But a great service is rendered by the publication, translation, and critical evaluation of source material. In the task of shedding light in the obscure corners, a task that will require the ingenuity of many scholars, there is much to learn from these books of Mme Mélikoff-Sayar and Professor Paul Lemerle.

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Charles Muscatine, *Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning*. Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957. Pp. 282. $4.

Increasing attention has been given in recent years to a new criticism of Chaucer's works. This emphasis on criticism has, of course, been part of a general modern movement away from historical scholarship; and it has come late rather than early to Chaucer studies for a couple of reasons. One reason is that from early in the twentieth century one of the glories of Chaucer studies has been the marriage of scholarship and criticism in the works of such eminent Chaucerians as Kittredge and Lowes: a worthy criticism of Chaucer existed, albeit not entirely in the modern temper. Another reason is that the disciplines essential to a mastery of Chaucer are rather formidable to the critics, and so they hesitated to attempt the task; when they did rush in without mastering the disciplines — that is, without being scholars as well as critics — they speedily exhibited their inadequacies and rendered themselves ridiculous: "The laughter aros of gentil foules alle."

This book by Dr Muscatine is the latest and most impressive "effort toward a modern criticism of Chaucer" (p. 1). Like some other lesser similar efforts, it takes occasion to attack the "post-Victorians" Kittredge, Lowes, Root, Young, *et al.* The victory is not always with Apollo rather than the Titans. But Dr Muscatine has not failed to master the disciplines: he impresses one with his knowledge of pre-Chaucerian French literature, with his accurate and sensitive perception of the qualities of that literature, with his easy and generally competent critical judgment concerning it, with his ability to relate it significantly to Chaucer's poetry. Among other things, his book is a packed digest and evaluation of the many pertinent historical and critical studies both of the French literature with which it deals and of Chaucer and his works.

The author finds two dominant traditions in the French literature from which Chaucer's poems stem: the courtly (associated with conventionalism, non-representationalism, symbolism, idealism, Guillaume de Lorris: chief example, the romance) and the bourgeois (associated with realism, representationalism, naturalism, Jean de Meun: chief example, the *fabliau*). Chaucer inherited both traditions; and it is a mistake to equate his conventionalism with mediaevalism and his realism with modernism in order to point up a mediaeval-modern conflict in him. Chaucer did not develop through the triumph of his realism over his conventionalism; rather, he employed both traditions according to his artistic needs, and he developed by his growing skill to relate the two discordant traditions in the same work, extracting the available values from each and creating new values from the interplay of one with the other, to produce an integrated, harmonious

whole. By and large, then, the author gives us another ordering of "God's plenty," expressing it in terms of the two elements with which he is concerned, finding them first in the literary tradition which lay behind Chaucer, then examining their interplay in the poems, chronologically considered. And he finds an increasing skill in Chaucer's interrelating of the two elements, an increasing complexity, an increasing richness and fullness in artistic and moral value, in beauty and in truth. — Such, in general, is the thesis of the book.

It is worked out with varying degrees of success. In the early poems, to a greater degree than in the later works, the two traditions exist separate, side by side, unassimilated. This fact, the author shows, accounts for much of the awkwardness and for the comparative failure of these earlier pieces, especially the *House of Fame.* In the *Troilus,* the courtly mode is represented by Troilus himself, the realistic by Pandarus; and the interplay leads to an irony cast by each mode upon the other. Criseyde, partaking of both, offers the usual difficulty to the critic — a difficulty not solved, I am afraid, in this book either; at any rate, I cannot be satisfied by being told that Chaucer's portrayal of her is symbolic rather than psychological. Nor does the author account satisfactorily for the "Narrator's" inconsistency in attitude between early full approving joy in earthly love and later rejection of it.

