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Social Conflict in Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales

Thesis

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Sociální konflikt v Canterburských povídkách Geoffreyho Chaucera

Diplomová práce

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This thesis focuses on manifestations of Medieval anti-Semitism hidden in Geoffrey Chaucer's Canterbury Tales. In its first part, several pieces of information about fourteenth century England are given, with the especial aim at the Peasants' Revolt, during which xenophobia towards the Flemings led to their killing. This historical background is followed by a concise biography of Geoffrey Chaucer, mentioning the works and events that influenced his production. The main part is dedicated to an analysis of The Prioress's Tale, particularly studying the Prioress's individuality as well as her attitude towards Jews, when her actual behaviour contrasts sharply with Christianity that supposes love to all people. At the end of the main part, also other English works containing anti-Semitic motives are mentioned. The last part of the thesis investigates the roots of anti-Semitism in general. It begins with the history of Hebrews in the ancient times and ends with Christian anti-Judaism that transformed into anti-Semitism in the Middle Ages, which were full of Jewish massacres justified by various nonsensical reasons. This thesis tries to reveal the truth about Medieval anti-Semitism.

Tato diplomová práce je zaměřena na projevy středověkého antisemitismu skrytého v Canterburských povídkách Geoffreyho Chaucera. V první části se uvádí několik informací o Anglii čtrnáctého století se zvláštním zaměřením na Rolnické povstání, během něhož xenofobie k Vlámům vyústila v jejich zabíjení. Za tímto historickým pozadím následuje stručný životopis Geoffreyho Chaucera zmiňující díla a události, které ovlivnily jeho tvorbu. Hlavní část se věnuje rozboru Povídky abatyše, obzvláště zkoumajíc abatyšinu osobnost i její přístup k Židům, kdy její skutečné chování je v ostrém rozporu s křesťanstvím, které předpokládá lásku ke všem lidem. Na konci hlavní části jsou zmíněna také další anglická díla obsahující antisemitistické motivy. Poslední část práce zkoumá všeobecné kořeny antisemitismu. Začíná historií Hebrejců ve starověku a končí křesťanským antijudaismem, který se přeměnil na antisemitismus středověku, jenž byl plný židovských masakrů, ospravedlněných různými nesmyslnými důvody. Tato diplomová práce se pokouší odhalit pravdu středověkého antisemitismu.

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i. Anti-Semitic history

Every historian investigating the mysterious field of human history meets the peculiar and indisputable fact that people living within one community, united by the same language, customs, history, or religion, have had rather intolerant feelings and attitude to those who differed from them by any of the attributes. The reason is usually the fear of unknown, the feeling of menace, or the desire to have more. There were many wars between France and England although these two countries were alike. However, when the question of the way of behaving towards Jews arises, all European countries, the heirs of the Hellenic-Roman culture, face the horrible truth that the history of their states is interwoven with anti-Semitism. This xenophobia is even more elusive when considering the basis of Christianity, which was the official religion in Europe since the times of Constantine the Great. Its main idea is love towards all people without any differences. Therefore, it is hard to understand why Jews had to undergo such hatred that culminated in their massacres and the losses of their possessions. Thousands of Jews died because of their religion and wealth either during the crusades, or beyond them when they were accused of ritual murders of children. These myths became common property in British folk ballads, and their impact appears even in the work of Geoffrey Chaucer, the founder of poetry written in English. When cogitating about the Jewish slaughters, the question of their reason comes to one's mind.

Christianity, which was supposed to be the climax of Judaism, its continuation, became its greatest enemy. Its reasons lie deep in history, at the beginning of our era. The ways of Christianity and Judaism split soon after the death of Jesus Christ, which happened because of Paul, the real founder of the new religion. He rejected the old Jewish law and customs for new Christian converters, which led to deprecation of Jews by non-Jews. Jews continued with their former rituals, the gap widened quickly, and soon it was impossible to unite the two religions. However, anti-Semitism was not the work of Christians only; Jews suffered also before our era. Their misery in Egypt was well described in Exodus, the Second Moses' Book. God sent Moses to save his people and to lead them to Canaan, where they founded a glorious kingdom under Kings David and Solomon. Nevertheless, the kingdom ceased, and Jews dispersed around the Mediterranean Sea. The biggest Diaspora, or dispersion, was in Alexandria; a city

founded by Alexander the Great, who invited Jews to settle in his empire. Although it was in Alexandria where the first translation of the Jewish Pentateuch originated, this centre of noble Hellenic culture witnessed several brutal massacres of Jews. Greek scholars were not able to understand Jewish customs and religion, probably because nobody explained their meaning to them, which led to misunderstanding of Jews and their condemning altogether. This practice was undertaken also by the Romans, the successors of Hellenism. Common Jewish history ended in the first century AD with the fall of Jerusalem and their final scattering, which was caused by the Zealots, fanatic adversaries of the Roman ascendancy and anticipants of the Messiah. From that point, Jews lived scattered in different countries, living in their small, closed communities. They managed to re-unite in 1948, when they started the state of Israel; but their modern history is filled with wars with surrounding Arabic nations. The history of Hebrews is also the history of anti-Semitism.

ii. England in the Fourteenth Century

As it has been said, also Medieval England witnessed anti-Semitism, accompanied by several Jewish massacres, resulting in the total expulsion of Jews. What was England like in the times of Geoffrey Chaucer? It must be admitted that there are many features or affairs that can and should be mentioned when trying to give a characterisation of fourteenth century England. It was the age of great wars, most important one being the Hundred Years War, which was a series of wars between England and France that lasted for 116 years. The difference between those two countries then was not as deep as it may seem. When William the Conqueror arrived at Britain in 1066, himself being a Norman, he brought with him nobility, namely 4000 knights and 180 barons, to whom he gave the land and made them his vassals, ready to protect their King against his enemies and avenge his death. These people brought the French language and customs, which was "a historical paradox because Normans themselves were originally Anglo-Saxon tribes who conquered Normandy, and there they grew French" (Menhard 1995, 114, my translation)[1]. Nevertheless, their language became the language at the court, and English remained the language of low classes for approximately three hundred years. Moreover, England held some lands in France for

the King of England was also the Duke of Aquitaine; therefore, narrow contacts existed between those two countries. However, good relations became strained after scant three centuries, reaching climax in 1337, when King Edward III, whose mother Isabella was the sister of the French King Philip VI, laid claim to the throne of France after Philip declared Gascony confiscate to France. "The war was, at bottom, a conflict between two emerging territorial states, each consolidating itself within its own borders and thrusting aggressively beyond" (Wilkinson 1969, 136). The Hundred Years War affected every family in England not only because of the feudalist military service but also because of levies for the wars were continually exhausting the King's exchequer. The war ended with the defeat of England, which lost all lands in France except for Calais.

On the other hand, they were not only militant conflicts that interfered in the lives of the English people. The most disastrous events were the strokes of the Black Death, the bubonic plague, which occurred in 1348 – 49, and recurred at intervals in 1361 – 62 and 1369. The plague "reached England by way of trade routes from the East, and was carried by rats and fleas" and "caused painful swellings in the armpits and groins, fever, and dark spots on the skin which gave it the name" (Wilkinson 1969, 185). There were two forms of the plague, both being lethal. The disease certainly did not choose between high and low classes: Among its victims was the Archbishop of Canterbury, Thomas Bradwardine, and in 1369 the plague took a very high toll—Queen Philippa, the wife of Edward III. The only group of people who were more endangered than others were clergymen because of their duty to conduct the dead bodies to the place of their last repose and bury them. People believed that it must have been God's punishment for their sins. Together with the famine in 1315 – 16, the Black Death reduced the population of four million to the half, which brought the decline of productivity, poverty and wasteland. The plague affected every family in Europe. It played its important part in the general tale of Boccaccio's Decameron, which was the model for the Canterbury Tales. He made his storytellers go out into the countryside to escape the danger of the plague. However, neither this fact, nor the actual experience of the disease influenced Geoffrey Chaucer in his work. "The plague is mentioned in Chaucer's poetry only incidentally and marginally" (Brewer 1988, 50, my translation from Czech; I could not find the English original)[2].

The Hundred Years War and the Black Death had catastrophic impact on English economics. The plague caused shortage of manpower, and the remaining people were beset with increasing taxes. The growing dissatisfaction with the difficult situation culminated in the Peasants' Revolt in June 1381, under the rule of Richard II.

> Its causes were both political and economic: on the one hand, disappointment and frustration at the failures of the French war and the inability of the Commons to achieve ambitious reforms in the Good Parliament; on the other, peasant discontent shown in demands for the abolition of villeinage, and resentment at taxation especially the poll taxes, so that one rebel demand was for no further impositions save the fifteenths which their fathers knew and accepted.
> (Wilkinson 1969, 158 – 9)

The poll tax was a levy especially set to refund the expenses of the war in France. First it appeared in 1377 and it was 4 pence per capita: The people were discontent. Two years later the tax was changed into the graduated one, according to people's property: The lowest tax was 4 pence for a peasant and the highest 6 pounds, 13 shillings and 4 pence for the Duke of Lancaster, who was the richest aristocrat in England. For various reasons the tax did not bring the expected yield. In 1380 the King urgently needed money to pay to his soldiers in France, otherwise he could await mass desertion. The poll tax was transformed to 1 shilling for a person, no matter what their status was. An ordinary peasant could earn 12 shillings per year; therefore, they were trying to escape the duty, and the King deputed collectors to enforce the money. The act of assembling the poll taxes gave rise to the great rebellion, known as the Peasants' Revolt.

Everything started in south Essex in the small village of Fobbing. The local dwellers refused to pay the incredibly high and unjust levy, claiming that they had already paid, which was untrue. The collector brought a couple of varlets with him in order to intimidate the malcontents, but they threatened that they would kill them all. Both sides of the conflict ran away: The King's commissioners escaped to London, and the peasants to the neighbouring villages, where they defied others to sustain their rebellion. Then the presiding judge of the Supreme Court was dispatched to find and capture the insurgents, but they arrayed against him. However, he was scared of them; therefore, it did not cost them much effort to force him to swear that he would not continue with his mission and to incriminate those who would identify the rebels. Those

informers were decapitated, and their houses were burned to the ground. Thus, the judge's incapability to deal with several rebelling peasants enabled the revolt to spread through all the country. First, they avenged on tax collectors, but soon they turned their anger against the officials in general. It is interesting that they were not resentful with King Richard II for he was too young to be blamed for the ominous affairs.

> The revolt spread also in southern and eastern shires, ignited by the actions of commissioners from the ranks of the local sheriffs and other dignitaries, as well as by the news about successful resistance, diligently spread by those who had already stood up to resist. The discontent from various reasons put more fuel onto the fire. Other motives played their roles, as well: idealism, hooliganism, hatred for foreigners, desire to pay old debts.
>
> (Brewer 1988, 150, my translation)[3]

The Archbishop of Canterbury, named Simon of Sudbury, was the King's Chancellor: He was the one responsible for all the evil in the eyes of the rebels. They arrived at the Cathedral in Canterbury ready to murder their enemy, but he was in London at that time. The crowd informed the monks that Sudbury was a traitor and he would be beheaded soon. In the Archbishop's gaol there was a priest called John Ball, who was imprisoned because of his reformatory ideas. His famous couplet, which soon became popular, best expressed what he thought of the Church and its property: "When Adam dalf and Eve span / Who was thanne the gentilman?" (as quoted in Wilkinson 1969, 159). The crowd appointed Wat Tyler as their leader and John Ball as the preacher. His radical ideas were actually infeasible:

> Good people, things cannot go well in England, nor will they until all goods shall be in common and there shall be neither villeins nor gentles, but we shall all be one. Why should he, whom we call lord, be a greater master than us? … They have ease and beautiful manors, and we have hardship and work, and the rain and the wind in the fields; and it is through us and our labour that they have the wherewithal to maintain their estate.
>
> (as quoted in Wilkinson 1969, 159)

Inconceivably huge armada of raging folks gathered near London's Aldgate, above which Geoffrey Chaucer lived, and then they flew into the City of London after somebody who sympathised with them lowered the drawbridge on the other side of the river Thames. The governing classes had been warned several days before, but they had

not believed the news about rioting crowds. When they could make sure, it was too late. The crowd had entered the city, and no one was able to guess what to expect from them. In one of the Canterbury Tales, the Clerk's tale, Chaucer gives his description of an unstable throng:

> O stormy people! Unsad and evere untrewe!
> Ay undiscreet and chaungynge as a fane!
> Delitynge evere in rumbul that is newe,
> For lyk the moone ay wexe ye and wane!
> Ay ful of clappyng, deere ynogh a jane!
> Youre doom is fals, youre constance yvele preeveth;
> A ful greet fool is he that on yow leeveth.
>
> (Clerk's Tale, Fragment IV, 995 – 1001)[4]

The crowd needed to quench the flames of their anger: They went to burn the beautiful palace of the Savoy to avenge themselves upon the Duke of Lancaster, John of Gaunt—Richard II's uncle and father of the future King Henry IV—who was luckily not in London then. The next important building to be burned was the Temple—the headquarters of English lawyers. The Fleet and Newgate prisons were also burned to the ground after the prisoners were released. The King's counsellors advised Richard II to negotiate with the rebels in order to stop them. At the time when the King was negotiating with their leader, Wat Tyler, the peasants came into the Tower, where they found a foursome of men praying in the chapel of the White Tower, preparing for death. They were Simon of Sudbury, the Chancellor and Archbishop of Canterbury, then Sir Robert Hales, the Treasurer, and two other men; in all England they were the most responsible ones for the taxes. "The mob dragged them out and struck off their heads on Tower Hill" (Chute 1946, 198). The heads were exhibited impaled on spears on the London Bridge. Eventually, the anger of the revolting peasants released the hatred for foreigners, especially the Flemings.

The Flemings knew special weaving techniques, but trading with them was difficult because of taxes imposed on wool. During the reign of Edward III, Richard II's grandfather and the previous King, they were encouraged to immigrate into his realm. Edward sent even secret agents to Flanders who told them "how happy they should be if they would but come over into England, bringing their mystery with them, which would provide their welcome in all places" (Wilkinson 1969, 190). However, their proficiency

did not guarantee them safety and hearty welcome. Already "in 1344 the King caused proclamation to be made in London against attacks on foreign cloth-workers" (Wilkinson 1969, 190). The xenophobia climaxed during the Peasants' Revolt. First the insurgents pillaged a brothel carried on by the Flemings, near the London Bridge. As Derek Brewer, Geoffrey Chaucer's biographer, states, "the rebels probably did not destroy the brothel because of a moral disgust, but because of the hatred for foreigners, especially the Flemings" (Brewer 1988, 153, my translation)[5]. Another chase of the Flemings took place in Vintry, where Chaucer spent his boyhood. Brewer talks about forty headless people lying in Thames Street. Others sought a shelter in the parish church of Saint Martin, but the endeavour to save their lives was vain. Chute mentions thirty-four, Brewer thirty-five people who were dragged out and beheaded. "Decapitation was a favourite technique of the insurgents—stabbing was not enough" (Brewer 1988, 154, my translation)[6]. One leader of these outrageous hordes was one Jack Straw; historical annals do not bear any record of him. However, his name was caught in the Canterbury Tales, when noisy people are chasing a fox that stole a cock in the Nun's Priest's Tale:

> So hydous was the noyse—a, benedicitee!—
> Certes, he Jakke Straw and his meynee
> Ne made nevere shoutes half so shrille
> Whan that they wolden any Flemyng kille,
> As thilke day was maad upon the fox.
>
> (Nun's Priest's Tale, Frag. VII, 3393 – 3397)

If the indifferent disdain with which Chaucer comments on that tragedy can be perceived as general opinion of the slaughter, then there must have been a great hatred for foreigners. Moreover, they were not only the Flemings who were persecuted during the revolt. According to Brewer, "the rebels proclaimed that whoever catches a Fleming or other foreigner, they can behead them" (Brewer 1988, 155, my translation)[7]. Consequently, many houses of the Italians were plundered. Fortunately, the drastic revolt was coming to its end.

Richard II agreed on negotiating with the leader of the revolt, Wat Tyler. He put in several conditions, of which the most important was the abolition of villeinage and the poll tax. Together with him there was John Ball, who demanded the abolition of the

entire paramount except for the King, forfeiture of the patrimony, and that all the bishops except for one should be deposed; the one remaining would be himself, a new Archbishop. The King stayed calm and agreed with all the rebels' demands. Then one of the King's negotiators called William Walworth, the London mayor, stabbed Tyler, and the bowmen from the lines of the insurgents got ready to shoot their arrows towards the King's retinue. "The unarmed fifteen-year-old boy set his horse at a canter towards the armed lines. 'Sirs, will you shoot your King?'" (Chute 1946, 198). By that courageous act the King achieved the ending of the Peasants' Revolt. The head of Sudbury was replaced by the head of Tyler, and the peasants obeyed the King's appeals to return home.

