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Canterbury Pilgrims and Their Horses in the Eighteenth Century: Two Artists' Interpretations

Betsy Bowden

John Dryden in 1700, in his mind's eye, saw "all the Pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales* . . . as distinctly as if I had supp'd with them at the *Tabard*" and as clearly "as if some ancient Painter had drawn them."¹ Inspired perhaps by Dryden's hint and certainly by the growing interest of English intellectuals in their own nation's literary history, two artists did individual portraits of the pilgrims during the subsequent century. The earlier series illustrates the elegant, but textually absurd, Chaucer folio edited by John Urry. Published in 1721, it is accessible today in major libraries.² The later series, never published, consists of brown wash drawings completed in 1781 by James Jefferys, a prolific young artist who died soon thereafter. His corpus of work was neglected until a 1976 exhibition at the Victoria and Albert Museum, the organizers of which list "Designs from Chaucer's Pilgrimage to Canterbury" under "Lost Works by James Jefferys."³

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¹ Preface to *Fables Ancient and Modern* (London, 1700), now in *The Poems of John Dryden*, ed. James Kinsley, 4 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1958), 4:1450. In context the "ancient Painter" clause refers to Ovid, compared immediately to Chaucer. At Dryden's time the pictorial tradition was as yet meager. On pilgrims pictured in manuscripts, with further references, see Martin Stevens, "The Ellesmere Miniatures as Illustrations of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*," *Studies in Iconography* 7–8 (1981–82): 113–30. Sixteenth-century printed folios, more accessible than manuscripts to later artists, deserve more attention than they have so far been accorded. Although most woodblock prints show pilgrims' generic occupations, some General Prologue details do appear. See Betsy Bowden, *Chaucer Aloud: The Varieties of Textual Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Univ. of Pennsylvania Press, 1987), 32–33 (with references), and "The Artistic and Interpretive Context of Blake's 'Canterbury Pilgrims,'" *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 13 (1979–80): 178 and passim, which also describes pre-Victorian artwork grouping several pilgrims. (This book and article will hereafter be cited by short titles only.)

² Denounced as inaccurate upon publication, *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London: B. Lintot, 1721) has remained plentiful partly because previous owners seem seldom to have opened it. On the edition itself see Caroline Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism and Allusion, 1357–1900*, 3 vols. paginated as 6 parts

(1925; rpt. New York: Russell & Russell, 1960), 1:cxix–cxxi, 353–61; and William L. Alderson and Arnold C. Henderson, *Chaucer and Augustan Scholarship* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: Univ. of California Press, 1970), 69–140, partially reprinted in *Editing Chaucer: The Great Tradition*, ed. Paul Ruggiers (Norman, Okla.: Pilgrim Books, 1984), 93–115. Three of the Urry-edition portraits (Prioress, Pardoner, Merchant) are discussed in *Chaucer Aloud* 32–36, 98–99, 162–63, and esp. 303 n. 25 outlining issues as to identification of the artist(s). Also see G. E. Bentley, Jr., "Comment upon the Illustrated Eighteenth-Century Chaucer," *Modern Philology* 78 (1980–81): 398. Although George Vertue did the frontispieces to the Urry edition, his interest in accurate medieval costume would weigh against his being primary artist for the medallion portraits. He joined the authenticity-seeking Society of Antiquaries in 1717 and remained active, according to Joan Evans, *A History of the Society of Antiquaries* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, for the Society of Antiquaries, 1956), 55 and passim. As an example, Vertue describes "long piked Shoes, so long as to be tied up by Strings or small Chains to their Knees" at Chaucer's time (1747, quoted in Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism* 1:394). On Vertue see further nn. 22–23, below.

³ Timothy Clifford and Susan Legoux, "James Jefferys, Historical Draughtsman (1751–84)," *Burlington Magazine* 118 (1976): 154. The work termed lost, #9 in their list,

Imagine my gasp when serendipity revealed Jefferys' original drawings at the Houghton Library. Acquired in 1968, they now can join other visual art in contributing to a potentially fruitful field of literary analysis: "reception aesthetics," investigation of ways that readers in different sociohistoric contexts have interpreted the same work of literature differently.⁴ These two sets of visual interpretations exemplify two ways of re-creating the past. Displaying Neoclassical tendencies, the Urry-edition artist has found in Chaucer's text certain universals of human experience, which he conveys unconcerned that the pilgrims' clothing and other features could be termed anachronistic. In contrast Jefferys, having sought out physically surviving relics of the late fourteenth century, places each pilgrim in a reconstructed historical context.

Each item of virgin evidence is immense: twenty-five separate engravings in the Urry edition, twenty-four separate drawings by Jefferys.⁵ Therefore I will focus on one aspect of the portraits, one that well illustrates the presumption of reception aesthetics that familiarity with previous attitudes toward a work, each regarded as true in its time, may alert us to expectations and limitations that affect each present-day interpreter of a work of literature, art, or indeed history. In today's sociohistoric context many analysts, without quite realizing the lack, might remain oblivious to what any casual observer seventy years ago would have seen in both portrait series: the interaction of pilgrims with their respective horses. Before the motorcar, even city dwellers who seldom rode astride remained continually aware of frightened, snorting horses about to bolt, for instance, or of ones with ears flattened in anger, refusing to move. Furthermore, variously bred and trained horses used to signal social status in ways now lost. Although direct equestrian experience can partially illuminate horse-human relationships in the two portrait series, interpretation of status and fine points of equitation will depend on illustrated riding instruction manuals and other material available during "the eighteenth century[, which] was the classical period of horse portraiture in England."⁶

In this article I compare the two artists' visualizations of six pilgrims: each Chaucer figure, plus the five whose equestrian abilities help characterize them in the General Prologue. Two pilgrims, the Knight and Squire, ride professionally.⁷

was "made during his stay with Mr Davy of One House, Suffolk"; see also item #16. The Houghton manuscript, pFMS Typ 560, is "From the library of Rev. Charles Davy, Onehouse, Suffolk." See also Martin Butlin, "The Rediscovery of an Artist: James Jefferys 1751-1784," *Blake: An Illustrated Quarterly* 10 (1976-77): 123-24; and Jefferys' entry in the *Dictionary of National Biography*, ed. Leslie Stephen and Sidney Lee, 22 vols. (1885-1901; rpt. London: Oxford Univ. Press, 1937-38), which misdates his birth (as 1757).

⁴ For an overview see Robert C. Holub, *Reception Theory: A Critical Introduction* (New York: Methuen, 1984); in reference to medieval studies Lee Patterson, *Negotiating the Past: The Historical Understanding of Medieval Literature* (Madison: Univ. of Wisconsin Press, 1987).