Only selected parts of the *Canterbury Tales* are dealt with: the *Prologue* and general plan ("Gothic Form"); the *Knight's Tale* and *Clerk's Tale* ("Two Versions of Conventionalism"); the *Reeve's Tale,* the *Wife of Bath's Prologue,* and the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale* ("Three Versions of Naturalism"); and the *Miller's Tale,* the *Merchant's Tale,* and the *Nun's Priest's Tale* ("The Mixed Style"). This section of the book, I should say, is the most uneven. There are many valuable insights *passim,* especially in the section on the *Knight's Tale,* where the symmetrical pattern and structure of the poem are held to suggest the ordered nature of the noble life, and above all in the sections on the *Miller's Tale* and the *Merchant's Tale,* where the values which Chaucer evokes from the combination of courtly love and *fabliau* elements, previously developed by brilliant Chaucerian criticism, are now ably gathered together by Dr Muscatine with helpful additional synthesizing comments. But sometimes the author's attempts to solve by symbolic interpretation problems which he feels have not been solved by naturalistic criticism lead him into super-subtlety and tenuousness: then he indulges, like some other recent critics, in intellectual exercises which may be interesting in themselves but have only an adventitious relevance to the poetry being discussed. For instance, I do not feel enlightened by some of the discussion of the *General Prologue* and plan of the *Tales;* and in my view the author goes very far astray in his bizarre symbolic interpretation of the *Canon's Yeoman's Tale.* Like Swift's spider, he here is spinning a web out of his own entrails, and the materials are naught.

I do not have space, of course, to argue every interpretation which seems to me doubtful; but one, not turning on symbolism but on realism, I feel impelled to mention. Seeking to find a functional explanation for the northern dialect of the two Cambridge college boys who *swyve* the miller's daughter and wife in the

Reeve's Tale, the author maintains that "their speech represents them to the miller as country bumpkins of no social position whatsoever" (p. 201). Their "mispronunciation" and "bad grammar" convicts them, in the miller's mind, of "rustic simplicity" and "social inferiority." Hence (the argument runs) the ferociously proud "miller is chagrined, not at what has been done to his daughter, but that it has been done by someone of lower class!" The only support from the poem which the author can adduce for this interpretation is his doubtful translation (contrary to *OED*) of the single word "disparage" (l. 4271). A sufficient answer to this kind of gratuitous interpretation is that there simply is no basis for it anywhere in the poem. There is no word from the miller, no act by him, which suggests that he feels socially superior to the college boys because of their speech or alleged rusticity or any other characteristic. Chaucer makes the miller's attitude toward them explicitly clear: it is the attitude of a man who works with his hands toward men who work with their minds. Far from associating "rustic simplicity" with them, he associates with them skill in philosophy (ll. 4046–56), art (ll. 4096–97), argumentation and speech (ll. 4122–26) — in a word, learning and intellectual superiority, especially the reputation for intellectual superiority. Far from feeling socially superior to them, he is smarting from the general view that as a miller he is intellectually inferior to them. Hence his desire to deceive these particular clients is especially motivated; and Chaucer has portrayed him as having great pride in his own cleverness (and in his wife's lineage) so that the contrast between his temporary triumph and final discomfiture will be all the more violently felt. There is class feeling here, to be sure, but the emphasis is not upon the kind which the author finds; rather it is class feeling of a different kind, and from below rather than from above.

Nevertheless, despite debatable interpretations with which one reader or another is certain to disagree, this is a very able book by a very able critic. There is a sense in which it may be said, as Dr Muscatine early observes (p. 9), that "variant interpretations are abstractions from the total poem, are actually variant and partial discoveries of meaning." This book does not give us complete and final interpretations — only some additional partial readings. We could hardly ask for more. Because of its successes, it deserves our serious attention and has its real contribution to make.

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Per Nykrog, *Les Fabliaux: Etude d'histoire littéraire et de stylistique médiévale*. Copenhagen: Einar Munksgaard, 1957. Paper. Pp. lv, 339. Dan. kr. 36.

The important thesis, *Les Fabliaux*, of Joseph Bédier in 1893 has been accepted for the last sixty years as definitive in its main conclusions: the futility of previous theories of origin of the fabliaux, especially that of their ties to India and the East; their insignificance as a literary genre; the fabliaux as bourgeois literature, written for a bourgeois public in contrast to the aristocratic literature as represented in the courtly romances: "poésie des châteaux" versus "celle des carrefours." Research in the fabliaux since 1893 has been concerned with problems of