Thoughtful men were sure when assessing the Peasants' Revolt: "It was God's judgement upon England for her sins" (Chute 1946, 199). Perceiving disasters as God's punishment was nothing unusual.

> John Gower wrote a long poem, called Vox Clamantis, in which he interpreted the rising as a warning from on high. This was exactly the same way that another poet, the author of Piers Plowman, interpreted another catastrophe, the Great Wind that had levelled so many buildings in the London area in 1362.
>
> (Chute 1946, 199)

However, the rebellion was successful as far as the important requirements are concerned. Eventually, many of them were heard: The poll tax was immediately abolished, the villeinage was slowly withdrawing, and the exaggerated demands of John Ball were not taken seriously and faded away. The King did not retaliate, and the leaders of the revolt were pardoned.

Although there were many devastating events that ought to be pointed out when describing fourteenth century England, such as the wars against state enemies, revolts against taxes and nobility, or the catastrophic plague, it can be also characterised as time of rising national self-consciousness through writing in the English language, which had been quite unthinkable and unusual some hundred years before. For centuries Europe, once noble and high, was exposed to the extensive impact of the victorious and uneducated Barbarian tribes that came from the East and destroyed the Roman Empire at the beginning of the fifth century. However, the situation sun was slowly beginning to change at the turn of the thirteenth and fourteenth century. The transformation that

influenced all areas of human lives are called the Renaissance and began in Italian Florence, where Dante Alighieri wrote a famous work of art called the Divine Comedy. His Italian followers and their literary works were no less renowned: Petrarch's lyrical sonnets to Laura influenced European love poetry, and Boccaccio's Decameron inspired Geoffrey Chaucer to write the Canterbury Tales, which became an important part of English literature. Next to other sources, Chaucer was motivated by The Romance of the Rose, an influencing poem written in French.

A romance can be defined in two different ways. In its literal connotation it means anything written in one of the Romance languages; the second meaning of the word denotes a tale written in the Middle Ages and based chiefly on legend, chivalric love and adventure, or the supernatural. The first romances began to appear in France in the middle of the twelfth century, and the spirit of their glory swayed the following hundred years, mainly in France and Germany in the works of Chretien de Troyes, Benoit de Sainte-Maure and Gottfried von Strasburg. It had already been in decline when it reached Great Britain in the middle of the thirteenth century. The stories based on romantic love or religious allegories are subordinate to the three major areas within that genre: classical history and legend, the adventures of King Arthur and the Knights of the Round Table, and the acts of Charlemagne and his companions. The most famous Arthurian romances were written by Chretien de Troyes, who introduced the theme of Holy Grail to literature in his work Perceval ou li Conte du Graal. French romances were important for the formation of English writers.

The first part of The Romance of the Rose was written in the fourth decade of the thirteenth century by Guillaume de Lorris. Although it had used to be prohibited by the Church, by the time of Chaucer's life it had already been accepted and reputable. "Of all the books produced in the Middle Ages this was the one of the most loved, the most imitated and the most influential, and Chaucer was not the only poet who made it his handbook" (Chute 1946, 74). In his allegorical poem Guillaume depicted a young man who enters a garden in a dream and tries to pluck the most beautiful rose of all. This dream symbolises his love towards a woman and his desire to get her love in return. Chute claims that Guillaume was a master of allegory; he did not invent all the symbols, but knew how to combine them successfully. "There was hardly a poet in the fourteenth century, for instance, who wrote a love poem without enclosing it in the

framework of a dream" (Chute 1946, 75). The garden is ruled by the god of Love, and Guillaume gave the reader a complete description of how a courtly, innocent love should look like, according to the opinion held in the thirteenth century and inspired by Ovid. He calls it love "As pure as men but meet in dreams, / Where all is fair and nought is wrong" (as quoted in Chute 1946, 76). Unfortunately, the author died and left the book unfinished. After forty years, another French poet took the manuscript of The Romance of the Rose in order to complete it. His name was Jean de Meun and "there could hardly have been a writer more unlike the ornamental and courtly Guillaume" (Chute 1946, 77). If one may claim that Guillaume occupied himself only with courtly love, Jean de Meun filled his part of the romance with unbelievable number of opinions concerning everything in human life. Among many matters, he was also interested in the theme of love and approached it from different points of view: as a humorist, as a moralist, as a dramatist, as a Christian, as an aphorist and as a pagan, but he had never the outlook on love as his romantic predecessor, Guillaume de Lorris. Other themes come out in Jean de Meun's part of The Romance of the Rose, for example the innocence of primeval man, equality in marriage or pointing out that a king is born as naked as a beggar.

> He was as characteristic of the lively, mocking, sceptical spirit in the Middle Ages as Guillaume was of its stylised rigidity, and the combination of the two men inside the covers of a single book made The Romance of the Rose in one sense a summary of the whole medieval period.
>
> (Chute 1946, 77)

The both parts of The Romance of the Rose gave the poetic followers two different points of view. Whereas Guillaume de Lorris sees only the romantic part of love, the sickness of lovers, and the suffering they have to undergo, Jean de Meun is a realist in terms of perceiving also the other side of approach towards women, which he actually took from the Church. For centuries women had been depicted as the roots of evil, their foremother being Eve, who had been successfully seduced by the serpent and thus causing the long lasting agony of mankind. This view was transferred to contemporary conditions and broadened by many enthusiastic poets. "A woman not only sent a man to hell when he died but on earth she squandered his money, she nagged him in bed, she lorded it over him in public, she talked all the time and she was

as faithless as an alley cat" (Chute 1946, 81). Among various poets also Chaucer was capable of keeping that dichotomy in regarding women, being well trained by Guillaume and Jean. Two typical examples can be given, one being noble Emelye in the Knight's Tale, for whose love two best friends were willing to fight to death, the other perhaps unfaithful Alison in the Miller's Tale or the typical Wife of Bath, whose love and behaviour was certainly not courtly.

One notable feature has to be mentioned when talking about important pieces of writing that appeared and influenced authors in the fourteenth century in England: It is the language in which the works had been written. As it has been mentioned, England had been under strong influence of French since the Norman Conquest. It was the actual language at the court, the King gave his speeches in Parliament in it, and the nobility spoke in French, too. On the other hand, there had been a strong influence of Latin, which was the official language of the Church. All significant books circulating in England were written in those two languages, and new pieces copied the pattern, as well. However, the fourteenth age is the century of change. English was slowly gliding into the higher classes. "In 1362 a statute required all pleadings and judgements in all courts to be in English, since French was much unknown in the realm" (Wilkinson 1969, 225). Since then, also the Parliament sessions had regularly begun to be opened in English. After 1385 English became the primary language in all the grammar schools: Children learned French from English, not vice versa. When King Henry IV ascended to the throne in 1399, he gave his official speech in English as the English monarch for the first time. From then on, only English was used as the language at the court, though it was not the Old English that had been suppressed in the eleventh century by William I and his followers, but it was one with half of the words French, now called the Middle English. The changes on the basis of the spoken language must have reflected also in literature, where at least four influencing authors can be mentioned.

The first of them was William Langland, who wrote his magnificent work The Vision of Piers Plowman, published for the first time probably in 1362. This epic has 20387 lines and D. W. Robertson with B. F. Huppé described it as a poem "justifying the ways of God to man and setting forth the ideals which had to be reactivated in society if the Christian world was ever again to go on the greatest of all crusades, the pilgrimage to the heavenly Jerusalem" (as quoted in Wilkinson 1969, 228). His Piers is

Peter, a common man who identified himself with Christ, but he is also a ploughman for whom "Withinne and withouten waited his profit / Idyke[d] and id[o]lve, ido that he hoteth" (Piers Plowman 5544 – 5). He is a representative from the low classes, which were often scorned, but "Ne none sonner saved, ne sadder of bileve / Than plowmen and pastours and povere commune laborers" (Piers Plowman 10456 – 7). Langland's audience were perhaps the courtiers, whom he wanted to mock, indicating their moral failures and showing poor people suffering on their pilgrimage from birth to death: "I wol worshipe therwith Truthe by my lyve / And ben His pilgrym atte plow for povere mennes sake" (Piers Plowman 6101 – 2). The general validity of his visions classes William Langland as one of the most original writers of his age.

The second example of literature written in English was Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, a romance in archaic, alliterative verse. The name of the author is unknown, and the work originated in the middle of the century. Unlike The Vision of Piers Plowman, Sir Gawain was more precise and more polished, composed for educated, aristocratic audience, patronised by nobles who were in opposition to royal policy. It was a poem about chivalric virtues of genuine knights. "Whatever its origin and purpose, the alliterative verse is part of the emergence to ascendancy of the English language in English literature" (Wilkinson 1969, 228). Today the piece is regarded as one of the most beautiful English poems of the Middle Ages.

Another author living and composing in the fourteenth century was John Gower. He wrote his works in French; e.g. his Mirour de l'Omme, compound sometime before 1381, describes seven personified biblical virtues and seven vices struggling for a man. On the background one can find his deep interest in political, social and moral reform, which is probably common for many writers of the fourteenth century. The other language of Gower was Latin; e.g. the Vox Clamantis, written in 1385 and dedicated to King Richard II, was a treatise on the Peasant's Revolt. Under influence of his contemporary friend and colleague Geoffrey Chaucer, whose Canterbury Tales had achieved success, he tried to write in English, too. His Confessio Amantis, written in 1390, was a poem concerning morality. Later he even turned against his patron, courageously dedicating his work not to the King but to England, designating the King as undisciplined youth and "lecturing the King on his royal duties, declaring that the

God-given beauty of his person should be matched by the virtue of his soul" (Wilkinson 1969, 227). Chaucer gave him the attribute moral Gower owing to his instructions.

Finally, the greatest and the most significant writer of the period was Geoffrey Chaucer. His glorious work the Canterbury Tales became important to such a degree that contemporary literary critics divide English literature into that before Chaucer and after him. Although, besides his native English, he knew French, Latin and Italian, he decided to compose in English, and thus contributed to proliferation of the English language in written works. Because of the importance of Geoffrey Chaucer's writing as well as the focus of this thesis, he is going to be treated separately in the following chapter.

iii. Geoffrey Chaucer

Contemporary literary researchers confront difficulties when investigating people in England in the fourteenth century. It is usually a problematical task to assign their age because then it was not the custom to keep any records. Even the son of John of Gaunt, King Henry IV, was not sure about the date of his birth. Moreover, nobles and knights usually thought that they were younger than they really were when determining their age. Another problem arises with people's identification. On the one hand, people had already got used to the custom of employing surnames, but, on the other hand, there were similar surnames around England. Surnames began to be used hereditarily and fixedly only from the end of the fourteenth century. To sum up, historic people are swathed in mystery, inclusive of writers. It is only assumed that the author of The Vision of Piers Plowman was indeed William Langland; and there are many poems, e.g. The Pearl or Sir Gawain and the Green Knight, of which the author is unknown. However, these problems do not occur when talking about the Canterbury Tales. There exists unerring evidence that the work was written by Geoffrey Chaucer, who can be unfailingly identified. "Fortunately, the surname Chaucer—with all its spelling variations—was rather rare in the second half of the fourteenth century, and Geoffrey was not as frequent a name as John or William" (Brewer 1988, 24, my translation)[8]. More disputed is the question of the year of his birth. It is supposed that he was born in 1340, in the fourteenth year of King Edward III's reign, but the only evidence from

which it can be derived is a record of Chaucer's testimony at a trial between two families, concerning the property right to use one coat of arms. The trial took place in Westminster Abbey on 15th October 1386. When the refectory asked him to specify his age, "he said that he was forty et plu, i.e. he was gone forty. Then he added that he had been wearing his knightly armour for already twenty-seven years" (Brewer 1988, 26, my translation)[9]. The inquiry is when men acquired the right to wear the armour, or bear arms. Edward Woodstock, the Black Prince, was allowed to lead the front flank in the victorious campaign against Frenchmen at the battle of Crécy in 1346 when he was sixteen, but that was unusual. Ordinary warriors used to begin to wear their armours when they were between twenty and twenty-two years of age. This corresponds with the fact that Chaucer partook in the military expedition to France in the years of 1359 – 60; he could be nineteen or twenty then. The question of when Chaucer was born is unimportant, and historians need not encounter any other obscurities concerning his curriculum vitae for Geoffrey's life ran in connection with the court.

Geoffrey spent his childhood in the London district of Vintry; their house was situated in Thames Street. His father John was a wine merchant and collector of customs. It was the custom that the women in the household looked after the children till the age of seven. Between seven and fourteen Geoffrey went to a parochial grammar school, in which the lessons were conducted in French. However, this changed in Chaucer's lifetime as it has been pointed out. "This reform was the work of a single Oxford schoolmaster, John Cornwall, but he had behind him the rise in English nationalism that had been generated by the long war with France" (Chute 1946, 33). The education was divided into two parts: trivium, which was lower, and quadrivium, which was the higher education taught at the universities. Chaucer completed the first part only, but next to rhetoric, logic and Latin grammar, of which trivium consisted, he certainly learned some arithmetic for his later career had a lot to do with the keeping of accounts. After finishing the school it was time to begin a new life, and Geoffrey decided to enter into employ of a noble magnate.

"The first written document mentioning the name of Geoffrey Chaucer is dated 1357 and shows him as a page in the household of Elisabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster and daughter-in-law of the King" (Chute 1946, 39). This information was preserved for the modern age only by coincidence. A zealous admirer of two anxious

Chaucer's pupils John Lydgate and Thomas Hoccleve used fragments of pages from the Countess's account books in order to brace the covers into which he bound their poems. Being a page meant for Chaucer the duty to learn an incredible amount of social manners and conventions of what is and what is not allowed to utter and do on different occasions; to sum up, he became familiar with the life at the court. In the Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, composed thirty years later, Chaucer himself gives a neat description of a squire.

> With hym ther was his sone, a young SQUIER,
> A lovyere and lusty bacheler,
> With lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse.
> Of twenty yeer of age he was, I gesse.
> Of his stature he was of evene lengthe,
> And wonderly delyvere, and of greet strengthe.
> And he hadde been somtyme in chyvachie
> In Flaunders, in Artoys, and Pycardie,
> And born hym weel, as of so litel space,
> In hope to stonden in his lady grace.
> Embrouded was he, as it were a meede
> Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede.
> Syngynge he was, or floytynge, al the day;
> He was as fressh as is the month of May.
> Short was his gowne, with sleves longe nad wyde.
> Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde.
> He koude songes make and wel endite,
> Juste and eek daunce, and weel purtreye and write.
> So hoote he lovede that by nyghtertale
> He sleep namoore than dooth a nyghtyngale.
> Curteis he was, lowely, and servisable,
> And carf biforn his fader at the table.
>
> (General Prologue, Frag. I, 79 – 100)[10]

It cannot be stated to what extent was Chaucer like the squire that he described, but e.g. the allusion to Artois, the shire around Calais, is biographical. He visited that area many times for Calais was an English dependency and the entrance gate to the Continent. From the lines one can assume that Chaucer accepted all values of courtly life without hesitation. Among its main attributes belonged loyalty, love, duty, bravery and beauty. In his free time he studied books, but he also tried to compose poems, which was nothing unusual, as it is seen in Chaucer's description, as well. "They were composed by many pages, many servants and squires, because to compose and sing songs

belonged to the education of every courtier" (Brewer 1988, 70 – 71, my translation)[11]. He let himself inspire not only with English alliterative verse, which he found rather awkward and stylistically absurd, but he read also French poems, which were full of much better words and expressed courtlier manners, e.g. The Romance of the Rose. Nonetheless, he stayed loyal to English, although many contemporary poets wrote in French at his time. "For example, a big anthology of English poetry, compiled in about 1400 and called the Vernon Manuscript nowadays, contains a series of poems that Geoffrey undoubtedly read in their older versions" (Brewer 1988, 71, my translation)[12]. It is necessary to understand that imitating was not conceived as it is in the modern age: Even Shakespeare was a great imitator. However, peaceful days under the protection of Countess Elizabeth ended for Geoffrey in autumn 1359, when Edward III gathered a huge army in order to invade France, and the Countess Elisabeth's husband Lionel, the King's son, got ready to help him together with the men from his court.