⁵ The count differs because Jefferys illustrates the General Prologue, copied by hand into the Houghton Library manuscript, whereas the Urry edition places each pilgrim before his or her tale, including the now spurious tales of the Plowman and of Gamelyn (assigned to the Yeoman). Therefore only Jefferys portrays the Citizens and the Host, who tell no tales, and only the Urry edition portrays the Canon's Yeoman, Nun's Priest, and Second

Nun, who are not described in the General Prologue.

⁶ John Baskett, *The Horse in Art* (Boston: New York Graphic Society, 1980), 88.

⁷ The Knight's horsemanship is noted in lines 44-45 and 74 of the General Prologue, and in references to his skill in battle. His son has already served in the cavalry, according to *GP* 85-86; direct praise occurs in *GP* 94. Knights were by definition fighters from horseback; in many languages the same word means "knight" and "rider"—e.g., Ritter, chevalier, caballero. The seminal statement on chivalry and horsemanship is Lynn White, Jr., *Medieval Technology and Social Change* (1962; rpt. New York: Oxford Univ. Press, 1972), 1-38; so far the most thorough study is R. H. C. Davis, *The Medieval Warhorse: Origin, Development and Redevelopment* (New York: Thames & Hudson, 1989).

Hereafter references to lines of Chaucer are parenthesized in the text, with the following abbreviations: *GP*, General Prologue to the *Canterbury Tales*; *NPT*, Nun's Priest's Tale; *FriT*, Friar's Tale; *RvT*, Reeve's Tale; *SqT*, Squire's Tale; *TST*, Tale of Sir Thopas. Quotations come from *The Riverside Chaucer*, 3d ed., ed. Larry D. Benson (Boston: Houghton Mifflin, 1987).

Another experienced equestrian is the Reeve; he holds his “ful good stot” named Scot “hyndreste of oure route,” this being the safe position for a highstrung horse unaccustomed to crowds (*GP* 615–16, 622). Unlike military leaders and estate managers a monk ought to remain cloistered, yet nearly a third of the Monk’s description concerns his love of horses and hunting (*GP* 165–207). In contrast to the four skilled riders is the Shipman, who stays atop a borrowed or rented “rouncy, as he kouthe” (*GP* 390).

Numerous details, transferred from verbal to visual portraits, confirm that both eighteenth-century artists based their interpretations primarily on the General Prologue. Their familiarity with other parts of *Canterbury Tales*, though probable, is not essential to this analysis. Perhaps both had read the Squire’s enthusiastic exposition on fancy foreign breeds, for instance, and the Urry-edition artist shows why the Host teases the Nun’s Priest about his “jade . . . foul and lene” (*SqT* 189–98, *NPT* 2812–13). The six pilgrims specified and their horses, however, provide ample evidence for a preliminary investigation of the two portrait series’ relationship to the best-known portion of Chaucer’s work, the General Prologue.

THE SQUIRE

“Wel koude he sitte on hors and faire ryde” (*GP* 94). This line praises two components of the Squire’s horsemanship: first his proper posture, second his riding ability. One might display a good seat on a sleepy horse standing still. In the process of education to knighthood, Chaucer’s well-seated Squire is also learning to ride, learning to control the high-spirited animals used for war and for aristocratic sports such as jousting. In the Urry edition an anachronistic Squire excels at horsemanship fashionable for eighteenth-century nobility, whereas Jefferys depicts the same pilgrim with accoutrements actually used in equestrian sports at Chaucer’s time.

Probably neither artist saw the Ellesmere manuscript, in which the Squire rides a rearing horse (figure 1). Firm-seated, raising a hand for balance, calmly in control, the Ellesmere Squire fixes his eyes on those certain barometers of equine moods and imminent actions: the ears. Four centuries afterward the Squire’s steed rears also in the rival paintings by Thomas Stothard in 1807 and William Blake in 1808/9. In the former its unruliness is causing the Yeoman’s horse to shy, while in Blake’s vision a starry-eyed Squire gazes into space without even noticing that his horse is wheeling to attack the Knight’s, thus creating commotion in the front rank that will surely delay the pilgrimage.⁸

⁸ For reproduction and discussion of Blake’s 1810 engraving of his painting see “Artistic and Interpretive Context”; horse-related matters are further treated in Betsy Bowden, “Equitation as Interpretation in Blake’s ‘Canterbury Pilgrims,’” forthcoming. For reproductions of Stothard’s work see Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism* 2:2.36/7; and Richard Garnett and Edmund Gosse, *English Literature: An Illustrated Record*, 4 vols. (New York: Macmillan, 1903–4), 1:156/7.

In addition to key roles in these two paintings, the Squire generated particular attention elsewhere in the pilgrims’ pictorial history. The Urry-edition Chaucer and Squire greatly resemble one another (figure 2, 17); similarly, in at least one sixteenth-century edition the

Squire woodblock doubles as frontispiece, as reproduced in Charles Muscatine, *The Book of Geoffrey Chaucer: An Account of the Publication of Geoffrey Chaucer’s Work from the Fifteenth Century to Modern Times* (San Francisco: Book Club of California, 1963), 15. Another sixteenth-century Squire, comically conceived, is reproduced in *Chaucer Aloud* 33 and in “Artistic and Interpretive Context” 179. The Squire’s nonverbal popularity reinforces David Lawton’s point—in *Chaucer’s Narrators* (Woodbridge, Suffolk; Dover, N.H.: D. S. Brewer, 1985), 106–29—that twentieth-century critics belittle the Squire’s Tale whereas earlier readers considered it the commencement of an English epic to rival Ariosto.



In the Urry edition the Squire rides what many late-twentieth-century observers might see as just another high-strung horse (figure 2). Instead, in 1721 the Squire is passing time en route to Canterbury by practicing his dressage.

During the sixteenth century, after the advent of gunpowder and consequent cessation of tournaments, Italian and French aristocrats invented and elaborated the dancelike movements of dressage. By the early eighteenth century such formalized exercises appealed to some English gentry—most of whom, however, continued to prefer hunting and other less restrained sports. The Squire is apparently practicing a movement called *terre à terre à main gauche* (figure 3). Horse and rider move forward and left while performing the

Terre-a-Terre: a gallop in two beats . . . the horse raises the two forelegs together and puts them down in the same manner; the hindlegs follow and accompany the forelegs, which produces a lively low cadence, which is like a series of little low jumps, close to the ground.

