France and the bloody Peasant's

Revolt of 1381. Even the Church of the late Middle Ages was crumbling, playing host to increasing clerical abuses and two contending Popes, a situation that culminated in the Great Schism and, subsequently, the Reformation.

A similar upheaval marks the cultural milieu surrounding the creation of *The Waste Land*. Europe had been ravaged by the First World War, and ideals of justice and order, God, and human progress were undermined by the realities of international carnage and destruction. The loss of "timeless" ideals is evident in both poems, from the errant clergy of Chaucer's poem to the spiritually vacuous inhabitants of the wasteland. The cacophony of voices in both works similarly reflects social mayhem, and the refusal in either work to identify a privileged point of view suggests that there are no objective truths to be descanted. Finally, the social unrest which surround these poems partially explains their final appeal to the divine, the only possible panacea for the ills of this world.

"Comparing and contrasting" the poetic works of Chaucer and Eliot fits Eliot's own critical agenda, for he maintains in "The Tradition and the Individual Talent" that any pot "must inevitably be judged by the standards of the past" (50). He explains that "it is a judgement, a comparison, in which two things are measured by each other." It has been the intent of this study to "measure" Eliot's own poetry against that of Chaucer's, without privileging the work of either. Such a comparison yields insight into both poets' works and aptly illustrates a phenomenon that Eliot explains as follows:

what happens when a new work of art is
created is something that happens
simultaneously to all the works of art
which preceded it. The existing monuments form an ideal

order among themselves,
 which is modified by the introduction of the new
 (the really new) work of art among them. (49-50)

Eliot's poetry "modifies" our understanding of Chaucer's verse, and thus the works of these poets can be understood as exerting a reciprocal "influence" on one another. Moreover, it cannot be overlooked that Eliot had the particular advantage of studying Chaucer's poetry prior to embarking on his own poetic career, and this advantage is clearly intimated in Eliot's early verse. Eliot never discussed his debts to Chaucer, nor is Chaucer included among the dozens of writers cited in Eliot's Notes to *The Waste Land*. However, in his 1926 review of Root's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Eliot argued that "the whole stock of critical commonplaces about Chaucer must be reinventoried," and Eliot had been privy to a cutting-edge "reinventory" of "critical commonplaces about Chaucer" in his 1909 course at Harvard. Eliot also referenced Chaucer in his 1926 Clark Lectures, where he called for studying Chaucerian "conditions" as a method for improving modern verse, and Eliot concluded this lecture series by quoting the ending and invocation of Chaucer's *Troilus and Criseyde*, a testament, at least, to Eliot's familiarity with and regard for the medieval English poet. While it is impossible to assess precisely Eliot's debts to Chaucer, one is reminded of Eliot's assertion in "Tradition and the Individual Talent":

we shall often find that not only the best,
 but the most individual parts of [a poet's] work
 may be those in which the dead poets, his
 ancestors, assert their immortality most vigorously. (48)

주제어: T.S. 엘리엇, 황무지, 트로일루스와 크리세이드, 초서, 캔터베리 이야기, 중세 시학

Works Cited

- Ackroyd, Peter. *T. S. Eliot: A Life*. New York: Simon and Schuster, 1984.
- Augustine and Henry Chadwick. *Confession*. Oxford World's Classics, 1998.
- Cooper, Helen. *The Structure of the Canterbury Tales*. Athens: U of Georgia P, 1984.
- Curry, W. C. *Chaucer and The Medieval Sciences*. Boston: Mifflin, 1973.
- Eliot, T. S. *Annotations to The Student's Chaucer*. Harvard Ms. MH 52-1225. Houghton Library, Cambridge, 1997.
- _____. *The Sacred Wood: Essays on Poetry and Criticism*. London: Methuen, 1960.
- _____. *Complete Poems and Plays*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1952.
- Eliot, Valerie. *The Letters of T. S. Eliot*. San Diego: Harcourt, Brace, 1988. Vol. I
- _____. *The Waste Land: A Facsimile and Transcript of the Original Drafts Including the Annotations of Ezra Pound*. New York: Harcourt, Brace, 1971.
- Gordon, Lyndall. *Eliot's Early Years*. New York: Oxford UP, 1977.
- Howard, Donald. *Writers and Pilgrims*. Berkeley: U of California P, 1980.
- Mayer, John T. *T. S. Eliot's Silent Voices*. New York: Oxford UP, 1989.
- McLuhan, H. M. *Critical Essays on the Poetry of Tennyson*. New York:

Barnes and Noble, 1960.

Ovid. Trans by Charles Martin. *Metamorphoses*. New York: Martin, 2005.

Robinson, F. N. *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*. 2nd ed. Boston:
Houghton-Mifflin, 1957.

Scofield, Martin. *T. S. Eliot: The Poems*. New York: Oxford UP, 1999.

The Medieval Poetics of Pilgrimage and Multiple Voices

Abstract

Uirak Kim

Scholars have long sought to identify the sources of T. S. Eliot's poetic development, a search that seems invited by the poet's essays on such as Dante, Spenser, Shakespeare, and Pope. However, occasionally obscure those ties which are less explicitly referenced. Eliot's poetry "modifies" our understanding of Chaucer's verse, and thus the works of these poets can be understood as exerting a reciprocal "influence" on one another. Moreover, it cannot be overlooked that Eliot had the particular advantage of studying Chaucer's poetry prior to embarking on his own poetic career, and this advantage is clearly intimated in Eliot's early verse. Eliot never discussed his debts to Chaucer, nor is Chaucer included among the dozens of writers cited in Eliot's Notes to *The Waste Land*. However, in his 1926 review of Root's *Troilus and Criseyde*, Eliot argued that "the whole stock of critical commonplaces about Chaucer must be reinventoried "reinventory" of "critical commonplaces about Chaucer" in his 1909 course at Harvard. It has been the intent of this study to "measure" Eliot's own poetry against that of Chaucer's, without privileging the work of either. Such a comparison yields insight into both poets' works.

Key Words

T. S. Eliot, Waste Land, Troilus and Criseyde, Chaucer, Canterbury Tales, Medieval Poetics