Edward III was an excellent warrior, unlike his homosexual father Edward II or his effeminate grandson Richard II. It is necessary to understand that warfare was conceived as something important, exciting and glorious. Christianity was not a pacifist religion and hermits with crosses in their hands were blessed same as knights with swords in theirs. In his reign the English won many important battles. Between the years of 1355 – 57 France was successfully plundered under the leadership of Edward III's son, Edward the Black Prince, who also won the famous battle of Poitiers in 1356, in which he even captured Philip, the King of France. It is not surprising that King Edward saw himself as the French King after more than twenty years of fights. However well the English were prepared, the invasion was unsuccessful. They did not manage to conquer Reims, which was the coronation town of French kings, because its citizens had fortified themselves well, leaving the area of forty miles around it completely deserted. The enormous crowd of men ran out of food soon, and the King decided to march to Burgundy. During this stride the French captured Geoffrey Chaucer, who was a valet in the retinue of the Prince of Wales, under whom Lionel belonged. "Fortunately for the English literature, very few soldiers died in battle in the Middle Ages; the popular institution of ransom made a living soldier more useful to the enemy than a dead one" (Chute 1946, 47). In fact, ransoming was a well-developed business: The Keeper of the King's Wardrobe paid sixteen pounds to have Chaucer

ransomed. From Burgundy King Edward headed towards Paris, wanting to bring Parisians down to their knees, but they retired safely within their walls. Consequently, the weather turned against the English, "when a violent storm struck without warning, accompanied by lightning and hail and so sudden a drop in the temperature that men died as they sat on their horses" (Chute 1946, 48). This event was later named the Black Monday, and the King took it as a sign that God sided against him, and promised to sign a just peace. England got back the whole of Aquitaine, and the King of France, Philip, was sold to the French for three million golden crowns, of which the English actually got only one third. Still, it was ten times the annual revenue of the English crown, and Edward III was at the height of his glory.

In the year of 1360 Geoffrey Chaucer belonged to the court of the Countess of Ulster and in 1367 he already worked in the retinue of the court of the King. Between those two years there is no evidence of what Chaucer was doing except for the presumption that he studied in the juridical college Inner Temple in London, where he met John Gower. This fact was concluded from a note of Thomas Speght, the headmaster of a school in Ely and a devoted Chaucerian from the middle of the sixteenth century, who claimed: "It seems that both the scholars were together in the juridical college Inner Temple; for it has not been long since Mr. Buckley saw a record in that college, according to which Geoffrey Chaucer was fined two shillings for having beaten a father Franciscan in Fleet Street" (as quoted in Brewer 1988, 80, my translation)[13]. In 1926 it was proved that Mr. Buckley was a keeper of the files in that college, but, unfortunately, the record was destroyed during centuries, so this information is not verifiable. However, records from the neighbouring college, which were preserved, show that squires from the king's court often studied law, and incidents similar to the one described were not rare for both the colleges were next to a big Franciscan convent. Contemporary literary researchers agree on the fact that Chaucer probably had legal education, and it is possible that he was educated for the important position that was awaiting him. In 1367 Geoffrey Chaucer was in the King's employ: There is evidence that he was given a gift of a Christmas robe in addition to his salary as a king's squire, or valet of the chamber. This post had used to involve taking care of the King's wardrobe and jewels, attending and serving the King in his bedchamber.

However, times had changed in the fourteenth century, and a squire of the King became a governmental agent.

> Chaucer and his fellow esquires were in a general way the medieval equivalent of the modern civil service performing a good many of its diplomatic functions as well as lesser errands throughout England and abroad. An esquire might be sent about the country as a purchasing agent, to act as a custodian of horses, or to borrow or convey money, and especially he would be used on foreign diplomatic missions. No permanent resident embassies of any kind were established until the following century, and all the work that was later performed by embassies had to be done by government envoys sent especially for the purpose.
>
> (Chute 1946, 56)

Once being in the King's employ, Chaucer's life became firmly bound up with the court. It was a custom to unite the King's squires with the Queen's demoiselles, and the time had come for Geoffrey, as well. He married Philippa, a daughter of Sir Gilles de Roet, who was a Flemish knight in employ of Marguerite, the Empress of Germany, and then in the employ of her sister Philippa, the Queen of England. Geoffrey's wife had a beautiful sister, Katherine Swynford, who entered the annals as a mistress of King Edward III's son, John of Gaunt, the Duke of Lancaster. Their love must have been great since he waited for the possibility to marry her till the age of fifty-six when his previous wife died, Katherine then being ten years younger than him, which shocked all prospective brides within the upper class around England as well as France and other countries. Thus Geoffrey's existence happened to be linked with the life at the court of the Lancastrian house through his sister-in-law, who "became the second only to the Queen" (Chute 1946, 60). The important question is whether such relationship could have had any effect on the poet. There is common agreement that Chaucer had no special advantages derivable from his wife's sister's position, perhaps except for the fact that Philippa was employed in the house of Lancaster, which certainly helped the income of Chaucer's household. They often lived separately because Philippa Chaucer was a lady-in-waiting of Constance, John of Gaunt's first wife, who lived largely outside London, whereas Geoffrey used to spend most of time in London except for being on travels. In Chaucer's poetry marriages are described with disrespect, undergoing similar attacks as the Church, which may bring his readers into the conclusion that their marriage was unhappy. However, Chaucer kept his privacy in

distance: “He was one of the most impersonal of poets and it is almost impossible to find him speaking for himself” (Chute 1946, 61). Every age has its own kind of humour, and it is probable that jokes about dominant wives were contemporary popular sport about the nation in the fourteenth century, for even Langland did not avoid the theme claiming “Do-right-so-or-thi-dame-shal-thee-bete” (Piers Plowman 6079). In conclusion of this discussion one can only say that if the accomplishment of a marriage is to be measured with the length of it, the Chaucers’ marriage was quite successful because they were married for more than twenty years and had at least two children.

The beginnings of Chaucer’s employ at Edward III’s court are coincident with the beginnings of his making poetry. One year before the last massive stroke of the Black Death, in 1368, the heiress of the vast Lancastrian estate, Duchess Blanche, died of the plague similarly as her sister and father, aged only twenty-seven. John of Gaunt thus inherited besides the title of the Duke of Lancaster also incredible wealth, which made him richer than his royal father. Certainly independent on this fact, he asked Chaucer, who had already achieved a good reputation regarding his poetic creativity, to compose a poem in honour of his deceased, beloved, beautiful wife. Geoffrey managed to write 1334 verses within an incredible fortnight, but many times he derived his lines from French poets Froissart and Machaut, whom he loved and admired. The poem reminds of romances, although the explicitness with which the hero’s lover’s death is described evokes rather an unromantic statement of hunters who eventually captured and got down the long-chased game.

> “She ys ded!” “Nay!” “Yis, be my trouthe!”
> “Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!”
> And with that word ryght anoon
> They gan to strake forth; al was doon,
> For that tyme, the hert-huntyng.
>
> (The Book of the Duchess 1309 – 1313)[14]

At the end of 1372 Edward III delegated diplomatic negotiations with Genoese Doge and other town representatives on Geoffrey Chaucer. Genoa was an independent and wealthy state, and the negotiations concerned trading with the city as well as using English havens by the Genoese. Besides this mission Geoffrey had a secret task in Florence regarding a money loan from one of rich Italian banks. “This was the

important part of the trip as far as his development as a poet was concerned, for it was his first contact with a kind of writing that was neither classical nor French" (Chute 1946, 102). Florence was a great Renaissance city, twice the size of London, built of stone unlike the English capital, pulsating with energy. It could impress Geoffrey with its well-developed industry, architecture and trade on the one side, and with its worldwide influencing intellectualism, art, and, of course, literature on the other side.

The most important writer who had lived in Florence was Dante Alighieri, being dead for more than fifty years then. Although the people of Florence had sent him to exile because of his political opinions, he was accepted enough as a great poet. If Chaucer had not known Dante's Divine Comedy so far, he must have encountered the magnificent work in Florence. There are at least two aspects that can be mentioned when discussing Dante's influence upon Chaucer. The first striking thing is using his native language when composing the masterpiece, the other is "his brilliant new use of the art of description differing from the French analytical style, which Chaucer had known well, in its specific realism" (Chute 1946, 104). The second famous Florentine writer was Giovanni Boccaccio, whose credit is even verifiable. As it has been stated, the framework of Decameron—people telling different stories to one another—directly affected that of the Canterbury Tales. Moreover, Boccaccio's poetic opus Il Filostrato served Chaucer as the basis of his Troilus and Criseyde, and the poem called Teseida inspired Geoffrey to write The Knight's Tale. No matter how much Giovanni Boccaccio influenced Geoffrey Chaucer, the latter never mentioned the former one's name anywhere. The last of the beloved poets was Francis Petrarch, who was the only one whom Chaucer could have met for he was in Florence at the time of Chaucer's visit, unlike Boccaccio. Unfortunately, it is certain that the two never met each other for no records of such a meeting were found in Petrarch's detailed personal diary. However, his sonnets to Laura were written also in his vernacular, and if by any chance Chaucer had not owned them, he certainly bought a copy of them in one of Florentine bookshops.

These three renowned writers were, besides other important events, very important for formation and development of Geoffrey Chaucer as a poet. The long-lasting gap of anti-culture that Europe had to undergo after the noble world of the Romans was conquered by the uneducated barbarian tribes from the East eventually

came to its end in the fourteenth century. The Renaissance started in Florence, and all the three men were typical representatives of its nature; they were Renaissance in every aspect of their lives. Medieval works were written in Latin and they concerned entirely religious matters. However, the situation changed, and writers like Dante, Petrarch and Boccaccio appeared, writing their works in the vernacular and being not afraid to choose worldly topics for their works. Consequently, other poets could take inspiration from their effort, which resulted in the separation of spiritual and secular literature. Among those who tried to compose in non-ecclesiastical style was also Geoffrey Chaucer, who returned back to England from his mission in spring 1373.

One year after his business trip to Italy, Chaucer ceased to be an ordinary squire of the King and was inducted into a special governmental commission of Comptroller of the customs and subsidy of wools, skins and hides in the port of London. The controller was responsible for monitoring the honesty and efficiency of the actual collectors. While the post provided safe subsistence for the Chaucers, the export duty imposed on raw wool made the main income of the English government at that time. Therefore, as it has been stated, the best weavers from Flanders moved to England in order to circumvent the high tax, but their dwelling there caused incredible xenophobic hysteria and massacres during the Peasants' Revolt. Together with the new job he was rented also a new flat, which was situated above one of the city gates—Aldgate. There he had enough space and peace to indulge in reading; and he read every available book. Geoffrey himself described his approach towards literature in the eagle's speech in The House of Fame.

> For when thy labour doon al ys,
> And hast mad alle thy rekenynges,
> In stede of reste and newe thynges
> Thou goost hom to thy hous anoon,
> And, also domb as any stoon,
> Thou sittest at another book
> Tyl fully daswed ys thy look;
> And lyvest thus as an heremyte,
> Although thyn abstynence ys lyte.
>
> (The House of Fame 652 – 660)[15]

The last line may be an allusion to the daily gift of a pot of wine that Chaucer began to receive from 1374, perhaps for the successful mission to Italy. His hermit-like

behaviour, encouraged by the good wine, seems to have been beneficial for future readers; for at the time when Chaucer lived above Aldgate he composed three great poems and translated one philosophical work from Latin. Besides the mentioned House of Fame he wrote The Parliament of Fowls and Troilus and Criseyde; and the translation concerned Boethius' Consolation of Philosophy. However awkward it may seem, "it has been observed that Chaucer was most prolific as a writer when he was apparently most busy with other affairs" (Crow and Leland in Benson 1987, xvii). In the works written after Chaucer visited Italy there are already implicit hints of the Italian influence. In the first book of The House of Fame he introduced the condensed plot of Virgil's Aeneis. Another resemblance with Dante appears at the beginning of the second book: the invocation of Cipris (Venus) for help, and of the poet's thought to tell his dream right. The most interesting event comes afterwards, when a big eagle takes Geoffrey and flies with him in his claws. The flight may one remind of Dante's wandering through the Inferno, Purgatory and Heaven. During the flight the eagle explains to the poet why all uttered statements end up in the House of Fame. In the third book the poet gives an extensive list of the writers with whom he has had experience. When he comes to the Hall of Fame and somebody asks him if he came for fame, he lowly answers:

> "Nay, for sothe, frend," quod y;
> "I cam noght hyder, graunt mercy,
> For no such cause, by my hed!
> Sufficeth me, as I were ded,
> That no wight have my name in honde.
> I wot myself best how y stonde;
> For what I drye, or what I thynke,
> I wil myselven al hyt drynke,
> Certeyn, for the more part,
> As fer forth as I kan myn art."
>
> (The House of Fame 1873 – 1882)[16]

This modest attitude with which Geoffrey approaches the secular glory that writing poetry could bring him underlines the greatness that he eventually achieved. The House of Fame is entirely a Renaissance work of art in the sense of its explicit secularisation. The poet came not for fame but to find out something new "Of love or suche thynges

glade" (The House of Fame 1889). The time has come to free literature from the ecclesiastical boundaries, and this Chaucer's work contributed to it, as well.

Meanwhile, changes happened at the top of the English realm. The successor to the throne, Edward III's eldest son Edward, the Prince of Wales, died in 1376, after eight years being a poor invalid, of a savage disease that he had brought from Spain. He himself wrote this epitaph, originally in French: "I am poor and bereft; I lie under earth / Were you to see me now, I do not think / you would believe that ever I was a man" (as quoted in Chute 1946, 117). The Good Parliament confirmed the Black Prince's son Richard the heir to the throne, which was confirmed also by John of Gaunt, Richard's uncle, who could easily seize the power to his hands. Edward III felt old and ill, and died of apoplexy only one year after his first-born son. Thus Richard became the King at the age of ten. In 1382 he married Anne of Bohemia, the daughter of Charles IV. It is generally agreed that there is an allusion to her becoming the Queen in Chaucer's description of Criseyde's attractiveness: "Right as oure firste lettre is now an A, / In beaute first so stood she, makeless" (Troilus and Criseyde I, 171 – 172)[17]. At that time Chaucer wrote The Legend of Good Women, which he dedicated to Queen Anne, and in which he described women faithful in their love—quite the contrary to his depiction of the faithless woman in previous Troilus and Criseyde. All the stories in The Legend of Good Women keep the same frame of a faithful woman loving an unfaithful man, and Geoffrey grew tired of the plot soon; therefore, the book was left unfinished, as many other Chaucer's works.

His connections to the court in London began to dissolve in 1385. Geoffrey Chaucer was allowed to choose a permanent deputy for his comptrollership and was appointed a Justice of the Peace, moving to the countryside in Greenwich, Kent. The post meant an instance lower than royal or church law, dealing with local problems on the local level. Being a Justice of the Peace enabled Chaucer to meet incredible amount of different people, for Justices solved anything between an assault and a murder, as well as to hear the same number of different people's stories. No one knows when Chaucer got the idea of writing his greatest work, The Canterbury Tales, but it is quite probable that the composition was incubating in his mind for a long time. Chaucer wrote this piece sometime in the second half of the 1380's. His inspiration for the tales came from many different sources, and the picture of the pilgrims could be designed

during a lot of journeys between London and Canterbury that Chaucer travelled since the road was the main one from the capital to the south. The plot of the frame story begins perhaps in 1387 in a Southwark pub, where a gay jumble of people are getting ready to start their journey to Canterbury in order to bow and kneel before martyr Saint Thomas Becket.

> Bifil that in that seson on a day,
> In Southwerk at the Tabard as I lay
> Redy to wenden on my pilgrimage
> To Caunterbury with ful devout corage,
> At nyght was come into that hostelrye
> Wel nyne and twenty in a compaignye
> Of sondry folk, by aventure yfalle
> In felaweshipe, and pilgrimes were they alle,
> That toward Caunterbury wolden ryde.
>
> (General Prologue, Frag. I, 19 – 27)[18]

The twenty-nine people are joined by the innkeeper, who persuades them that they can amuse themselves by telling two stories each on the way there and also two on the way back. After their return to the inn, the teller of the most entertaining and enlightening story could dine at the others' cost. If Chaucer fastened onto his formal intention, the work would contain 120 tales, which would be certainly interesting. However, Chaucer had never completed this difficult task, leaving only twenty-four behind him, some of them even unfinished. Nevertheless, he still managed to create an outstanding work of art, full of wit and delight, which is nowadays considered one of the most important work of English fourteenth-century literature.