Or perhaps this Squire is pausing in the journey to execute a *pesade*, “in which the horse, remaining in place, raises the front very high, keeping the hind legs firmly on the ground without advancing or moving them,” or a *pirouette à gauche*, in which hind legs turn in place while front legs circle at a collected canter.⁹

“Wel koude he sitte on hors,” and indeed the 1721 Squire might well serve as textbook illustration to a contemporary description of proper seat:

Figure 1 (left). Portrait of the Squire (detail from the Ellesmere Manuscript, fol. 115^v). Courtesy of the Huntington Library, San Marino, California.

Figure 2 (right). The Squire. From page 59 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

⁹ Descriptions of movements from François Robichon de la Guérinière, *École de cavalerie* (Paris, 1733), uncredited transl. in Vladimir Stanislaus Littauer, *Horseman's Progress: The Development of Modern Riding*, ed. Eugene V.

Connett (Princeton, N.J.: Van Nostrand, 1962), 82–83. On the early history of dressage see Charles Chenevix Trench, *A History of Horsemanship* (Garden City, N. Y.: Doubleday, 1970), 101–53; Anthony A. Dent, *The Horse*

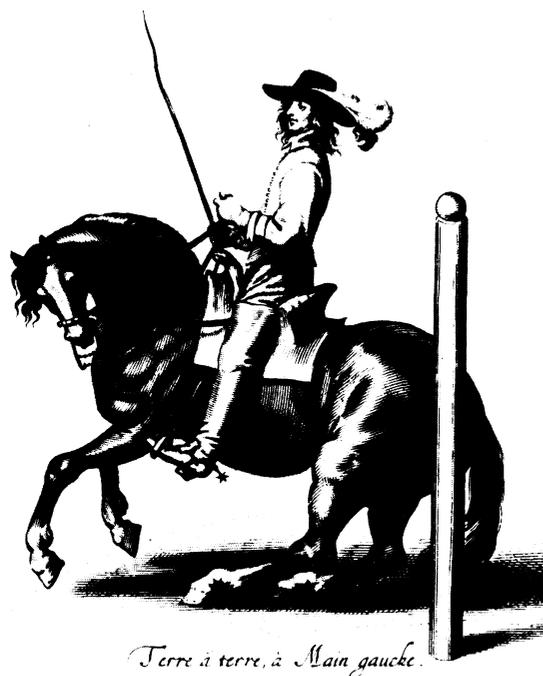


Figure 3 (left). Horse and rider demonstrating a terre à terre à main gauche. From plate 18 of William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *A General System of Horsemanship* (London, 1743), 1:54–55. Drawn by Abr. a Diepenbeke and engraved by Petr. Clouwet. 12 x 16 cm. Fairman Rogers Collection, Veterinary School Library, University of Pennsylvania.

Figure 4 (right). *The Squire*, drawn by James Jeffreys, ca. 1781. Brown wash. 28 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.



He ought to fix himself firm upon his stirrups, with his heels a little lower than his toes, so that the ends of his toes may pass about half an inch beyond the stirrup, or somewhat more. He should keep his hams stiff, having his legs neither too near, nor too far distant from the horse. . . . He ought to hold the reins in his left hand . . . his arm bent and close to his body, but in an easy posture. . . . The rider's breast ought to be in some measure advanced, his countenance pleasant and gay, but without a laugh, pointing directly between the horse's ears as he moves forward.¹⁰

In the Urry edition other experienced riders on the ramble to Canterbury may relax and look around, shift reins to right hands, and so on. Consistently, though, each maintains the foot position that is most comfortable over distances as well as correct for showy equitation. Besides the Squire, the Knight, Monk, and Reeve also ride with heel sharply lowered, ball of foot firmly in stirrup (figure 6, 11, 12).¹¹ Conversely, the drooping toes that reveal inexperience appear on the Parson and Shipman, the two pilgrims who seldom ride (figure 7, 8).

In the Urry edition the Squire's impeccable seat forms a subtle contrast to his riding ability. He is still learning to ride, thanks in part to a very well-trained horse that performs the difficult maneuver in spite of unclear signals, insofar as the slack reins are making too little contact between bit and hand (cf. taut reins in figure 3).

Through Fifty Centuries of Civilization (New York: Holt, 1974), 142–52; and Littauer, *Horseman's Progress* 38–91.

¹⁰ William Cavendish, Duke of Newcastle, *La methode et invention nouvelle de dresser les chevaux* (Antwerp, 1658), uncredited transl. as vol. 1 of *A General System of Horsemanship in All Its Branches*, 2 vols. (London: J. Brindley, 1743), 1:30. Concerning Cavendish's influence on English equitation and literature, see Betsy Bowden,

"Before the Houyhnhnms: Rational Horses in the Late Seventeenth Century," *Notes and Queries* 237 (1992): 38–40.

¹¹ Two other relevant examples of downthrust heels are reproduced in *Chaucer Aloud* 37 (the Knight in John H. Mortimer's drawing, ca. 1779) and 158 (the Urry-edition Merchant).

The checkreins, which attach noseband to saddle such that the neck cannot freely extend, also help him control his mount (cf. figures 3, 6, 12). The Squire's other tack, though, appears more ornamental than practical. On some horses a breastplate and crupper keep the saddle from sliding backward and forward, respectively (cf. figures 7, 8, 12, 17). Instead the scalloped neckpiece on the Squire's steed loops too high to be securing the saddle. Nor are the fluttering rear trappings and tail ribbon functional—unless a red ribbon then, as today, warned of a horse prone to kick.

The Squire's array looks more practical than his horse's. The turban would protect him from overhanging branches, and keep out of his eyes the long curly hair specified in the General Prologue. His "short . . . gowne, with sleeves longe and wyde" leaves arms and legs unhampered so as to convey crisp, definite signals to his horse (*GP* 81, 93).

Although based on the same General Prologue passage, half a century later, Jefferys's horse and rider instead both appear fussily overdressed (figure 4). The Squire's plumed hat, perched on curly locks, could sail off at fast gaits. His beflowered gown forms only one of many clothing layers that could billow and snag on twigs, thereby startling his horse, which in the picture sports a laboriously braided mane and forelock mirroring its scalloped browband.

Elegant hairdressing does not improve this horse's mood. Flattening its ears in the unmistakable sign of equine displeasure, it eyes with suspicion the enormous weapon that it will have to bear if, indeed, Jefferys's Squire manages to keep a grip on lance and outsized broadsword as well as reins. Although a horse might paw the ground with anticipation or sheer high spirits, this one's expressive ears indicate pawing in anger. Apparently its rider has yet to learn the full advantages of cooperation, rather than conflict, with his primary mode of transportation and symbol of social class.