Between the years of 1389 and 1391 Geoffrey worked as the Clerk of the King's Works and then he was appointed Deputy Forester for a forest in Somerset, which ensured sufficient income for Chaucer, already a widower. The last years of the poet's life were uneasy. After John of Gaunt's death Richard II confiscated all the property of the rich house of Lancaster and sailed to Ireland to suppress a revolt. John's son Henry, who was only half a year older than Richard, came to take back his heirloom and found that people hated Richard and welcomed him. Being sustained by the nation, Henry assumed the power while Richard was dethroned and killed. The changes on the throne in 1399 slowed down the payments of the annuities, and forced the writer to compose The Complaint of Chaucer to his Purse, a witty poem addressed to Henry IV to remind

him of his duties. At the end of the same year Chaucer rented a small house in the garden of St. Mary's Chapel at Westminster Abbey, but he was not allowed to enjoy living and writing in peace for a long time. He died on 24th October 1400 and his body was buried in Westminster Abbey, in the place called Poets' Corner. Geoffrey Chaucer's contribution to English literature is exceptional. Next to important translations, he composed a big amount of poetry written in his vernacular, in Middle English. The following chapter is dedicated to an elaborate examination of one of his tales, The Prioress's Tale, from the point of view of the true character of the Prioress, as well as Chaucer's possible anti-Semitic attitude to the story.

iv. The Prioress's Tale and other stories about Jews

The tale told by the Prioress is not extensive as far as the plot is concerned. In a big town far in Asia there was a ghetto full of Jews living on usury, which was forbidden to Christians, who lived in the city, as well. These Christians opened a school for their children at the outskirts; among them was a widow's seven-year-old son, who was a devoted Christian in spite of his age. At school he heard older pupils singing a Latin song, the Alma Redemptoris. He had the meaning of the song explained by one of the pupils and found out that it was praise of Virgin Mary. His friend then taught him all the song, and the boy was singing it on the way to and from the school every day. Unfortunately, this provoked the Jews by whose houses the boy walked, and they colluded to kill him for their hearts were possessed by Satan. They hired a murderer in order to get rid of the boy. He slit his throat and tossed him into a cesspool. The widow was waiting for her son all the night and went to seek him in the morning, but she could not find him. When she asked the Jews, they lied that they did not know. Finally Jesus led her steps to the sewer where she found her beloved son jugulated but singing Alma Redemptoris. The Christians rushed to the place and took the boy into the local church. The boy's song was a miracle of Virgin Mary, who let him sing the last praise, placing a pearl on his tongue, before she took him to the Heaven. The provost revenged the boy's murder by ordering the punishment for all the Jews who were guilty: They were drawn by horses and hanged thereupon. At the end of the story there is a short prayer for mercy for sinners.

This breathtaking tale was told by the Prioress. At the first glance she is a pious, modest person in a nun's habit, certainly competent enough in order to be able to be in charge of a convent. This is how the poet from the group of the pilgrims saw her:

> And sikerly she was of greet desport,
> And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,
> And peyned hire to countrefete cheere
> Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
> And to ben holden digne of reverence.
>
> (General Prologue, Frag. I, 137 – 141)[19]

Chaucer's description of the Prioress in the General Prologue is a "portrait full of humour and pleasant jibes" (Manly 1926, 219). The first thing that people do when they meet is each other's introduction. "And she was cleped madame Eglentyne" (GP, I, 121)[20]. Benson explains that the name means "briar rose, which probably connotes heroines in romance or the Virgin" (Benson 1987, 804). Thus her name should evoke the innocence of Virgin Mary as well as grandeur of romantic ladies. Her speech lacked worldly rudeness and when she swore, she used only a name of a saint. "Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy" (GP, I, 120)[21]. Since orthodox Christians could not use the God's name, she chose the name of St. Eligius, who himself refused to take an oath, which meant that the person actually did not swear. John M. Manly states "she swore by the most elegant and courtly saint in the calendar, one thoroughly representative of the feminine tastes which she preserved in spite of her devotion to religion" (Manly 1926, 213). Another fact that brings the reader closer to getting acquainted with the Prioress when discussing speech is her knowledge of French. As it has been stated, the higher class spoke French whereas the lower classes spoke English. "And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly, / After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe, / For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe" (GP, I, 124 – 126)[22]. This proves that she learned her French at school; she did not have any experience with real French spoken in Paris or at the court, which she, nevertheless, probably would like to master. All these innuendoes bring the reader to the idea that the Prioress wanted to look like somebody nobler than who she really was. Her courtly-like behaviour is expressed in the lines describing her careful manners at the table.

At mete wel ytaught was she with alle;
She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.

(GP, I, 127 – 132)[23]

All that is said about her table etiquette is in neat compliance with the impression of a well-bred lady. She paid all attention not to soil her clothes, or otherwise break the rules, and the last line explicitly states that her greatest pleasure was in courtesy. Chaucer's usage of the term can be conceived in two ways. "This word has associations with faithfulness to a way of life ordained by God as well as with an aristocratic refinement of manners and spirit" (Benson 1987, 804). When drinking wine, she was taking care even not to dirty the glass. "Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene / That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene / Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte" (GP, I, 133 – 135)[24]. No matter how good all her manners were, they remind one rather of a gentlewoman from the court than of a religious nun, which is probably the ambiguity that Chaucer wanted to arise. Moreover, she was also tenderhearted and could not stand even thinking about pain or death; the more surprising is the violence with which the Jews in her tale are punished. "She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous / Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde" (GP, I, 144 – 145)[25]. When considering the behaviour of the Prioress, one arrives at the conclusion that she wanted to impress the other pilgrims so that they would have the best opinion of her character.

Another important fact that is revealed when reading about the Prioress concerns again the difference between her calling to be a nun and her actual behaviour. People serving to God are not supposed to have their own families and they usually do not long to have one in order to be fully available to God's needs. However, Chaucer's Prioress kept dogs, which shows that she was very influential in her convent since "nuns were ordinarily forbidden to keep animals" (Kuhl in Benson 1987, 805). She took the little dogs with her on the pilgrimage, and her behaviour towards them could one remind of a mother looking after her children. "Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde / With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed" (GP, I, 147)[26]. She gave her dogs only the best food, which is strange for a person who should rather take care of Christ's poor than keep animals for her own pleasure. "We are startled by the kind of food she feeds her

animals… Since books of the time recommend soft meats and bread softened with milk as ideal foods for weaning infants, we wonder if frustration has not perhaps directed the Prioress's maternal instincts toward her pets" (Condren 1989, 194). Her possible motherly feelings are also expressed in her prayer before she started telling her tale. "But by the mouth of children thy bountee / Parfourned is, for on the brest soukynge" (The Prologue of the Prioress's Tale, VII, 457 – 458)[27]. Although the mention of the child can be only the expression of her desire to be as innocent as a child according to Jesus in the Bible, it could also be her desire to become a mother. And once more Chaucer leads the reader to the conviction that the Prioress is a compassionate woman when he describes her pathetic feelings towards the dogs. "But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed, / or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte; / And al was conscience and tendre herte" (GP, I, 148 – 150)[28]. Chaucer's Prioress was a very sensitive woman as far as one can suppose from her depiction in the General Prologue; nevertheless, her approach to the Jews in her tale is cruel and elusive.

When hearing the word nun, one imagines a hazy figure dressed in a poor habit, perhaps holding an ordinary rosary in her hands and praying. Monks and nuns were supposed to be more underprivileged than the poor of the world. However, the poet noticed the beauty of her cloak which evokes rather worldly fashion. "Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war" (GP, I, 157)[29]. As regards the Prioress's robe, Ruth Ames concludes that "the symbolism of her habit was apparently lost on the Prioress, who had instead taken advantage of the system to rise to a position of importance" (Ames 1984, 176). An inherent part of a nun's habit is a wimple. Nuns cover their hair in order to hide their beauty before the eyes of men, keeping it for Christ only. Also the Prioress hid her hair and forehead with a wimple. "Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was" (GP, I, 151)[30]. On the other hand, Chaucer uses a witty hint to prove that she was not much occupied with strict hiding the parts of her body that were not supposed to be seen, when the poet claims: "But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed; / It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe" (GP, I, 154 – 155)[31]. Maureen Hourigan asserts that the Prioress's "veil is supposed to be pinned so tightly against her own eyebrows that none of her forehead shows, yet clearly hers is visible, for Chaucer as narrator mentions its breadth" (Hourigan 1996, 45). If the Prioress wears the wimple in the way that uncovers her forehead, then the piece of clothing reminds rather of mode than of a nuns' habit, which

proves her clinging to the worldly estates. As far as the holy chaplet is concerned, the Prioress had one, as well. “Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar / A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene / And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene” (GP, I, 158 – 160)[32]. It is necessary to remind that monks and nuns went to a monastery in order to serve God, and they voluntarily abandoned all the temptations that the world could offer. Nonetheless, it is apparent that the Prioress adhered to for-a-nun-unimportant things like jewellery. Kuhl notes “nuns were forbidden to wear brooches” (as quoted in Benson 1987, 805). Such material possessions place the Prioress among clergy who did not mean their occupation seriously. Ames claims that “Chaucer’s criticism of the Prioress is levelled… at her clinging to the silliest part of the feminine stereotype, love of jewellery and expensive clothes. A woman who chose the religious life was expected to put away such nonsense” (Ames 1984, 176). The simple brooch seems to be one of the most important parts of Chaucer’s description of the Prioress; it is a piece of “delicious ambiguity” (Friedman 1974, 120). On the brooch there was an inscription: “Amor Vincit Omnia” (GP, I, 162), which means “Love Conquers All.” Although the love in the writing is God’s one, and the saying was used widely in the Church, its origins reach as far as Virgil. As Adams states, “the possibility of secular interpretation remains, strengthening the portrait’s ambiguity” (as quoted in Benson 1987, 806). All these allusions guide one to the certainty that there is an un-Christian character under the husk of a pious nun. This is how the narrator from the group of the pilgrims saw her, and probably how Chaucer wanted the reader to see the woman. In spite of this, when researching into the character of the Prioress, it is necessary to employ also the opposite side of the view and ask how she perceived herself.

As soon as the shipman finished his story about a treacherous monk, the innkeeper asked the Prioress to tell her story, whereupon she began without any hesitation, starting her tale with praise of God almighty, followed by an invocation of Virgin Mary. In the prayer she revealed to her listeners how she felt about herself already before uttering the narrative. “For to declare thy grete worthynesse / That I ne may the weighte nat susteene; / But as a child of twelf month oold, or lesse / That can unnethes any word expresse” (The Prologue of the Prioress’s Tale, VII, 482 – 485). This passage shows clearly that the Prioress viewed herself as an infant no more than one year old. Friedman indicates that “by describing herself as such, the Prioress… lays

herself open to charges of 'arrested development' from hostile critics" (Friedman 1974, 124). However, the critics need not necessarily be conceived as hostile since the tinge could be exactly what Chaucer intended the reader to absorb. For the most apt characteristic that may depict a twelve-month-old child is its innocence, it can be stated that the Prioress wished to be allocated that attribute. On the other hand, her story of an ingenuous boy who is killed by malevolent Jews has its surprising climax in the form of their savage punishment.

If it were possible to characterize The Prioress's Tale with one word only, it would be the word pathetic because, during her narration, she uses many expressions that should arouse sympathy amidst her listeners. First, the child is described as an innocent schoolboy devout to the Christian faith and as a son of a widow on top of it:

> Among thise children was a wydwes sone,
> A litel clergeon, seven yeer of age,
> That day by day to scole was his wone,
> And eek also, where as he saugh th'ymage
> Of Cristes mooder, hadde he in usage,
> As hym was taught, to knele adoun and seye
> His Ave Marie, as he goth by the weye.
>
> (The Prioress's Tale, VII, 502 – 508)[33]

Everything that he does—especially his eagerness to learn Alma Redemptoris in order to praise Christ's mother—makes the boy more congenial not only to the pilgrims but predominantly to the Prioress herself. "One may reasonably argue that her sentimental sympathy with the little clergeon lacks mature detachment, that she enters too completely into the child's world, indeed that she identifies with him" (Friedman 1974, 124 – 125). Also other devices are used to describe the boy's innocence and to stimulate the readers' sympathy with him. When the boy is murdered, he is thrown into a cesspool, the idea of which is repulsive. After her mother finds him, he is portrayed as "This gemme of chastite, this emeraude, / And eek of martirdom the ruby bright" (TPT, VII, 609 – 610)[34]. The colours constitute a connection with the Prioress's rosary; she "gives the boy in her tale the very colours of her green and coral beads to symbolize his chastity and martyrdom" (Condren 1989, 203). Although the Prioress's empathy with the suffering boy may seem obtrusive, it could still be apologised if she did not

introduce the hatred for the Jews, which was quite contrary to her supposed Christian love.

The other person in the story evoking readers' sympathy is the boy's mother. She wept all night when her son had not come home, and went to look for him as soon as the dawn came. Later she found out that her boy was last seen in the ghetto. "With moodres pitee in hir brest enclosed, / She gooth, as she were half out of hir mynde, / To every place where she hath supposed / By liklihede hir litel child to fynde" (TPT, VII, 593 – 596). The Jews did not want to disclose their crime and therefore they did not tell her where the boy's body lay. When she found him because of Holy Mary's miracle, her son's throat was slit. Inside the church where people took him, she collapsed. "His mooder swownynge by his beere lay; / Unnethe myghte the peple that was theere / This newe Rachel brynge fro his beere" (TPT, VII, 625 – 627)[35]. The mother broke down because she lost her beloved, and Chaucer compares her to Rachel, a biblical woman who was inconsolable over the loss of her child. In this association Benson cites David, who sees an interesting parallel asserting that "such reminiscence of Old Testament material suggests Chaucer's awareness that Jews were not only legendary monsters but children of the promise; and thus an ironic contrast is created between the Prioress's view and his own" (as quoted in Benson 1987, 916). To sum up, the two main characters, the boy and his mother, are depicted in the way that insinuated sympathy. "Chaucer's principal artistic concern in using pathos is to produce a strong emotional effect… Special attention is given to the emotional reaction of the central character, and, often, of witnesses, and of the narrator as well… This, of course, is the essential nature of the pathetic" (Frank 1982, 143 – 144). The Prioress needed all the sympathetic emotions that her narrative brought about so as to defend the cruelty of the Jews' deaths.

The villains in The Prioress's Tale are Jews whose hatred for an innocent Christian child culminated in its condemnable murder. They lived in the Asian city "Sustened by a lord of that countree / For foule usure and lucre of vileynye, / Hateful to Christ and to his compaignye" (TPT, VII, 490 – 492)[36]. Already in these opening lines the Prioress condemns Jews for practising usury, which was actually the fault of Christians who did not let them do crafts, allowing them only such activities that were sinful in their eyes, e.g. to lend money at interest. The attributes that the Prioress used

when describing the Jews underline the difference between her pathetic attitude towards the boy with his mother and her hateful attitude towards the Jews. First, the Prioress claims that the Devil dwells in their hearts: "Oure firste foo, the serpent Sathanas, / that hath in Jues herte his waspes nest" (TPT, VII, 558 – 559). Then the Jews are described as damned Herod's offspring in her narrative: "O cursed folk of Herodes al newe" (TPT, VII, 574). This Prioress's hint should probably remind of an awful King Herod's deed described in the Gospels when he let all the children up to the age of two in his kingdom be killed because he was afraid of the new king, Jesus, who was an infant then. The widow's son walked through their ghetto to school singing a Christian song every day, which irritated them to such a degree that they hired a murderer. "This cursed Jew hym hente, and heeld hym faste, / And kitte his throte, and in a pit hym caste" (TPT, VII, 570 – 571)[37]. This assassination was even more horrible when one considers the age of the boy—he was only seven years old—as well as the innocence with which he was described. When the widow asked them if they knew where her son was, they refused to tell her the truth, which again depicts their evil nature: "She frayneth and she preyeth pitously / To every Jew that dwelte in thilke place, / To telle hire if hir child wente oght forby. / They seyde 'nay'" (TPT, VII, 600 – 603)[38]. However, the Prioress did not need all her pathos only for emphasising the dreadfulness of the Jews' act, but, primarily, for the atrocity of their punishment.

Chaucer's Prioress's Tale was not original, there were more versions of the story circulating around England. The first to be mentioned is a tale called A Little Boy Murdered in Paris that appears in the Vernon Manuscript, which is a "vast miscellany of religious or didactic pieces, written in Middle English" (Kolve and Olson, 1989, 423). The plot is roughly the same as in The Prioress's Tale; the biggest difference can be indicated in the punishment of the Jews. The Prioress clearly states that all the Jews who were found guilty by the provost got what they deserved: "Therfore with wilde hors he dide hem drawe, / And after that he heng hem by the lawe" (TPT, VII, 633 – 634). However, the Vernon version mentions only the murderer's judgement and there is not any allusion to what punishment he got. "Straightaway, ere they passed further, / The Jew was judged for that murder" (A Little Boy Murdered in Paris 113 – 114). On the other hand, next to the Vernon Manuscript there were also other adaptations of the story. Cooper gives reference to older versions in Latin, where "the worst fate

mentioned for the Jews is that they cannot hear the miraculous song" (Cooper 1989, 289). Other versions are even milder in their attitude towards the villains, converting them to Christianity. In the version that appears in Kolve and Olson, the archbishop "was more eager for the saving of a soul than for the punishment of the crime; he baptised the Jew and entrusted him to the church; having marked him with the sign, he remitted the penalty and pardoned the crime" (Kolve and Olson 1989, 423). Compared to the other versions of the tale, the Prioress's one had quite a bloodthirsty climax which she reached using pathetic motives of a helpless widowed mother and her innocent boy who was jugulated by vicious Jews. She probably did not realise the abysmal difference between her theoretical Christian love and the concrete hatred that she showed in her story. This unconscious duality of hers is also revealed in the ironic allusion to a proper holy life when she talked about the abbot who celebrated the mass for the dead boy in her tale: "This abbot, which that was an hooly man, / As monkes been—or elles oghte be" (TPT, VII, 642 – 643). She ended the story with a prayer for mercy by which she again put herself into sharp contrast with what she had revealed in the tale. "Preye eek for us, we synful folk unstable, / That of his mercy God so merciable / On us his grete mercy multiplie, / For reverence of his mooder Marie. Amen" (TPT, VII, 687 – 690). The Prioress shocked all her listeners, which was expressed by the silence that spread after she finished her tale: "Whan seyd was al this miracle, every man / As sobre was that wonder was to se" (The Prologue to Sir Thopas, Frag. VII, 691 – 692). The other pilgrims' astonishment was just a reflection of the Prioress's ambiguity. Ames states that she "does not see that her prayer for mercy on 'us sinners' is inconsistent with this zeal for 'justice' against the Jews" (Ames 1984, 200). At the end of the tale one can state that the Prioress is quite a shallow person who does not live her nunhood much although she tries to look better than she really is in the eyes of the others. In her heart she keeps anti-Semitic feelings that are revealed when she talks about the Jews' cruel punishment. This xenophobic view is more bewildering when heard from a superior of a nunnery, who is expected to penetrate Christian love through all her life and acts.

Evaluating The Prioress's Tale from the point of view of anti-Semitism, it can be stated that the story contains at least one particular anti-Semitic part in comparison with other stories bearing the same motive and appearing in England at that time. Strictly expressed, it is "deeply and mindlessly anti-Semitic" (Cooper 1989, 292). However,

negative feelings against Jews were not rare in the fourteenth century although Chaucer himself could meet them only on the Continent for they were expelled from England in 1290, nearly one hundred years before he wrote his Canterbury Tales; the general view on anti-Semitism is going to be discussed later. It is highly probable that Chaucer knew the other versions of the story of a boy murdered by Jews. If hatred for Jews was only a matter of folklore, then The Prioress's Tale could be comprehended as "bold and obvious satire of anti-Semitism" (Friedman 1974, 119). The difference between the innocence of the child and the cruelty of the Jews' punishment could also be used only in order to underline the difference between the good and evil in the world. "To have ended the tale with a conversion would undoubtedly have made the story less pathetic; it would have lacked the clear-cut boundary between good and evil, martyr and devil, Christian and Jew, that gives the tale its impact. As a literary structure, however, it would have been more spiritually uplifting to a Christian audience and more in keeping with the character of a truly Christian nun" (Zitter 1991, 279). Nevertheless, there is another level that can be examined when talking about The Prioress's Tale: besides its anti-Semitic theme it is its criticism of the Church.

At this point one may ask what Geoffrey Chaucer's Christianity was like. After reading The Canterbury Tales it can be stated that Chaucer was not an enthusiastic Christian; he jested about a deceitful monk in The Shipman's Tale, and the Pardoner who has come back direct from Rome is described as a eunuch or homosexual without any beard in the General Prologue. The majority of his tales bear worldly themes despite the fact that the people are on a pilgrimage; the most favourite person is perhaps the wife of Bath. In his defence it must be mentioned that Chaucer revoked all his writing that was against God at the end of his days. However, his life did not show any great devotion to the Church—nota bene his incident of beating the father Franciscan in Fleet Street. Robert Frank asserts that "there is no reason to doubt that he shared the religious faith of his time" (as quoted in Boitani and Mann 1986, 146). Chaucer's biographer agrees on that matter, claiming that "Chaucer respected himself and his art as deeply as he respected Church" (Chute 1946, 62). However, by pointing at various deficiencies of the Church at that time he joined the ranks of those who criticised it, e.g. John Wyclif, a theologian from Yorkshire who was ten years older than Chaucer.

Wyclif insisted on using the vernacular and translated the Bible into English, in which he resembles Chaucer's approach. He believed that all the evils could be cured with the help of God. He attacked the intermediary role of the priest between lay people and God, he did not want the Church to accept donations and denied the right of the Church to excommunicate Christians. He based his faith solely upon the Bible, which brought a deep disagreement with the official teachings of his time.

> His dedication to reform, in face of the urgent needs of his age, led him more and more bitterly to assail those whom he regarded as the stubborn defenders of abuses: the 'regulars' whom he had long denounced; the friars whom he had at one time regarded with some favour; the 'Caesarean' clergy; and even the pope himself, who finally emerged as a potential and even actual Anti-Christ.
>
> (Wilkinson, 1969, 215)

In many respects Wyclif anticipated his age and ignited a vast reform of the Church that culminated in the fifteenth and sixteenth century. Although he made the officials feel uncomfortable, and they tried to bring him to court for trial, he had powerful supporters, e.g. John of Gaunt, who helped him. Therefore, he could die peacefully in his bed in 1384, but, unlike Chaucer, he was not allowed to reside in peace for a long time: His bones were removed from his grave in 1415, and in 1428 his ashes were thrown into the river Avon. His ideas served as the foundation stone of the protestant reformation all over the world.

Chaucer was not the only person using an anti-Semitic theme in his writing. In the last stanza of The Prioress Tale there is a hint mentioning a Hugh of Lincoln: "O yonge Hugh of Lyncoln, slayn also / With cursed Jewes, as it is notable, / For it is but a litel while ago" (TPT, VII, 684 – 686). Hugh was a child martyr murdered by Jews in 1255 according to a legend, and there is an old British ballad called Hugh of Lincoln containing the story of his assassination. The plot is simple because the ballad is relatively short. Boys, together with Hugh, were playing with a ball, but it went through the window into a Jew's house. Hugh asked the Jew's daughter, who leant out of the window, to toss him the ball, but she asked him to come up. Although he refused, she enticed him with apples and finally killed him. "She's led him in through ae dark door, / And sae has she through nine; / She's laid him on a dressing table, / And stickit him like a swine" (Hugh of Lincoln 27). Afterwards she threw the dead body into a deep well.

The boy's mother was looking for him but could not find him. Eventually she prayed him to speak to her by the well, and he answered, telling her to go home in order to prepare a winding sheet, and that they would meet at the end of the city of Lincoln next morning.

> And a' the bells o' merry Lincoln,
> Without men's hands were rung;
> And a' the books o' merry Lincoln,
> Were read without man's tongue;
> And ne'er was such a burial
> Sin Adam's days begun.
>
> (Hugh of Lincoln 28)

A parallel story appears in Percy's Reliques of Ancient English Poetry. It is called The Jew's Daughter and it is based upon a Scottish ballad that was derived from some Italian legend. The plot is very similar, but the boy's name is spelled Hew, and the story takes place in Milan, which is called Mirry-land in the ballad, resembling the Dutch expression Meylandt. Again they are apples that play their role when the Jew's daughter is enticing Hew: "Will ye cum in and dine?" (The Jew's Daughter 88). When he came, she stabbed him with a little penknife. The rest of the ballad is identical, except for the last stanza that appears in Hugh of Lincoln, which is quite missing. It seems that there was a strong belief that Jews were kidnapping and killing children from Christian families. The collector Percy, who lived between 1728 – 1811, says in the prologue to The Jew's Daughter that the story "is founded upon the supposed practice of the Jews in crucifying or otherwise murdering Christian children, out of hatred to the religion of their parents: a practice which hath been always alleged in excuse for the cruelties exercised upon that wretched people, but which probably never happened in a single instance" (Percy, s.a., 88). There was a dedicated cult of St. Hugh, especially around Lincoln where he had a plaque commemorating his martyrdom in the local cathedral until 1959. Contemporary studies prove the contrary; Langmuir states that "it is clear that the boy was not murdered by Jews" (as quoted in Benson, 1987, 916). However, not all the stories with the general subject of Jews deal with the theme of them killing Christian children.

Percy's collection contains an epic poem called Gernutus, the Jew of Venice, which has a similar scenario like the one in Shakespeare's Merchant of Venice. The plot

of the story is humorous and revolves around the central character, the Jew called Gernutus, who lived on usury. Already the third and fourth stanzas, which describe him, induce a hostile air against this man in readers' minds.

> His life was like a barrow hogge,
> That liveth many a day,
> Yet never once doth any good,
> Until men will him slay.
>
> Or like a filthy heap of dung,
> That lyeth in a whoard;
> Which never can do any good,
> Till it be spread abroad.
>
> (Gernutus, the Jew of Venice 202 – 203)

One day he lent one hundred crowns to a merchant who was at last need, and did not want any interest from him except for a bond that he would forfeit a pound of his own flesh if he failed to return the money in one year. Indeed, the man could not pay back because his ships were all at sea, whereupon Gernutus let him go into a gaol and sued him for the bond. The merchant's friends offered a hundred times more, but he insisted on the forfeiture of a pound of his flesh. The judge was a wise man and said to the Jew that he has to take exactly one pound: "For if thou take either more or lesse / To the value of a mite, / Thou shalt be hanged presently, / As is both law and right" (Gernutus, the Jew of Venice 206). In the end the Jew got nothing because he did not dare to cut the merchant's body. To conclude, comparing the stories which have been cited, both horrible ones like the Prioress's Tale or that about Hugh and witty ones like that about Gernutus, they resemble one another in one point: They contain common hatred for Jews, who were not favourite among Christians at that time. Frank even states that "it is an unhappy fact that anti-Semitism was endemic in the late Middle Ages" (Frank 1982, 154). Therefore, the following section of this dissertation focuses on the roots and features of anti-Semitism.

v. Pre-Christian Anti-Semitism

When investigating the roots of anti-Semitism that spread appallingly throughout human history, one must go as far as the origin of Judaism deep in the antiquity. The

contemporary denotation contains the word Semitism: The Semites is the general name for ethnic groups living in the area of Arabian Peninsula; their name is derived from Noah's son Sem. They have common type of language that is divided into three main branches: East-Semite (e.g. Akkadian), South-Semite (e.g. Arabian), and North-West-Semite (e.g. Hebrew). One of the Semitic tribes were Hebrews, or Israelites, who came to the land called Canaan—the Syrian-Palestinian tract of coast including the hinterland. The name Canaan means red purple, which is produced in that region. Their forefather, who lived from the twentieth to nineteenth century BC, was Abram, later re-named to Abraham by God himself. His father came probably from ancient Ur to Haran, a town located in the north of Syria. Abraham obeyed God's appeal and led his wife, nephew, and companions to Sichem, an important town 50 kilometres north from Jerusalem. His vision of God almighty laid the basis of up-to-then unknown phenomenon—Judaic monotheism. Every small nation in the historic world had their own religion, and they co-existed without any problems altogether; however, the Hebraic religion surpassed them all.

First, as the word monotheism implies, God of the Hebrews was only one in number, which was quite unusual for people who confessed hundreds of gods and idols, but still acceptable. Nevertheless, the second characteristic of Judaism was particularly unique: Hebraic God did not have any face or name, and his existence depended solely upon the faith of his worshippers: the fundament immanent for the whole religion. This was absolutely incomparable to any other religion, and caused Jews a lot of problems in cohabitation with many other nations, as it is going to be described later. God forbade any picturing of his entity as well as being called with a name; he himself denominated as Ehyeh, meaning I am; the third person singular being Yiehyeh, he is. These two attributes made Hebrews a very specific community differing sharply from other people.

Abraham did not stay in Sichem for a long time. He was driven further to Egypt, probably because the land around the Nile delta was more fertile. This desire of his to wander still away represents a trait common to all Hebrews, called the Diaspora, which is a Greek term meaning dispersion and indicating the settling of Israelites outside their tribal territory. The Diaspora is peculiar to Jews and it is as old as their own history. In the antiquity their settlements could be found all around the Mediterranean. In the Middle Ages they pervaded throughout Europe, they got to Asia, even as far as China,

and in the present they can be found anywhere in the world. Compared to other nations, Hebrews in the Diaspora were not pugnacious, which consequently turned against them. Israelites living in Egypt were akin to the tribe of the Hyksos, who were ruling there in the seventeenth and sixteenth century BC. At that time Joseph, Abraham's great-grandson, became the pharaoh's counsellor after he explained two weird dreams to him, and Hebrews enjoyed their best times in Egypt. However, the governing tribe was expelled to Palestine by a new dynasty, but Hebrews did not follow them there. Soon they began to be treated as enemies and later as slaves of the pharaoh, climaxing in the reign of Seti I and his son Ramesses II. This was the first documentary hostility towards Jews in history, recorded in the Second Moses' Book—Exodus, but it was not because of their religion yet as it may seem or as it is often depicted.

> Hebrews did not endanger Egyptian religion anyhow directly; perhaps only by being allies of invaders who apparently damaged Egyptian pantheon and who, besides other things, established the cult of God Seth. However, it is important to recall that religion at that time was not so weighty as it began to be several centuries later: it is mainly the expression of culture and nation.
>
> (Messadié 2000, 25, my translation)[39]

Their suffering was stopped by God, who sent Moses to lead them from Egypt back to the Promised Land, punishing the pharaoh with ten strokes that devastated his land, his people and himself. The Israelites wandered through the desert for forty years; the old generation that had experienced the life in Egypt had to die out. On their way back God gave his people a new law, the Decalogue, and thus appointed the basis of Judaism. Nevertheless, although Hebrews left Egypt, they did not keep any hostile feelings towards the country, which can be evidenced by the existence of their communities in many places there. Those Jews who came to Palestine established their own great kingdom, with the capital of Jerusalem, which lasted from the eleventh to the sixth century BC. They did not have any considerable problems with the surrounding nations, except for political ones, similar to those of any other nation, and continued with the Diaspora, settling around the Mediterranean. However, the glory of their realm ceased in the sixth century when it was overruled by the Persians, who still did not persecute them because of their religion, but only politically.

The fourth and third decades of the fourth century BC belonged to the magnificent reign of Alexander the Great, who conquered also Jerusalem and thus set Hebrews free from their Persian bondage. He forwarded the Diaspora allowing Jews to spread through his empire as well as to exercise their own laws within their communities. At that time many of them, especially those from higher classes, began to speak Greek; nevertheless, the processes of Hellenisation and Romanisation respectively that took the following two hundred years were fatal to them. The crescendo Greek impact influenced the language in synagogues and led so far that the high priest made the Jewish law void, instituting worshipping Greek gods in the Jerusalem temple. Orthodox Jews saw the danger of the disintegration of their religion, initialising a great revolt uder the leadership of the Machabees that culminated in expulsion of all the Greek from Jerusalem and its suburbs. In 161 BC they managed to conclude an agreement with Rome that Judea would be autonomous, which meant principally the exemption from taxes. However, they were not able to keep the hard-regained freedom. The Machabees were superseded by the Asmoneans, who were not competent to reign. The last king from the Asmonean dynasty Alexander Jannaeus became a despotic drunkard, and his sons Hyrcanus and Aristobulus engaged in fights for the throne, bringing the country into a civil war in 67 BC. Four years later the Roman general Pompey took the advantage of the inner instability and subdued Jerusalem, making the realm a part of the Roman Empire; all the following monarchs were vassals of Rome. The existence of the Machabean kingdom was important for awakening Jewish national as well as religious identity, which slowly spread also among the Jews living in the Diaspora. Unfortunately, this national consciousness became connected with hatred for anything foreign, caused by the fear to protect their religion. In the first century BC, Diodoros Sicilian described Jews as “the only nation that deprecates dealing with other nations and considers all other people enemies” (as quoted in Messadié 2000, 37, my translation)[40]. This picture of Jews in the Hellenised world was sustained also by a misinterpretation of Moses’ Torah that arose from Septuagint—the Greek translation of Pentateuch.