Horse and Squire pose in an archway shown in so much detail, including praying statuettes and symmetrical markings "HB/MCCCIX[X?]," that future researchers may discover exactly where Jefferys looked for accurately medieval buildings, furniture, costumes, tack, and weaponry. In particular the huge swords and lances were quite commonly preserved through the centuries, along with armour and other mementos of a noble family's past, after the abrupt decline of tournaments.¹² The Squire's long spurs are authentic too: by the late fourteenth century, jousting saddles and paraphernalia had become so elaborate that a six-inch extension was needed for the rowel to reach the horse's hide.

THE KNIGHT

Jefferys's Knight wears spurs as extended as the Squire's, with a different style of rowel (figure 5). Pictorial composition invites comparison between father and son: the two stand beneath stone archways in similar poses, bearing similar weapons, beside pawing horses turned to three-quarter profile. Compared to his son, the father manifests more experience at a knight's vocation, riding. A shoulder strap

¹² Substantial weaponry collections survive still today, of course, even in the United States (e.g., Worcester, Mass., and Philadelphia). For reproductions and description see Richard W. Barber and Juliet Barker, *Tournaments: Jousts, Chivalry, and Pageants in the Middle Ages* (New York: Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1989), 151–62. It is beyond the scope of this study to determine which collections

Jefferys would have seen during his boyhood in Maidstone, Kent or his apprenticeship to the London engraver William Woollett beginning ca. 1771. I would like to thank Veronica Tonge and her colleagues at the Maidstone Municipal Museums and Art Gallery for determining that the architectural settings are not in Jefferys's hometown itself.



Figure 5 (left). *The Knight*, drawn by James Jefferys, ca. 1781. Brown wash. 28 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.



Figure 6 (right). *The Knight*. From page 8 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

makes his sword portable on horseback. His clothing looks less billowy than the Squire's, and his headgear more secure. Bardings protect his mount, as was usual in medieval tournaments and battles. Held by an attendant, the Knight's prancing horse reveals the extent of Jefferys's research into objects that can survive four hundred years: even the horseshoes appear to be authentic.¹³ Its pawing expresses eager anticipation. Ears prick forward; flared nostrils and a partly closed eye also show it to be relaxed yet alert. As today's mount selected from its master's string of "hors . . . goode" (*GP* 74), it looks almost smug: "Boy, am I good."

Thus, to portray the contrast between an experienced knight and his neophyte son, Jefferys uses clothing, tack, weapons, and other features in addition to their conspicuously contented vs. discontented horses, whose attitudes appear in pricked vs. flattened ears. Jefferys served apprenticeship with an engraver who worked for George Stubbs, the famous horse artist. Perhaps the experience proved more humbling than educational, for Jefferys's depictions of equine features and responses are either straightforward to the verge of caricature or else evasive. For example, among his pilgrims only the Man of Law is mounted . . . on a horse mostly hidden by an accurately fourteenth-century wall. In contrast the 1721 artist portrays every pilgrim on horseback, with minimal background, interpreting each almost

¹³ On spurs, bardings, tack, and horseshoes see Barber and Barker, *Tournaments* 155–57; Chenevix Trench, *History of Horsemanship* 96–97, 303; and Zorošlava Drobná and Jan Durdík, *Medieval Costume, Armour, and Weapons*, transl. Jean Layton (London: A. Dakers, [1957?]), 65–67 and plates. Jefferys also probably means to show authentic

saddles, bridles, and bits. Excepting the highest-cantled jousting saddles, however, his medieval tack cannot be definitely distinguished from that of the eighteenth century (cf. Urry engravings) or indeed from certain styles of the twentieth.

exclusively in reference to equitation and horseflesh. My own sense, impossible to verify for someone not yet identified, is that the Urry-edition artist regarded the Canterbury pilgrims as an excellent excuse for a series of horse portraits.

In the Urry edition the analogous contrast between Knight and Squire appears partly in equine ears, also, but less obviously than for Jefferys's drawings. The Squire's horse points its ears in the direction that its head must turn to execute the dressage movement; thus its left ear opens toward the viewer (figure 2, 3). Although the left ear also opens outward in the father's portrait, the Knight's horse is looking forward while its ear rotates toward the rear (figure 6). Except in vigorous fly-switching situations, a horse swivels upright ears in order to listen to sounds including its rider's voice. The Knight is not speaking at the moment of the picture, but his gesticulating right hand implies conversation. Perhaps he is pointing out landscape like that they have seen together in Egypt, Lithuania, Russia, Morocco, or Turkey (*GP* 48–66). His war buddy listens attentively, looks in the direction that its master is pointing, and may even be nickering in reply. The artist portrays one-to-one harmony between longtime travelling companions. Such an instinctive relationship is needful in the heat of battle, moreover, when horse and man together must make instantaneous, life-or-death decisions.¹⁴ Instead the Urry-edition Squire, a partly trained rider, is still learning how to follow a well-educated horse's ears.

Like his son's the Urry-edition Knight's turban, short gown, and boots are all suited to equitation. His tack, which includes checkreins in case of emergency, appears more functional in that the breastplate does help secure the saddle. Clothing, tack, trappings, swords, spurs: for both father and son all accoutrements are eighteenth-century British or vaguely Middle Eastern, not medieval. Whereas Jefferys's expert Knight and less experienced Squire are correctly attired for fourteenth-century pastimes, the Urry-edition artist conveys that same contrast, professionalism vs. apprenticeship, primarily in precise details of equitation.

THE SHIPMAN

As opposed to those who ride horses for a living, the Shipman specializes in the other principal mode of pre-twentieth-century transportation. On the pilgrimage he rides as best he can (*GP* 390). Each artist shows the Shipman's ineptness on horseback—again with equestrian specifics in the Urry edition, and with broader strokes and historically researched background in the Jefferys drawing.

The 1721 Shipman's tension and improper riding form, which will cause back-ache and saddle sores long before Canterbury, appear most clearly with initial reference to another unskilled rider. According to the General Prologue, the Parson makes his rounds "upon his feet"; according to the Urry-edition artist, he therefore seldom rides (figure 7; *GP* 495). This Parson could serve as textbook illustration to *Rules for Bad Horsemen* (1762), a frequently republished handbook for nonenthusiasts sometimes obliged to ride astride as transportation. The Parson in the Urry edition:

¹⁴ Horse feed and overseas transportation were major items in military budgets until World War II. I make this point because at least one late-twentieth-century scholar had always assumed that knights left their trained warhorses

at home, travelled somehow to the scene of each battle, and there purchased (plow?)horses to ride into combat (private communication, 8 August 1989).