There was a great Jewish community in Alexandria: in the reign of Alexander the Great there were about 200,000 Jews. When he dominated Jerusalem, Alexander gave Jews special tax relieves and invited them to settle in other cities of his empire, as

well. However their presence in Alexandria may seem unperturbed, historical records prove the contrary. As an example can be mentioned Egyptian annals from the time of king Ptolemy I who reigned in the third century BC, which reveal a Macedonian deportation of 100,000 Jews from Jerusalem to north Egypt. The reason of such a massive transportation was solely political: 30,000 of those captives were men able to bear arms, who were later released by Ptolemy II, and the remaining 70,000 were old men, women and children who were given to Macedonian soldiers as slaves.

Gradual Hellenisation of the Jewish Diaspora in Alexandria came to such a stage that the majority of them forgot to speak Hebrew and, accordingly, could not read their sacral texts. Therefore, during the sovereignty of Ptolemy II, seventy-two sages came from Jerusalem to Alexandria in order to make a Greek translation of the Bible. They managed to translate only five Moses' Books; the prophets were translated a hundred years later and the complete Septuagint as it is known in the present was compiled in 100 AD. Thus Greek scholars came into contact with unknown literature, which caused misunderstanding and degradation of Jews in their eyes. They were not familiar with Hebraic history and law and became irritated by the overwhelming violence and severity of the text, condemning it altogether. For example, God of the Hebrews was presented as cruel to its own nation.

> For the Lord had said unto Moses, Say unto the children of Israel, Ye are a stiff-necked people: I will come up into the midst of thee in a moment, and consume thee: therefore now put off thy ornaments from thee, that I may know what to do unto thee.
>
> (Bible, Ex. 33, 5)

This was God's reprehension for Jewish idolatry when they made an idol of a bull in order to worship it. However, the Hebrews were God's Chosen People, and he was very malicious to the neighbouring nations threatening to destroy them with diseases. "When ye be come into the land of Canaan, which I give to you for a possession, and I put the plague of leprosy in a house of the land of your possession" (Bible, Lev. 14, 34). The Old Testament is full of similar passages; biblical God was quite intolerant in comparison with Greek gods, which they could not understand and identify with. When the Greeks broadened their empire, they never destroyed religions of subjugated nations; they rather absorbed them, increasing the number of their Gods. This

syncretism was not valid for Jews, whom God made obliterate altars of the defeated people.

> Take heed to thyself, lest thou make a covenant with the inhabitants of the land whither thou goest, lest it be for a snare in the midst of thee: but ye shall destroy their altars, break their images, and cut down their groves: for thou shalt worship no other god: for the Lord, whose name is Jealous, is a jealous God.
>
> (Bible, Ex. 34, 12 – 14)

Though it may seem inconceivable, the worst thing in the eyes of Greeks and Romans respectively were the Jewish customs of circumcision, observing Shabbat, and the prohibition of eating pork. Shabbat was described as idleness, though it was meant as the day of meditation and interlocution with God. Circumcision was a custom older than Judaism that was practised in ancient Egypt as well as in other countries. Its reason was not to differentiate Jews from other nations, although they presented it so, but simply a hygienic one. Unfortunately, Jews were held up to mockery and satire because of that custom. Eating pork was prohibited probably because of pig's pestilence, which was transmittable to people. A propos, Islam adopted this practice from Judaism. Jews insisted upon absolute observing all their directions and never surrendered their religion to any aggression. From historical point of view, they did it well because all Greek and Roman gods disappeared deep in time, but Judaism survived all the incredible hostility, to which it was exposed in the history, until the present.

This Greek-Roman anti-Judaism led to deprecating Jews in the Roman Empire and culminated in expelling Jews from Rome, which happened several times. The first case occurred sometime in the first century BC, but they certainly returned. "Cicero describes them in 59 BC as a numerous nation forming an informal community, whose antagonism is not advisable to arouse" (Messadié 2000, 56, my translation)[41]. The second departure, which took place in 19 AD in the reign of Emperor Tiberius, was recorded by a historian called Tacitus one hundred years later. In his writing he expressed some anti-Semitic feelings that were probably widespread at that time.

> Moses, in order to secure the nation, established new ceremonies, contrary to those of other people. In them everything is sinful that is in us sacred, and vice versa what is for us detestable is in them allowed… However were these customs instituted, they are justified by their antiquity: remaining institutions,

> perverse and detestable, were assumed for their evil. For the biggest rowdies, having despised their native religion, returned there tolls and allowances. Thus the power of Jews grew, and then accordingly because in them is unfailing faith and prompt mercy, but enemy malignity against all others.
>
> (as quoted in Messadié 2000, 58, my translation)[42]

These ideas may be described as open hatred for Jews as a nation that has its own customs and religion. No matter how much anti-Semitic the expulsion from Rome was, it cannot be compared to what happened to the Jews living in the Alexandrian Diaspora.

Alexandria was an important city in the western part of the Nile delta founded by Alexander the Great after conquering Egypt in 332 BC. Soon it became the most important Hellenic metropolis. It served as an Egyptian port for import of cereals and as a dock between the Mediterranean Sea and inland transportation. Its lighthouse on the isle of Pharos was one of the Seven Wonders of the World, and the library, originated by Ptolemy, was the most important one at that time, making the town the centre of Hellenic science and culture that lasted till the fourth century AD although it was defeated many times. The townspeople were Greeks, Egyptians, and Jews who formed the largest Diaspora in the world then. The nobler the city was, the more horrible was the event that happened there in 38 AD. Its roots were poor: When Caligula superseded Tiberius in 37 AD, the Alexandrian prefect Flaccus feared the loss of his post after he heard about executions that the insane emperor enforced, deciding to attract the Alexandrians' fancy by means of supporting their anti-Judaic feelings. The excuse occurred when Caligula appointed Herod's grandson Agrippa the ruler of Palestine. Agrippa was going to his new kingdom via Alexandria, visiting his old friends. Flaccus encouraged the Alexandrians' sulk that Jews have a new king; he forbade Shabbat and let the statue of Caligula be exposed in the Jewish temple in order to outrage Jews for they hated idolatry. Then Flaccus issued an edict stating that Jews are strangers in Alexandria, which divested them of their right to abode. The Alexandrians began to inveigh against Agrippa, arraigning him that he arrived in order to dominate the city. The Jews were accused of an insurgency, closed in their quarter and condemned to die of hunger. Those who left to bring some food were violently killed; the Jewish shops were plundered. No source mentions the number of victims, but certainly many people died during the revolt. That horrible event is in sharp contrast with the advance of the

Hellenic culture. However, a far worse massacre of the Jews in Alexandria happened twenty-six years later.

All started because of a big uprising against the Romans that occurred in Judea in 66 AD. Representatives of all the Alexandrian inhabitants except for Jews met in order to compile a message to Emperor Nero. Jews were curious what they were deliberating and penetrated into the place, but they were forced out. The Jews returned, threatening to set alight the building with the people in it. The prefect appealed to them to stop, but they did not want to, so he called the Roman army that dwelt in the city in order to repress the uprising. Flavius Josephus, a Jewish historian, gives the description of what the incident looked like.

> [The prefect allowed the detachments] not only to kill the Jews, but also plunder their possessions as well as burn down their houses. The soldiers plunged into the quarter called Delta, where the Jewry lived together, and accomplished the orders, naturally not without bloodshed… They had no mercy even with infants, they did not save any elderly men, but they massacred all without exception regardless the age. The whole place was flooded with blood, and fifty thousand dead bodies piled up. Nor would the rest have stayed alive if they had not begun to implore.
>
> (as quoted in Messadié 2000, 71, my translation)[43]

Although it is necessary to conceive counting in ancient times as exorbitant since fifty thousand was one fourth of the Jewish population in Alexandria, the number of the dead must have been very high. The displays of anti-Semitism began to bear the terrible shape of the slaughter because of cultural and religious diversity. Nevertheless, the worst massacre that happened in ancient times occurred among Jews themselves, and resulted in the fall of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

As it is obvious also from the New Testament, Jews were divided into several parties, and the division played an important role in the events that took place in the Holy City only four years after the terrible murders of Jews in Alexandria. The most powerful, sacerdotal party were the Sadducees, rich aristocratic Jews, who controlled the Jerusalem Sanhedrin—a kind of supreme court, state council, and legislative body. They were against Hellenisation and refused any new religious tendencies; recognising only the Pentateuch, they did not believe in the posthumous life. The second important party were the Pharisees, or the separating ones. They were pious lay Jews who strictly

wanted to adhere to the law that was rendered by the word of mouth, which differentiated them from the Sadducees, and whose relationship to Rome was moderate. Another party that was in direct opposition to the Sadducees were the Zealots, zealous enemies of Rome, who could be described as radical Pharisees. Unlike them, they proclaimed armed resistance against the Roman domination, awaiting the Messiah, a high priest and a king at the same time, who would come and restore the glory of the Jewish kingdom. Flavius Josephus mentions one more group among the Jews, so called Essens, who originated also from the pious Pharisees. They lived separately from the other Jews and their community reminds one of a religious order. They had common property, they did not recognise matrimony and anticipated the coming of God's kingdom, similarly as the Zealots. Only one of these four parties survived the fall of Jerusalem—the Pharisees. Their contemporary notion is influenced by the evangelists, who condemned them altogether, coping thus with the Jewry once and for all. However, their approach to faith was genuine to such a degree that, in fact, it preserved Judaism until the present: Today's Jews are the offspring of the Pharisees.

All the blame for the conquest of Jerusalem falls upon the Zealots. Agrippa died in 44 AD, and the country came under the direct administration of Roman procurators. The situation was worsening until 66 AD, when the people's dissatisfaction grew into an open revolt led by the Zealots, which is also known as the Jewish War. The Zealots, pursued by the Romans, withdrew to Jerusalem, where they managed to agitate a lot of mainly young people to join them. In 68 the city was besieged by 80,000 Roman soldiers; it resisted, but soon it was lacking food. The Zealots began to kill high-class people, and when the high priest urged Jews to rise against the Zealots, they killed him, as well. Later they split up into three wings that started to fight against one another. Jerusalem was exposed to the madness of those three groups. Soon they had no food and they began to kill everybody in the city. Flavius Josephus gives a detailed description of their behaviour, which reminds one of the apocalyptic visions given by Jesus. "The rebels fought treading on dead bodies piled up in disorder, and they drew despair from the dead under their feet, which made them even fiercer" (as quoted in Messadié 2000, 77, my translation)[44]. Their misery came to such a state that they ripped people's abdomens or examined faeces and sewers in order to find food. They would certainly have eaten the dead bodies if Emperor Titus did not stop them. He conquered

the city, but the Zealots fortified in the Temple, killing everybody who came to seek a shelter there, and at last killing one another. The Temple was set alight, even against the will of Titus. Josephus Flavius gives the incredible number of over one million dead people, but his records cannot be understood literally; indeed they could be twenty to twenty-five thousand. Whatever the number was, the impact was catastrophic: Jerusalem was destroyed, and the Jews lost their centre. From then on, they were scattered all over the world, living in small communities based solely upon their religion—Judaism was depoliticised. Thenceforth Jewish history is disunited; it is the history of separate groups of Jews living in the Diaspora.

vi. Christian and Medieval Anti-Semitism

It is a sad truth that the religion that arose from Judaism, and was actually its completion through the person of Jesus Christ, became its greatest enemy. Christianity stood by the origins of the anti-Judaic movement that resulted in incredible genocides during all the Christian era. Again, it is necessary to go to the very beginning of Christianity in the first century. When Jesus died on the cross in the fourth decade, he left his followers without any directions, referring them only to the Holy Spirit. "All this I have spoken while still with you. But the Counsellor, the Holy Spirit whom the Father will send in my name, will teach you all things and will remind you of everything I have said to you" (Bible, J. 14, 25 – 26). The first Christians were conceived as another Judaic sect, deprecated by the majority of the Sadducees as well as Pharisees, who did not accept Jesus as the Messiah. The reason was that the Sadducees did not expect any Messiah, and the Pharisees thought that the Messiah would banish the Romans, that he would be the Jewish king as well as the high priest; neither group could accept Jesus' philosophy. However, not all the Jews condemned him, for he was welcomed with palm branches when entering Jerusalem. "Many people spread their cloaks on the road, while others spread branches that they cut in the fields" (Bible, Mk. 11, 8). They were the Zealots and partly the Essens, but these people were not able to stop the Sanhedrin and Pontius Pilate from crucifying Jesus. The officials tried to liquidate the new sectarians; they appointed individuals who were responsible for persecuting and catching them. One of the enthusiastic pursuers was Saul, who travelled through all Judea. He was also

there when the members of Sanhedrin stoned the first martyr, Stephen, to death. "Meanwhile, the witnesses laid their clothes at the feet of a young man named Saul… And Saul was there, giving approval to his death" (Bible, Ac. 7, 58 – 8, 1). This man, later renamed to Paul, was the key person of the newly forming Roman church.

The change that entirely turned his curriculum vitae as well as the future shape of Christianity happened to Saul on his way to Damask, where he wanted to capture Christians in order to bring them in chains to Jerusalem. The Acts of Apostles give the description of what happened.

> As he neared Damascus on his journey, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. He fell to the ground and heard a voice say to him, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?"
> "Who are you, Lord?" Saul asked.
> "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting," he replied. "Now get up and go into the city, and you will be told what you must do."
> The men travelling with Saul stood there speechless; they heard the sound but did not see anyone.
>
> (Bible, Ac. 9, 3 – 7)

Saul converted to the sectarians whom he persecuted; he arrived at Damask and began to persuade the local Jews as well as non-Jews that Jesus was the Messiah. The question of the origin of this man is controversial. In his epistles he describes himself as a Jew. "I am an Israelite myself, a descendant of Abraham, from the tribe of Benjamin" (Bible, Rom. 11, 1). Once again he reminds of his Hebraic origin, convincing that he was "circumcised on the eighth day, of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew of Hebrews; in regard to the law, a Pharisee" (Bible, Philip. 3, 4 – 5). However, Luke, who wrote the Acts, indicates that Paul resorted to the Roman citizenship several times in order to get better treatment. Ha had the first occasion to reveal his background when Romans caught him in the town of Philippi, where he spread Jesus' ideas. "They beat us publicly without a trial, even though we are Roman citizens, and threw us into prison" (Bible, Ac. 16, 37). The second event was in Jerusalem, where Paul escaped the punishment of whipping. "Is it legal for you to flog a Roman citizen, who was not even been found guilty?" (Bible, Ac. 22, 25). The third assurance comes immediately after the previous one, when Paul says that he was born as Roman. "But I was born a citizen" (Bible, Ac. 22, 28). The last incident in which Paul claims his Roman citizenship and its

consequent rights appeared when he wanted to be judged by the emperor himself, which would be punished with death if not true. “I appeal to Caesar” (Bible, Ac. 25, 11). These allusions lead one to the conclusion that Paul was a Roman Jew, which corresponds with the church tradition; otherwise Paul’s Christianity would not be continuation of Judaism. It is interesting to look into what Paul’s relationship to his Jewish faith was. He said that he studied at the school of Gamaliel, who was an important Jewish Rabbi and advocate of the law. “Under Gamaliel I was thoroughly trained in the law of our fathers and was just as zealous for God as any of you are today” (Bible, Ac. 22, 3). It is elusive that Saul later became a member of the Temple guards and persecuted Christians because Gamaliel stood up for the Apostles in the Sanhedrin.

> But a Pharisee named Gamaliel, a teacher of the law, who was honoured by all the people, stood up in the Sanhedrin and ordered that the men be put outside for a little while. Then he addressed them: “Men of Israel, consider carefully what you intend to do to these men.”
>
> (Bible, Ac. 5, 34 – 35)

It is possible that Paul had different ideas than his teacher; nevertheless, there are other facts that impeach his Jewish allegiance. The most striking detail is Paul’s rejection of the Jewish law, claiming that “Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law” (Bible, Gal. 3, 13), by which he denied the teachings of Jesus as well as the Apostles. Jesus said: “Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfil them” (Bible, Mt. 5, 17). Jesus was a Jew, and his teachings were delivered predominantly to the Jews, but in Paul’s hands they were turned against them. Jesus’ reprehensions to the Pharisees and Sadducees were addressed to them only within the Jewish community; when they were brought outside it, they sounded as though they condemned all the Jews, which was not their original purpose. Paul decided to gospel among the pagans, and the new law that he taught them had little in common with the former Jewish law. Thus new non-Jewish Christians began to differentiate from the Jewish ones, or from the Jews in general. Thus Paul’s endeavour gave rise to Christian anti-Judaism already very soon after Christ’s death. Jesus’ Apostles disappeared, but Paul stayed as the main propagator of Christianity. He assessed the situation well: the Roman Empire was tired of its old religion and saturated

with the new one slowly. Hence Paul's version of Christianity won, condemning Judaism altogether.