Figure 7. *The Parson*. From page 190 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

. . . has no *seat* on horseback. . . . To have a *good seat*, is to sit on that part of the horse, which, as he springs, is the center of motion. . . . Stretch not out your legs before you: this will push you against the back of the saddle. . . . Keep your legs straight down, and sit not on the most fleshy part of the thighs, but turn them inwards, so as to bring in your knees and toes; and it is more safe to ride with the ball of the foot pressing on the stirrup, than with the stirrup as far back as the heel.¹⁵

The Shipman's stirrups are better adjusted in length than the Parson's, and he leans too far backward only from the waist (figure 8). Discomfiture manifests itself mostly in facial expression and in foot placement: as noted, both inexperienced pilgrims point their toes downward at an angle that is tiring as well as unsafe (because one could be caught in the stirrup and dragged, if thrown).

The mounts of Shipman and Parson wear similar tack, including the sturdy breastplate and crupper that a livery stables would put on rentals to clients who might not know or bother to check the girth. Also, both have the docked tails characteristic of work horses and multipurpose ones (because long tails snag in harness). Specifically the Shipman rides a "rouncy," which the Urry-edition artist could understand as "a rude horse" from Thomas Speght's glossary or from supposition.¹⁶ Big-boned, it raises broad hoofs and coarse head in a display of spirit

¹⁵ Charles Thompson, *Rules for Bad Horsemen, Addressed to the Society for the Encouragement of Art, &c.*, 3d ed. (London: J. Robson, 1765), 22, 29–30. Emphasis in original.

¹⁶ In the absence of any information as to book access by the unknown Urry-edition artist(s), citations are taken from the first edition of the only glossary at that time: "The old and obscure words of Chaucer, explained," in *The Workes of our Antient and Learned English Poet, Geffrey*

Chaucer, Newly Printed. [ed. Thomas Speght] (London: A. Islip, 1598), sec. Aaaa; rev. eds. 1602, 1687. On glossaries see Johan Kerling, *Chaucer in Early English Dictionaries: The Old-Word Tradition in English Lexicography down to 1721 and Speght's Chaucer Glossaries* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, for Leiden Univ. Press, 1979); and Eleanor P. Hammond, *Chaucer: A Bibliographical Manual* (1908; rpt. New York: Peter Smith, 1933), 504–9. The term was in abeyance until revived by Victorian archaizers: see *The*



notable in contrast to the Parson's glassy-eyed plodder (cf. figure 7). At a hackney stables near the Tabard Inn, according to this artist, someone has considered the two pilgrims' vocations and biceps, then has assigned the Parson their calmest "babysitter" horse and the Shipman one that requires some handling when, as in the portrait, it tries to seize the bit.

In the Urry edition the rouncy's rider, true to the text, wears:

. . . a gowne of faldyng to the knee [and]
A daggere hangyng on a laas . . .
Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun.

(GP 391–93)

He also wears a pained expression. Is his awkward seat already causing sores and muscle aches? Or does his face reveal worry about controlling the horse, worry about his tough-guy image should it throw or run away with him?

The latter suggestion appears in Jefferys' near-caricature of a Shipman who contemplates mounting (figure 9). Equipped with a sword, besides the dagger specified, he folds the massive arms of a self-assured strong man with no qualms whatsoever about storms or piracy at sea. Over his shoulder, though, he eyes warily the land transportation vehicle that he has just rented. From the right margin the horse glares back at him and plasters flat its ears, in disgruntled anticipation of yet another bulky, unbalanced, inimical lump on its back. If Jefferys had consulted the glossary in Thomas Tyrwhitt's brand-new edition, he would have found "rouncie"

Figure 8 (left). *The Shipman*. From page 138 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

Figure 9 (right). *The Shipman*, drawn by James Jefferys, ca. 1781. Brown wash. 28 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

Oxford English Dictionary, 2d ed., ed. J. A. Simpson and E. S. C. Weiner, 20 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1989), s.v. rouncy (hereafter cited as *OED*).

as “a common hackney horse” with reference to Latin etymology; he gives it whiskers appropriate to such a low-bred beast.¹⁷

In the background Jefferys shows characteristically medieval townhouses with overhanging upper stories, as he could have observed in older villages and neighborhoods. The artist also places this pilgrim, along with twenty-one of his twenty-three others, into a setting that incorporates the solid stone edifices still standing four centuries after Chaucer’s time. As best he can, the Shipman will heave himself into the saddle from a stone ledge that is even higher than a mounting block.

THE MONK

In contrast Jefferys’s horse-happy Monk prepares to mount from the ground, no mean feat for such a fat man (figure 10; *GP* 200). From among the “ful many . . . deyntee hors” in his stables he has chosen, as most comfortable for long distances, the berry-brown palfrey; his “souple” boots likewise suit all-day rides (*GP* 168, 207, 203). With “eyen stepe” the Monk gazes at the viewer as if daring criticism of the greyhounds, the fur-lined sleeves, the bridle bells, the horse “in greet estaat” (*GP* 201, 190, 193–94, 169–72, 203). Besides including visual specifics from Chaucer’s verbal portrait of the Monk, Jefferys adds authentic details including, as elsewhere, spurs and stone walls and arches.

Out of twenty-four pilgrims in his series, Jefferys shows eleven with their horses, ten of them positioned in front of the animal or on the same plane. Foregrounding of only the Monk’s horse manifests visually the cleric’s major lust in life (*GP* 191–92). His beloved companion stands immobile for easier mounting, while turning its head as if to inquire how much longer this posing for the artist will delay today’s pleasurable outing.

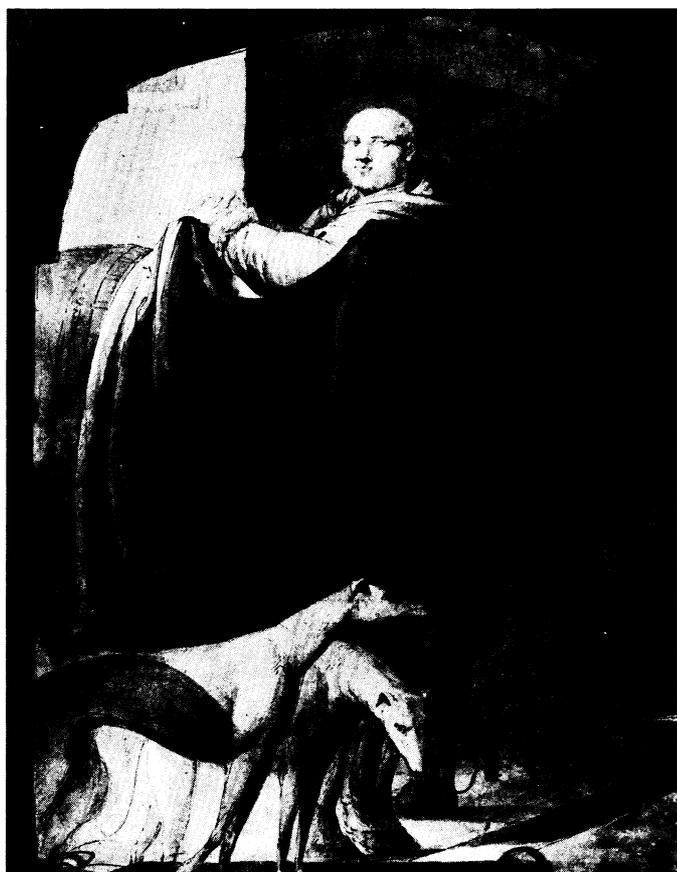
In the Urry edition, a Monk younger than Jefferys’s also stares directly at the viewer with a facial expression impervious to potential criticism (figure 11). These two pilgrims resemble one another more than do any others compared between the two portrait series, partly because the General Prologue gives so many visual details discernible even through fitfully glossed Middle English: the hood fastened under the Monk’s chin with a gold love knot, the sleeves, boots, baldness, prominent eyes, fat shining face (*GP* 193–203). Sitting firm and erect in the saddle, heel down, ball of foot firmly in stirrup, the Urry-edition Monk grasps reins free of bells because the artist, more keyed than Jefferys to pragmatic horsemanship, has put them on breastplate and browband rather than weighing down the bit.

The horse of the Urry-edition Monk exemplifies the potential effect on reception of diachronic shift in meaning of a single word, in this case “deyntee.” If Jefferys had consulted Tyrwhitt’s glossary, he could have learned that at Chaucer’s time the word denoted high value.¹⁸ Although Speght’s glossary does not include “deyntee,” the Urry-edition artist would not have puzzled at a term easily applicable to horses. Well-bred, well-kempt delicacy shows in the flamboyant mane

¹⁷ *The Canterbury Tales of Chaucer*, ed. Thomas Tyrwhitt, 5 vols. (1775–78; rpt. New York: AMS, 1972), 5:178. The glossary volume was published in 1778; Jefferys’ drawings are dated 12 September 1781. I provide Tyrwhitt’s definitions as linguistic context, therefore, not as source. Probably Jefferys worked from a seventeenth-

century edition, because the Speght frontispiece is copied as frontispiece to Houghton Library pf MS Typ 560. (See n. 23, below.) Perhaps future researchers will document the library of his patron Charles Davy, of One House, Henstead, near Beccles, Suffolk.

¹⁸ *Canterbury Tales*, ed. Tyrwhitt, 5:51; *OED*, s.v. dainty a. 4.



and tail, in fine-boned legs and hoofs, and most of all in the Arablike head: big eyes, small ears, narrow muzzle (cf. scraggly mane and large head and bones, figure 8). The dainty palfrey arches its neck gracefully despite slack reins, glad to go anywhere that its fun-loving master suggests.

THE REEVE

In the Urry edition the Monk's casual reining can be seen in contrast to the Reeve's more formally correct control of his "pomely grey" (figure 12; *GP* 616), who snappily executes a "collected" walk "on the bit." These are current terms for the state of enthusiastic submission also recommended and portrayed in eighteenth-century equitation manuals: the horse arches its neck to accept steady contact with the bit, so that its face is nearly perpendicular, and converts some of its forward impulsion into vertical leg motion (cf. figure 14).¹⁹ The Reeve keeps his spine straight but relaxed, aligned with proper foot position. Other than the check-reins essential on a nervous horse in unfamiliar conditions, most of his tack appears more decorative than functional. If tail ribbons indeed meant then what they mean now in conservative equestrian circles, however, Scot's second ribbon gives double warning that no pilgrim should ever ride behind the Reeve (cf. figure 2, 14).

¹⁹ For a representative description of such training see Cavendish, *General System of Horsemanship* 1:105: "the perfection of a well-managed horse consists in his following the will of his rider, so that the will of both shall seem to be the same." The collected walk has been very often shown on heroic equestrian statues since the time of clas-

sical Rome. For examples see Oliver Beckett, "Equine Sculpture," in *The Horse in Art and History*, ed. Michael Seth-Smith (New York: Mayflower, 1978), 34–41; and [Laura Camins,] *Glorious Horsemen: Equestrian Art in Europe, 1500–1800* (Springfield, Mass.: Museum of Fine Arts, 1981).

Figure 10 (left). *The Monk*, drawn by James Jefferys, ca. 1781. Brown wash. 28 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

Figure 11 (right). *The Monk*. From page 160 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.



Figure 12 (left). *The Reeve*. From page 30 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

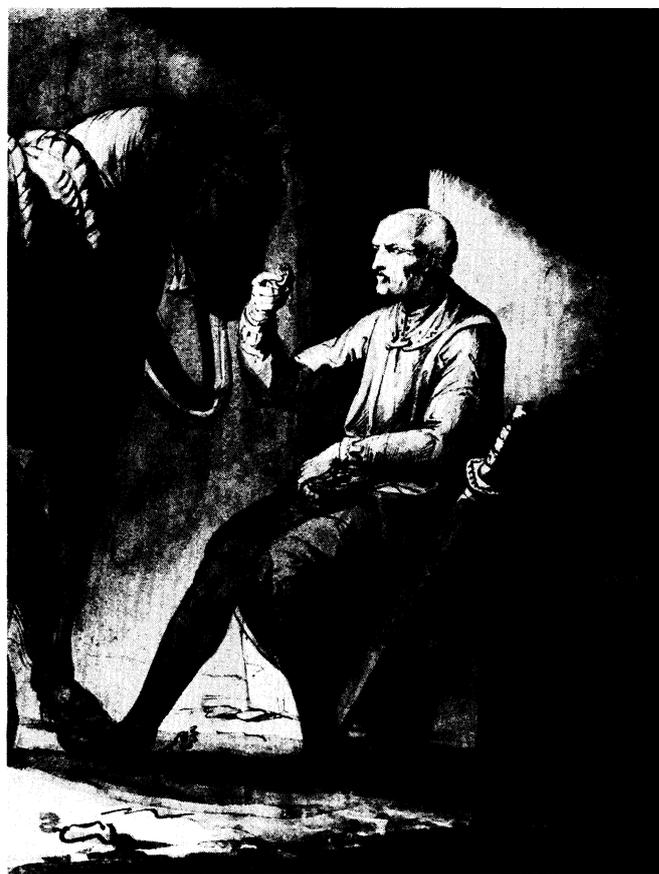


Figure 13 (right). *The Reeve*, drawn by James Jefferys, ca. 1781. Brown wash. 28 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

The Urry-edition artist here supplies diachronic evidence to support an experience-based solution to Chaucerians' sporadic arguments about moral and social implications of the Reeve's position "hyndreste of oure route," and about possible irony concerning his "ful good stot."²⁰ Horse sense applied to the passage reveals a Reeve who, whatever his character flaws otherwise, is considerate of other riders and thereby coated with dust or mud. He stays in the only safe place for a high-spirited horse unaccustomed to groups, which elsewhere in the "route" would be apt to kick, bite, buck, rear, start a stampede, or—if "stot" in Chaucer's text implies "stallion"—make untoward advances to the Plowman's mare (*GP* 541).