The gap between Christianity and Judaism that appeared in the first century AD was widening very quickly. The first assaults focus on the complete rejection of the Torah by new Christians. In the fourth century, violent anti-Semitic ideas arose from the mouth of Ioannes Chrysostomos, or John Golden-Mouthed, who was later canonised. In his sermons called Adversus Judaeos he sharply attacked everything Jewish.

> You are the ones who killed Christ, you are the ones who raised your arms against the Lord, therefore no relief can exist for you anymore, no pardon nor any forgiveness… You have overshadowed all falseness by that arch-crime. And that is why you are more punished now; that is just the reason for your contemporary disgrace… 'If anyone does not love the Lord—a curse be on him.' [Bible, 1 Cor. 16, 22] It is not me who curses them, but Paul, and even not Paul, but Christ himself speaking through him.
>
> (as quoted in Martin and Schulin 1997, 36, my translation)[45]

From then on, the label of God-murderous nation is used when talking about Jews. It looks as though all the ecclesiastical officials misunderstood the very substance of Christianity: If Jesus had not died on the cross, his task would not have been completed—he would not have saved the human race. This absurd nonsense wound through history as far as the twentieth century and was remedied only at the Second Vatican Council.

Roman Emperor Constantine the Great was the first Caesar who converted to Christianity, after he saw a fiery cross in the sky in 318 AD. One of the first laws discriminating Jews that he issued was the institution of Sunday as the day of the rest in 321, depriving thus Jews of one working day for they observed Saturday as their Shabbat. His son Constantius stated that Jews could not own any slaves, and if they circumcised a non-Jew, their possessions were confiscate, and they were punished with death. Christians could not marry Jews nor sell their goods to them. All these arrangements were constituted in order to weaken Jews economically and to push them to the edge of the society. Many times their synagogues were set alight and they were baptised forcibly. They even could not use their holy texts exclusively since they were now the heritage of Christianity. Christians conceived their religion as heresy, but it was

not. In fact, only Jewish perseverance helped their religion to survive; however, it was their persistence that outraged Christians so much, driving them to beat Jews repeatedly.

A new torture came at the end of the eleventh century, when Pope Urban II decided to liberate the Holy Land—Palestine—from the supremacy of Islamic heathens. All participants were promised the forgiveness of their sins. The response was unexpected: An incredible mass of various people gathered in 1096 to set out to the first crusade. Albeit the initial zeal was great, many crusaders were not able to go to such a distance. Therefore, they decided to punish the heathens already on their way. Guibert de Nogent, a chronicler, described their barbaric behaviour that could be portrayed as the baptism or the death: "We want to defeat enemies of the Lord in the East, and it is necessary to overcome a long distance thereby. However, it is a pointless effort for we have already here, in front of our eyes, Jews, who are the worst enemies of the Lord" (as quoted in Martin and Schulin 1997, 43, my translation)[46]. Consequently, all the Jews were expelled from France in the reign of Philip I. Following events can be depicted as unbelievable pogroms in all the towns through which the crusaders went, especially in Rhineland. Jews relied on the protection from the officials, which they got, but as soon as the fanatic crowd entered the scene, they were lost. The majority of them were savagely killed, the rest were baptised against their will, which was for an orthodox Jew erasable by only one thing—the killing of all his family ended by his suicide. The crusaders reached Jerusalem in 1099 and won. Again, their victory was followed by bloodshed—thousands of Jews were dying next to thousands of Moslems. The news of the famous triumph that reached France and Germany encouraged those who stayed at home to even bigger massacres. The Jews were expelled from France two more times then: first in 1144 in the reign of Louis VII and second in 1184 under Philip II. The reason for this was not religious, as the official verdict was, but the kings wanted Jewish money and belongings since the crusades cost more money than they brought. Nevertheless, Philip II invited the Jews back to his land and his protection in 1196. His motives were again economic: The Second Lateran Council in 1179 forbade Christians loaning money at interest. The only people who could trade with money were Jews, but of the will of Christians. Thus the first myth about the greediness and economic power of Jews originated. Soon other myths about Jews began to appear.

One of those horrible myths was the figment of Jewish desecrations of the Hosts that appeared in Germany. The first rumours that Jews stole the Host and abused it for devilish and desecrating ceremonies emerged in 1243 in the environs of Berlin. Christians found their answer quickly: Jews wanted to crucify Jesus' body that was present in the Host once more. In 1298 in Rottingen similar fames led to killing Jews, and correspondingly also in other cities throughout Europe. The only reason was again greed because those who deprived Jews of their lives purloined their possessions immediately. Also Medieval England did not avoid similar absurdities. Jews came there together with the Norman conquerors in 1066 and they got many privileges under Henry I, who reigned from 1100 to 1135. The first anti-Semitic movement started in Norwich in 1144. The fame concerned a boy called William who was said to have been kidnapped by Jews. They tortured him, shaved his head, and stabbed him with thousands of thorns. Thomas of Monmouth, who investigated the case, recorded:

> "Even as we condemned the Christ to a shameful death, so let us also condemn the Christian, so that, uniting the Lord and his servant in a like punishment, we may retort upon themselves the pain of that reproach which they impute to us." Conspiring therefore to accomplish the crime of this great and detestable malice, they next laid their bloodstained hands upon the innocent victim, and having lifted him from the ground and fastened him upon the cross, they vied with one another in their efforts to make an end of him... After all these many and great tortures, they inflicted a frightful wound in his left side, reaching even to his innermost heart... And since many streams of blood were running down from all parts of his body, then, to stop the blood and to wash and close the wounds, they poured boiling water over him. Thus then the glorious boy and martyr of Christ, William, dying the death of time in reproach of the Lord's death, but crowned with the blood of a glorious martyrdom, entered into the kingdom of glory on high to live forever.
>
> (as quoted in Arnold 2002)

William was a twelve-year-old apprentice to a skinner who had contacts with Jews because of his work. One day he was found dead, hanging in a wood. His body was buried three days later. After his mother had a dream in which Jews attacked her, carrying off her leg, she accused Jews of her boy's murder. Suddenly eyewitnesses began to appear; one remembered that she had seen the boy entering the Jew's house, and later another witness saw Jews tying up a boy as if for a crucifixion. The boy's body was reburied to a monastery grounds, and during the transport they saw the proof

that it had been tortured—after it had been one month underground. William became a martyr saint several years later. The same story happened in other towns soon, e.g. in Gloucester in 1168, in Bury St. Edmunds in 1181, or in Bristol in 1183, but it was rendered also to France. In Blois the whole Jewish community was burned to death in 1171, and the same happened to the Jews in Pontoise in 1179. From then on, there was not one child who died without a suspicion that Jews killed it. This anti-Semitic propaganda led to a horrible massacre that happened in 1189 on the occasion of the coronation of Richard I Coeur de Lion. Jews who came to pay homage to the new king were brutally killed by the crowd, and Richard did not do anything in order to help them. The year of 1190 was fatal to the Jews in Norwich—all the community was slaughtered. After the King saw the anti-Semitic manifestations, he issued a charter by which he granted liberties to the Jews in 1190, namely "to reside in our land freely and honourably" (as quoted in Halsall 1989). However, as soon as Richard departed to the third crusade, a horrendous mass murder happened in York. The Jews sought a shelter in the town hall, but it was set alight with them inside. The reason was that debtors wanted to get rid of their creditors. When the news reached Richard in the Holy Land, he accredited his chancellor to commence a process against the offenders, but they had enough time to escape.

The situation of English Jews got worse in the reign of John the Landless, who raised the taxes to such a height that they almost ruined them. The Fourth Lateran Council in 1215 ordered Jews to wear a visible saffron-yellow circle on their clothes, which was changed to two white squares at Oxford Council in 1222. The news of ritual murders appears repeatedly, e.g. a boy was found dead with Jewish letters inscribed on him in London in 1244, or the case of Hugh of Lincoln from 1255, which served Chaucer as a motif for his Prioress's Tale. When Jews were prohibited to build new synagogues in 1253, they asked Henry III to allow them to leave the country twice, but he always refused. Many Jewish communities were destroyed during the revolt of Simon de Montfort, the Earl of Leicester, who voided their debenture bonds. Finally, Edward I forbade English Jews to loan money at interest, which made their living impossible for they had already been prohibited to trade and they had been kept away from farming land. Some tried to break the law, but were punished with death. The climax came in July 1290, when Edward I expelled Jews from England; they were

allowed to return after 1656. Although there were no Jews in England in the fourteenth century, anti-Semitism stayed deep-rooted in the hearts of English people. For example, Jews were blamed that they spread the leper in 1321 and in 1348 they were accused that they poisoned wells in order to proliferate the plague that arrived at England then. As it has been shown, anti-Semitism appeared in folk ballads, it influenced Geoffrey Chaucer in one of his Canterbury Tales, and it found its way even to one of William Shakespeare's plays, The Merchant of Venice, written more than three hundred years after the expulsion of Jews.

vii. Apology

Closing this thesis, it is advisable to think of the reasons of anti-Semitism—the horrible xenophobic phenomenon recurring in human history. Jews represent a specific community, or a nation, that is united predominantly by Judaism. They had common history that ended in 70 AD; after that year they lived dispersed in all different countries. Jewish communities faced open enmity from Christians, and thousands of Jews died because of crusades as well as absurd myths, such as accusations of ritual murders of children. No matter how absurd these accusations were, they were not irrational. It was always people's desire for Jewish property that forced them to kill. Modern history led anti-Semitism as far as holocaust during the Second World War. Several million Jews died because of the racist hatred and because of their wealth. Their recent history started in 1948, when a resolution of the United Nations Organization enabled Jews to found their own state, Israel. However, contemporary Jewish history is also penetrated with wars.

Their particularity among other nations was their difference. They had a different religion—monotheism, which was unusual among nations practicing polytheistic religions. This was the first diversity that provoked the other nations, the other being Jews' refusal to accept any other religion although syncretism of religions was quite usual in the ancient times. These differences led to the first anti-Judaic manifestations before Christ. History of Christianity may be labelled as history of anti-Semitism. Although Jesus' teachings were addressed to Jews, they changed their meaning when taken without the community. It happened soon after Christ's death in

the first century, when Paul decided to reject Jewish law for new non-Jewish Christians. The gap that appeared broadened quickly, and the new Judaism—Christianity—became the worst enemy of its old form. When Christianity developed into the state religion, the followers of Judaism began to be persecuted. However, Christians killed Jews not only because of their religion but also because of their wealth. Paradoxically, they were Christians who helped Jews become economically strong when they forbade to loan money at interest within Christendom. It is a dreadful shame that the Church found its way to Judaism as late as the seventh decade of the twentieth century at the Second Vatican Council. The last two thousand years can be described as the history of Christianity, but also as the history of Christian anti-Semitism. Christians, the heirs of those who massacred Jews many times in history, owe much to those from whom their religion originated, at least an apology.

Resumé

Současný čtenář díla Canterburské povídky Geoffreyho Chaucera se rád nechá ukolébat příběhy, které po cestě vyprávějí poutníci na cestě do canterburské katedrály, kam míří, aby se poklonili křesťanskému mučedníkovi Thomasi Becketovi. Některé povídky jsou vtipné, jiné poučné, jiné však zarazí svou krutostí. Čím hlouběji se čtenář začítá do knihy, tím více mu vytanují na mysli otázky, jako jaká byla doba, ve které autor žil, či kdo a co jeho tvorbu ovlivňovalo. Anglie čtrnáctého století byla zemí plnou válek, z nichž nejkrutější byla válka stoletá, a pohrom, ze kterých lze na prvním místě uvést dýmějový mor, tedy nemoc, která snížila stav obyvatelstva Evropy na polovinu. Války a nemoci, které s sebou přinesly bídu a hlad, se nejvíce dotknuly nižších vrstev obyvatelstva, mezi něž však Chaucer nepatřil. Byl synem obchodníka s vínem a svůj život prožil u dvora; nejdříve jako páže u hraběnky z Ulstru a později jako královský kontrolor cla, které neslo vládní pokladně bohaté zisky. Za jeho života se stalo hodně důležitých událostí; sám se účastnil vojenských tažení proti Francii za krále Edwarda III., při kterých byl dokonce zajat, a byl přímým svědkem Rolnického povstání, které vyvrcholilo v Londýně roku 1381 za vlády Richarda II. Tehdy vyplynul napovrch ukrývaný strach z cizinců, neboli xenofobie, především však nenávist vůči Vlámům, kteří sem byli zváni a usazovali se zde kvůli svému tkalcovskému mistrovství.

Angličané se krutým způsobem pomstili na Vlámských mistrech: mnoho jich bylo zavražděno a jejich domy vypáleny. Tato událost je přímo zachycena v Povídce kněze jeptišek, kde je připomenut jakýsi Jack Straw, vrah Vlámů.

Jedním z nejhroznějších a nejvíce znepokojujících projevů xenofobie v lidských dějinách je antisemitismus, čili nenávist k Židům. Ač byli Židé z Anglie vyhnáni králem Edwardem I. v roce 1290, antisemitistické pocity v srdcích anglického lidu dlouho přetrvaly. Objevily se v lidových baladách, například ve sbírkách Thomase Percyho se vyskytují dvě, ale svou cestu našly i do díla Geoffreyho Chaucera či Williama Shakespeara. Ve své Povídce abatyše Chaucer nechává hlavního hrdinu—malého křesťanského chlapce, syna vdovy—zemřít rukama židovského vraha, kterého najali Židé, jež irituje jeho píseň určená Panně Marii. Viníci jsou odhaleni díky Mariinu zázraku, která hochu s prořízntutým hrdlem umožní promluvit předtím, než vydechne naposled. Jejich trest je nanejvýš krutý: jsou vláčeni koňmi a nakonec oběšeni. Je nesporně zajímavé podívat se blíže na osobu, která příběh vypráví. Abatyše, neboli představená kláštera, by měla býti osobou skromnou, oddanou Bohu a křesťanskému ideálu lásky, tolerance, porozumění, odpuštění. Bohužel, žádný z oněch atributů nemůže být přiřknut Chaucerově abatyše. Její vizáž odhaluje její touhu po světském majetku; její psíci, ke kterým se chová jako k dětem, připomínají její touhu po mateřství, které bylo a je jeptiškám odepřeno, aby se mohly plně oddávat svému povolání. Její mluva čtenáři napovídá, že abatyše by se ráda přiblížila životu u dvora a také to, že zaslepeně pohrdá všemi, kteří jsou v jejích očích málo křesťanští, ač je sama horší jich. Nejvíce však abatyše odhaluje své nitro při vyprávění své povídky. Nejprve čtenáře nakloní svým hrdinům—tedy vdově a jejímu zbožnému synu, k čemuž využívá patetické jazykové prostředky. Židé jsou pak postaveni do ostrého protikladu, jsouce několikrát označeni jako synové ďábla či prokletý lid Herodův. Patos vrcholí vraždou chlapce, kdy je mu nejprve prořízntuto hrdlo a pak je hozen do smrduté jímky. Pomsta na Židech je pak otřesná: Chaucer používá při líčení jejich konce množné číslo, takže kromě vraha umírají ještě další lidé, přičemž ze závěru je cítit abatyšin souhlas s krutostí jejich potrestání. Tento bod je nejvíce zarážejícím faktem celého příběhu: žena, jež má oplývat křesťanskou láskou k bližním svým, cítí uspokojení při vyprávění krutého příběhu, na jehož konci dojde k masakru části obyvatel židovské čtvrti. Na abatyšině přístupu k Židům v její povídce lze obecně charakterizovat přístup křesťanů k Židům.