Recently a philologist has shown that this Anglo-Saxon word "stot," which became "stud," is unrelated to the word "stot" with which the summoner in the *Friar's Tale* insults the old woman, the latter being derived from Old French "bawdestrot."²¹ Whatever the term's exact meaning at Chaucer's time, the Urry-edition artist does understand the Reeve's stot as an anatomically correct stallion. His Knight also rides an unneutered male (figure 6). Professional riders preferred them to geldings in the eighteenth century, as they decidedly did earlier, because of stallions' innate courage. A military mount would be trained and accustomed to travel with crowds of other horses; en route to Canterbury, therefore, the Reeve keeps the position necessary for the least predictable animal.

²⁰ For a survey of significances proposed for the Reeve's "hyndreste" position, all of which postdate the invention of the automobile, see Douglas Gray's note on *GP* 622 in *Riverside Chaucer*, p. 822. "Stot," of Scandinavian derivation like "stud," appears in sex-indeterminate senses

for both equine and bovine stock: *OED*, s.v. stot sb₁, stud sb₂.

²¹ *GP* 615, *FriT* 1630; Jeffrey F. Huntsman, "Caveat Editor: Chaucer and Medieval English Dictionaries," *Modern Philology* 73 (1975-76): 276-79.



R. Parr sculp.

In this medallion portrait the Urry-edition artist shows demonstrably more interest in Scot than in Oswald, whose mismatched legs and torso support a head far too youthful for Chaucer's text. His age is specified not in the General Prologue but only in his tale link, however, where Jefferys did find it (figure 13; *RvT* 3867 ff.). From the General Prologue portrait, both artists equally ignore visual details that compare the Reeve to clergy: neither one has hair "docked lyk a preest biforn," and neither rides "tukked . . . as is a frere" (*GP* 590, 621). Both artists supply the long surcoat, rusty sword, close shave, and thin legs specified. Jefferys puts extra emphasis on the estate manager's riches (*GP* 617–18, 588, 591–92, 609). From the heap in his lap the Reeve holds up a coin for inspection. His good stot, though neither tied nor held, stands patiently waiting. With ears pricked and an expression of amiable curiosity, sharing its master's interests, Scot peers at the tiny, glittering, inedible object so oddly important to human happiness.

Figure 14. Horse and rider demonstrating a collected walk. From William Cavendish, *Duke of Newcastle, A General System of Horsemanship* (London, 1743), 1:29. Engraved by R. Parr. 21 x 13 cm. Fairman Rogers Collection, Veterinary School Library, University of Pennsylvania.

CHAUCER

Likewise Jefferys's Chaucer figure and his horse both gaze at the same object, a helmet, but their expressions display disharmony (figure 15). The impatient horse wants to head on out for a round of sport; the poet hesitates. Both eighteenth-century artists honor Chaucer by portraying him with equestrian skills appropriate to the aristocracy. Urry's Chaucer excels, as will be seen, whereas Jefferys creates a cartoonlike scene in which the short, tubby Father of English Literature is hoping to avoid a display of horsemanship in so very accurately medieval a setting.

Many eighteenth-century biographies state that Chaucer was knighted by John of Gaunt.²² As depicted by Jefferys, Sir Geoffrey Chaucer is to compete in a tournament to which the lance and broadsword will be transported by his attendant's horse, packed and patiently waiting. The foreground horse turns to watch the helmet, which the attendant at its side holds out toward Chaucer. This richly bedecked courser bears a jousting saddle, decorated crupper, bardings, full neck and head armour, and spiked plume—all accurately medieval. Pricked ears, flared nostrils, swishing tail, pawing, and perhaps a whinny welcome the sight of a rider's final item of attire before the excitement begins.

Its rider-to-be, his back pressed to the picture's left margin, has far less enthusiasm. Jefferys has adapted features of traditional Chaucer portraits to convey the qualms that he himself might well feel, were he urged toward a mock battle using the massive medieval weaponry that he has investigated so thoroughly.

Although traditional Chaucer portraiture constitutes an extensive topic, the basic image and pose remained quite consistent because, through the centuries, artists kept on copying older works each in turn believed to be historically accurate. The Houghton Library portrait on wood, done by an unknown artist perhaps in the seventeenth century, stands in a long line of sweet-faced, fork-bearded Chaucers who finger pen case and rosary while gazing pensively downward (figure 16).²³ Artists and others in the eighteenth century, deriving the conception from this visual tradition reinforced by the Prologue to the Tale of Sir Thopas, believed that Chaucer had been:

. . . of a middle stature, the latter part of his Life inclinable to be fat and corpulent. . . . His face was fleshy, his features just and regular . . . the hair of his beard in two forked tufts, of a wheat colour; his forehead broad and smooth; his eyes inclining usually to the ground, which is intimated by the Host's words [*TST* 696–98]; his whole face full of liveliness, a calm easy sweetness, and a studious venerable aspect.²⁴

With eyes downcast as viewers of Jefferys's drawing would expect, a chubby Chaucer sweetly and studiously stares at the helmet (figure 15). Thus he avoids the potentially reproachful eyes of his attendant, a man taller by the height of two steps. Already dressed for jousting, the latter seems to be urging him to don the helmet despite the poet's lack of armour or even boots. Likewise the misaligned boy is apparently encouraging him to mount, for he proffers the reins rather than just holding the horse. Chaucer, however, edges backward out of the picture.

²² For a survey see Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism* 1:ci–cxii; one example is Giles Jacob, *Poetical Register*, 1719–20 (quoted in Spurgeon 1:349). Jacob's volume contains one of the four heads of Chaucer engraved by George Vertue, another being the frontispiece to the Urry edition. In 1775, for his pointedly brief "Abstract of the Historical Passages of the Life of Chaucer," Tyrwhitt eliminates the knighthood as (presumably) one of "those passages . . . which have nothing to recommend them to credit, but the single circumstance of having been often repeated" (*Canterbury Tales* 1:xxiv–xxxvi, iv).

²³ See Michael Seymour, "Manuscript Portraits of Chaucer and Hoccleve," *Burlington Magazine* 124 (1982): 618–23, which cites the still basic material in Aage Brusendorff, *The Chaucer Tradition* (London: Oxford Univ. Press,

1925), 13–27. Less attention has been paid to the continuing tradition outside of manuscripts; but see Reginald Call, "The Plimpton Chaucer and Other Problems of Chaucerian Portraiture," *Speculum* 22 (1947): 135–44; George L. Lam and Warren H. Smith, "George Vertue's Contributions to Chaucerian Iconography," *Modern Language Quarterly* 5 (1944): 303–22; and Marion Harry Spielmann, *The Portraits of Geoffrey Chaucer* (London: K. Paul, Trench, & Trübner, 1900). Along with paintings, widely distributed engravings such as the Speght-edition frontispiece (1598, 1602, 1687) had significant impact on the portrait tradition (reprod. in Spurgeon, *Five Hundred Years of Chaucer Criticism* 1:146/7).

²⁴ John Dart, "Life of Chaucer," in Urry edition (cited in note 2), unpaginated.



In this visualization of writer as reluctant rider, Jefferys pays particular attention to linear and angular composition. The stone staircase and background horse form an angle reflecting the primary horse's neck and back, while the projecting broadsword and lance create a precise right angle with the staircase/neck line. Furthermore all humans and horses have been positioned along a vertical and a horizontal line, both still visible. Thus Jefferys subordinates his text-based Chaucer character to a carefully organized setting of verifiable medieval relics. Among all Jefferys pilgrims only the group's chronicler stands so far to the edge of his own portrait. However, as indicated by interaction with the Host before and after the Tale of Sir Thopas, the pilgrim Chaucer is a shy person who might indeed wish to avoid the spotlight—whether in jousting or in Jefferys's artistic composition.

Similarly the Urry-edition artist uses an element of composition that sets Chaucer apart from all the other pilgrims (figure 17). His horse's left front hoof penetrates the frame of the medallion. In the Urry edition only Chaucer breaks the frame; analogously his lively poem, with self as character, crosses the usual boundaries of literary fiction then, now, and in the eighteenth century.

Displaying the equestrian skills of Frenchified Augustan aristocracy, Chaucer does dressage. The poet's alert and responsive steed is performing a *pesade* or a *terre à terre* (cf. figure 2, 3). His clothing and accoutrements, except the requisite rosary, are all appropriate for equitation. His firm, balanced seat includes, as quoted previously, a "countenance pleasant and gay . . . [with eyes] pointing directly between the horse's ears."²⁵ The artist found just such a countenance, complete to downcast eyes, on the half-body portrait that he copied from the edition's frontispiece by

Figure 15 (left). Chaucer, drawn by James Jefferys, ca. 1781. Brown wash. 28 x 36 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

Figure 16 (right). Chaucer. Early painting on wood by unknown artist. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

²⁵ Cavendish, *General System of Horsemanship* 1:30.

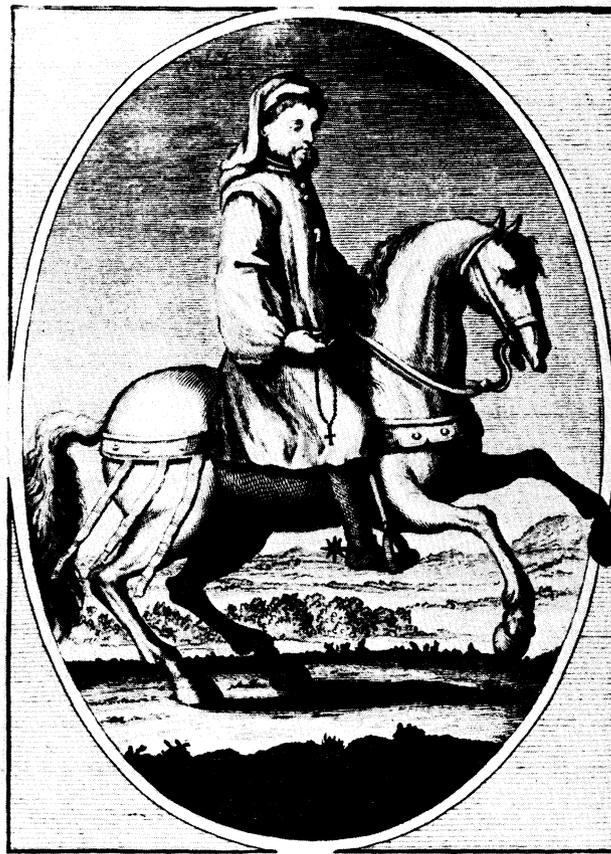


Figure 17. Chaucer. From page 147 of *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, ed. John Urry (London, 1721). 11 x 15 cm. Courtesy of Houghton Library.

George Vertue or from its prototype.²⁶ By gazing exactly where Chaucers always gaze, therefore, the Urry-edition pilgrim is doing exactly what an expert rider ought to do.

Thus each artist has taken cues from traditional Chaucer portraiture and from the fundamental identification of knighthood with horsemanship. The two create interpretations of Chaucer, however, in which the one detail of downcast eyes produces two such different effects as timid reluctance vs. skilled confidence. Although I recognize that Jefferys's comic conception has a firmer basis in textual and contextual evidence, it is the anachronistic equestrian Chaucer that I keep framed by my desk for inspiration.

Like that unknown artist, we Chaucerians idealize our subject first and foremost in terms of our own social context and values. While we like Jefferys attempt to reconstruct his fourteenth-century context, we run the risk of devoting scholarship and pedagogy to the works of a hesitant poet pressed to the margin by the sort of texts and other artifacts that people with money and power have chosen to preserve across time. Balance should be sought—balance between a caricature subordinate to his reconstructed context and, on the other hand, a bold, highly skilled, centered Chaucer well worth a lifetime of study. Such balance is aided by awareness of these portraits and of the masses of other uninvestigated material for study of Chaucer's reception throughout the past six centuries of Western history.

²⁶ The prototype is considered lost by Lam and Smith, "George Vertue's Contributions" 303. For help in the preparation of this article I would like to thank Mary-Jo Arn, Ann Brownlee, Susan Crane, Alexander S. Gourlay, Robert Ryan, Deborah Shaw, A. C. Spearing, the

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