Židé sami sebe označují za národ Bohem vyvolený, ale jejich dějiny jsou zároveň dějinami nenávisti, kterou vůči nim, ať více či méně, pociťovaly národy, se kterými žili. Jejich náboženství se totiž zcela vymykalo čemukoliv, co okolní národy znaly—bylo náboženstvím monoteistickým. Stovky bohů a bůžků, které si lidé modelovali do soch a uctívali coby modly, byly vystřídány jediným Bohem beze jména či vyobrazení. Bylo běžné, že když si jeden národ podrobil druhý, jejich náboženství splynula v jedno a počet bohů se rozrostl, což nikomu nevadilo. Židé však byli výjimkou a nikdy nepřijali jiného Boha, čímž se začali odlišovat ode všech ostatních. První protižidovské nálady propukly již před narozením Krista, z nichž největší se odehrál v řecko-egyptské Alexandrii, výkvětu tehdejší helénské vzdělanosti, místu pyšnícím se jedním ze sedmi divů světa—majákem na ostrově Pharos—a neméně slavnou knihovnou, zřejmě největší ve své době. Židovský masakr byl důsledkem špatného výkladu řeckého překladu židovské Tóry, neboli Septuaginty. Řekové nikdy nepochopili judaismus, a Římané, kteří absorbovali celou helénskou kulturu, přejali také tento jejich postoj. Nejvíce jim vadily židovské zvyky světit Šabat, nejíst vepřové maso a zachovávat obřízku u novorozených chlapců. Šabat označovali jako zbytečné nicnedělání a Židům bylo vytýkáno, že sedminu života prolenoší. Nikdo jim nevysvětlil, že pro Žida je Šabat dnem rozjímání a osobní promluvy s Bohem; tento zvyk přešel i do křesťanství. Vepřové maso se zřejmě nejedlo proto, že v oné době řádil prasečí mor, smrtelná nakažlivá nemoc, která se přenášela pozřením masa. Toto pravidlo ovšem přejala i jiná náboženství, z nichž islám je dnes zřejmě nejznámější. Obřízka nebyla ničím jiným, než praktickým hygienickým opatřením, bránícím tvorbě kožního mazu pod předkožkou, a byla praktikována i jinými národy, například starověkými Egypťany. Nesmyslná nenávist tedy přešla v otevřené nepřátelství vůči Židům a k jejich zabíjení již ve starověku.

Na přelomu letopočtu došlo k události, která změnila chod dějin—narodil se Ježíš, Židy dlouho očekávaný a prorokovaný mesiáš. Židovstvo však tehdy bylo rozděleno do několika skupin, z nichž někteří Ježíše přijali, ale jiní, kteří byli mocnější, jej neuznali a nakonec ho ukřižovali. Přívrženci Ježíšova učení byli mezi Židy vnímáni coby sektáři, ale brzy se počet těchto příznivců rozrostl. Jedna z odbojných skupin, která si říkala Zélóti, neboli horliví odpůrci římské nadvlády, způsobila, že římská armáda v roce 70 dobyla Jeruzalém; posvátný chrám Židů byl zbořen a ti se rozprchli do

diaspory. Od té doby se společné židovské dějiny začaly psát jako samostatné dějiny jednotlivých židovských komunit rozesetých po celém světě. Je možné, že by křesťanství bylo zaniklo spolu s pádem Jeruzaléma, nebylo-li by došlo k jisté velmi důležité konverzi, kterou prodělal pronásledovatel a největší nepřítel křesťanů, Šavel, později zvaný Pavel. Tomuto zarytému odpůrci nového učení, který byl původem římský Žid, se na jedné z jeho cest zjevil Ježíš, což ho přesvědčilo o přestupu na víru, kterou do té doby potíral. Pavel se však rozhodl, na rozdíl od židovských následovníků Ježíše, kázat křesťanství mezi pohany, což brzy vyvolalo problémy. Křesťanství obrácených Židů bylo plné starých zákonů, které převzali od Mojžíše a jichž se odmítali vzdát. Pavel se rozhodl zrušit židovské zákony pro křesťany z pohanů, ale to vyvolalo odpor apoštolské rady v Jeruzalémě. Dějiny dokazují, že Pavlova forma křesťanství nakonec zvítězila. Pohanští křesťané tudíž nepokračovali v židovské tradici a začali se tak Židům vzdalovat, přestali je chápat, spirituálně se jim oddálili. Tento rozpor nastal již v prvním století našeho letopočtu a postupem času se prohluboval. Ježíšova kázání, která byla určena Židům, se v nežidovském prostředí obrátila proti nim. Antijudaismus raných křesťanů se pak změnil na antisemitismus středověku.

Křesťanská Evropa byla velmi netolerantní vůči Židům. Jejich existence vždy závisela na blahovůli panovníka té které země. Francie, Anglie, Španělsko i další země zažily vyhnání Židů ze svého území. Snad nejvíce Židé trpěli během křižáckých tažení, která byla vedena proti jinověrcům ve Svaté zemi. Křesťané, jejichž základní životní filozofií měla být láska, způsobili svou nenávistí utrpení mnoha tisíců Židů, kterým tenkrát nepomohla ani ochrana z nejvyšších míst. Rozbouřený zfanatizovaný dav táhnoucí Evropou vždy dosáhl zmasakrování židovských komunit, což bylo spojeno s vyrabováním jejich majetku. Za mýtické bohatství Židů však také mohli křesťané, kterým byl zakázán obchod s penězi, ale kteří jej povolili Židům. Touha po majetku a strach z neznámé víry podněcoval nové a nové vraždy nevinných Židů. Ti byli označováni jako Bohovrazi, což logicky odporuje Ježíšovu učení: Teprve jeho smrt na kříži přinesla lidstvu vykoupení. Fenoménem typickým pro pozdní středověk je pak obviňování Židů z šíření nemocí typu mor či lepra a hlavně z rituálních vražd dětí. Nebylo tenkrát jediného úmrtí dítěte, za nímž by nebyl spatřován židovský úmysl. Tyto mýty se nezakládají na pravdě a dnešní badatelé dokazují, že k žádným vraždám nikdy nedošlo; úmrtnost dětí byla prostě velká. Podobně jako tomu bylo u honů na

čarodějnice, Židé byli upalováni či jinak popravováni. Tehdy vznikl kult Sv. Hugha z Lincolnu, chlapce-mučedníka zabitého Židy, jehož údajné mučednictví bylo zpochybněno až ve druhé polovině dvacátého století. A právě tento mýtus o dítěti umučeném Židy se dostal do lidových balad, ale našel svůj odraz i v literatuře Geoffreyho Chaucera, konkrétně v jeho Canterburských povídkách. Povídka abatyše je svým obsahem velmi podobná příběhu, který můžeme nalézt např. ve Vernonském rukopisu, od něhož se liší právě svým vyvrcholením, tj. krutým potrestáním Židů trestem nejvyšším, zatímco vernonský příběh hovoří pouze o souzení jednoho Žida, aniž by byl zmíněn druh trestu. Existuje však i jiná verze stejného příběhu, kdy jsou Židé potrestáni tím, že nemohou slyšet hochovu dojemnou píseň, či další verze, ve které se Židé obracejí na křesťanskou víru díky dojmu, který v nich vyvolá ona Alma Redemptoris. Chaucerova verze má tedy nejkrvavější zakončení celého příběhu. Jedním z možných důvodů byla jeho kritika pokrytecké formy křesťanské víry, kterou vylíčil v postavě vypravěčky oné povídky, ale mohl to být také projev jeho osobního antisemitismu, který byl v době středověku tak rozšířen, že jeho vliv byl zřejmý i sto let po vyhnání Židů z Anglie. Dodat lze snad jen to, že to nic neubírá na kráse Chaucerova díla, které má své kouzlo i pro dnešního čtenáře.

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Appendix

[1] Historickým paradoxem je, že Normané byli původně anglosaský kmen, který dobyl Normandii a tam se pofrancouzštil.

(Menhard 1995, 114, original in Czech)

[2] V Chaucerově poezii se mor připomíná jen mimochodem a okrajově.

(Brewer 1988, 50, original in Czech)

[3] Vzbouření se rozšířilo i v jižních a jihovýchodních hrabstvích, podněcováno akcemi pověřenců z řad místních šerifů a jiných hodnostářů, a také zprávami o úspěšném odporu, pilně šířenými těmi, kdo se na odpor už postavili. Nespokojenost z nejrůznějších příčin přilévala oleje do ohně. Svou roli sehrály i jiné motivy, idealismus, chuligánství, nenávist k cizincům, touha splatit staré účty.

(Brewer 1988, 150, original in Czech)

[4] *Unsad*: inconstant
undiscreet: undiscerning
fane: weathervane
rumbul: rumour
wexe: wax
clappyng: chattering
deere ynogh a jane: expensive enough at a halfpenny (i.e. worthless)
doom: judgement
preeveth: proves
leeveth: believes, trusts

[5] Vzbouřenci nejspíš nezničili nevěstinec z morálního rozhořčení, ale z nepřátelství vůči cizincům, především Vlámům.

(Brewer 1988, 153, original in Czech)

[6] Stínání byla oblíbená metoda vzbouřenců—nestačilo jim proklát srdce.

(Brewer 1988, 154, original in Czech)

[7] Vzbouřenci hlásali, že kdo si chytne Vláma nebo jiného cizáka, smí mu useknout hlavu.

(Brewer 1988, 155, original in Czech)

[8] Naštěstí se jméno Chaucer—se všemi pravopisnými obměnami—vyskytovalo v druhé polovině XIV. století poměrně zřídka a Geoffrey nebylo tak běžné křestní jméno jako John nebo William.

(Brewer 1988, 24, original in Czech)

[9] Řekl, že je mu čtyřicet let et plu, tj. pryč. K tomu pak poznamenal, že nosí rytířskou zbroj už sedmadvacet let.

(Brewer 1988, 26, original in Czech)

[10] *Squier*: squire, a young knight in the service of another knight
lovyere: lover
lusty: lively
bacheler: young knight, not yet a knight banneret
crulle: curled
presse: press (curler)
yeer: years
evene lengthe: moderate height
wonderly: marvelously
delyvere: agile
somtyme: for a time, once
in chyvachie: on a cavalry expedition
Flaunders, Artoys, Pycardie: Flanders and parts of northern France, where English armies fought
born hym weel: conducted himself well
space: time
stonden in his lady grace: find favour with his lady
Embrouded: embroidered
meede: meadow
reede: red
floytynge: piping, playing the flute
koude: knew how to
Juste: joust
eek: also
weel: well
purtreye: draw
hooste: passionately
by nyghtertale: at night-time
sleep: slept
lowely: modest (humble)
servysable: willing to serve, attentive
carf: carved

[11] Skládala je mnohá pážata, mnozí sloužící a panoši, protože skládat a zpívat písně patřilo k vzdělání každého dvořana.

(Brewer 1988, 70 – 71, original in Czech)

[12] Tak třeba velká antologie anglické poezie, sestavená kolem roku 1400 a nyní zvaná Vernonský rukopis, obsahuje řadu básní, jež Geoffrey nepochybně četl v jejich starších verzích.

(Brewer 1988, 71, original in Czech)

[13] Zdá se, že oba učení muži byli spolu v právnické koleji Inner Temple; neboť není tomu dávno, co pan Buckley spatřil v této koleji záznam, podle něhož byla Geoffreymu Chaucerovi uložena pokuta ve výši dvou šilinků za to, že v ulici Fleet Street zbil otce františkána.

(Brewer 1988, 80, original in Czech)

[14] *strake forth*: sound the signal on a hunting horn for going homeward

[15] *daswed*: dazed

[16] *drye*: experience, suffer

[17] *makeless*: matchless

[18] *Bifil*: it happened
seson: season
Southwerk: Southwark, across the Thames from the city of London
Tabard: the Tabard Inn
corage: spirit, feelings
sondry folk: various sorts of people
by aventure yfalle / In felaweshipe: fallen by chance into fellowship
wolden: desired, intended to

[19] *sikerly*: truly
greet desport: excellent deportment
port: bearing, manner
peyned hire: took pains
countrefete: imitate, pretend
cheere Of court: the manners of the court
estatlich of manere: dignified of behaviour
digne of reverence: worthy of respect

[20] *cleped*: called

[21] *ooth*: oath
Seinte Loy: Saint Eligius

[22] *fetisly*: elegantly
After the scole of: in the manner of Stratford atte Bowe (rather than that of the royal court)

[23] *At mete*: at dinner
with alle: indeed
leet: allowed
koude: knew how to
wel kepe: take good care
no drope ne fille: no drop fell
Her greatest pleasure *(lest)* was in good manners *(curteisie).*

[24] *over-lippe*: upper lip
coppe: cup
ferthyng: speck (spot the size of a farthing)
grece: grease

[25] *saugh:* saw

[26] *rosted flessh*: roasted meat
wastel breed: expensive fine white bread

[27] *soukynge*: suckling

[28] *soore*: sorely, bitterly
smoot: beat
yerde: switch
smerte: smartly, painfully

[29] *Ful fetys*: very elegant, well made
war: aware

[30] *Ful semyly*: very properly
wympul: wimple, a head dress that covers all but the face
pynched: pleated

[31] *sikerly*: certainly
spanne brood: about seven to nine inches wide
trowe: believe

[32] *peire*: set
gauded: divided by large beads *(gaudes)* marking the Paternosters
sheene: bright

[33] *clergeon*: schoolboy
wone: custom

[34] *emeraude*: emerald

[35] *Unnethe*: hardly

[36] *usure*: usury
lucre of vileynye: shameful (excessive) profits

[37] *hym hente*: seized him

[38] *frayneth*: asks
oght: at all

[39] Hebrejci totiž nijak přímo neohrožovali egyptské náboženství, pouze snad tím, že byli spojenci nájezdníků, kteří zřejmě pobořili egyptský panteon a kromě jiného zavedli kult boha Setha. Je však třeba připomenout, že v té době náboženství ještě nemělo takovou váhu, jaké nabylo o několik století později: je především výrazem kultury a národa.
(Messadié 2000, 25, original in Czech)

[40] Je to jediný národ, který odmítá jednat s jinými národy a pokládá všechny ostatní lidi za nepřátele.

(as quoted in Messadié 2000, 37, original in Czech)

[41] Cicero je popisuje v roce 59 jako početný národ, tvořící neformální společenství, jehož nepřátelství neradno vyvolávat.

(Messadié 2000, 56, original in Czech)

[42] Mojžíš, aby si národ do budoucna zajistil, zavedl nové obřady, opačné, než mají ostatní lidé. U nich je hříšné všechno, co je u nás posvátné, a naopak je u nich dovoleno, co je pro nás ohavné… Ať byly tyto obyčeje zavedeny jakkoli, jsou ospravedlňovány svou starobylostí: ostatní zařízení, zvrácená a ohavná, se ujala pro svou špatnost. Neboť největší darebáci, pohrdnuvše svým rodným náboženstvím, odváděli tam poplatky a příspěvky. Tím vzrostla moc Židů, a pak proto, že je u nich nezlomná víra a pohotové milosrdenství, ale proti ostatním nepřátelská zášť.

(as quoted in Messadié 2000, 58, original in Czech)

[43] [Prefekt dovolil oddílům] nejen Židy zabíjet, nýbrž také drancovat jejich majetek a vypalovat domy. Vojáci se vrhli do čtvrti zvané Delta, kde židovstvo pohromadě bydlelo, a vykonávali příkazy, ovšem nikoli bez krveprolití… Neměli slitování ani s nemluvňaty, nešetřili ani starců, nýbrž vraždili napořád bez ohledu na věk. Celé to místo bylo zaplaveno krví a nakupilo se padesát tisíc mrtvých. Ani zbytek by byl nezůstal naživu, kdyby se nebyli ujali úpěnlivě prosit.

(as quoted in Messadié 2000, 71, original in Czech)

[44] Povstalci bojovali šlapajíce po mrtvolách nakupených bez ladu a skladu a z mrtvých u svých nohou čerpali zoufalství a tím byli ještě divočejší.

(as quoted in Messadié 2000, 77, original in Czech)

[45] To vy jste usmrtili Krista, to vy jste vztáhli ruku na Pána, proto pro vás již nemůže existovat žádné ulehčení, žádné prominutí a také žádné odpuštění… Tímto velezločinem jste zastínili veškeré nepravosti. A proto jste nyní více potrestáni; to je právě příčinou vaší současné bezectnosti… ‘Kdo nemiluje Pána, ať je proklet.’ Nejsem to já, kdo je proklíná, nýbrž Pavel, a přece ani ne Pavel, nýbrž sám Kristus, který skrze něho mluví…

(as quoted in Martin and Schulin 1997, 36, original in Czech)

[46] Chceme porazit nepřátele Páně na Východě a k tomu je zapotřebí překonat velkou vzdálenost. To je však zbytečná námaha, poněvadž máme již zde přímo před očima Židy, kteří jsou přece těmi nejhoršími nepřáteli Páně.

(as quoted in Martin and Schulin 1997, 43, original in Czech)

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