

## A Rhythmic and Phonetic Study in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

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Zhou Yue

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My study is based on an analysis of the 3110 verses (hereinafter referred to as the specimen) of the *General Prologue* (hereinafter referred to as *GP*) and *The Knight's Tale* (hereinafter referred to as *KT*) of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*; it aims to further the comprehension of these two poems and to discover the artistry hidden behind the verses through a prosodic perspective.

I had heard, several times before my scansion of the *GP* and *KT* that they are mainly written in the so-called "iambic pentameter" form. But I was not satisfied with this kind of irresponsible statement, for "mainly" is a word so elastic as to make this argument meaningless. And the fact that both of the initial lines of these two poems are not composed of five iambs provided me with a ground for scanning the two poems entirely. And my discoveries, especially those on the types of verses, on the reading of Chaucer and on the sound symbolism are explained detailedly in the paper.

The results show that "irregular lines" occur 525 times in the specimen and account for 16.88% of the total number of lines. These "irregular lines", excluding the influence of the manuscript, are mostly written by the author for some special purposes: either to lay extra emphases on certain words or to change the tempo of the verses or to increase the varieties of the poems: the connection of their distribution with the content is a conclusive evidence of this. The "irregular lines" are divided into three types: those with inversions, those with surplus syllables and those lacking syllables. The fact that most of the irregular lines are those with inversions indicates that Chaucer must have paid much attention to counting the number of syllables.

Since all the "irregularities" of the "irregular lines" take place within the unit of "feet", it is convenient to rank all the feet according to the number of times they undergo the changes in order to compare their flexibility. And as a result, the first foot turns out to be the most flexible one and its opposite is the fifth foot.

On the other hand, since no one can read Chaucer's verses without taking pauses, the importance of the caesurae cannot be over-emphasized. However, Chaucer's caesurae should not be treated rigidly, for they are actually

moveable. And as I have stated in the paper, one can intensify a syllable in a weak position or weaken one in a strong position to meet the requirements of logic or content; as long as it is right, we can take advantage of scansion and read in a relatively free way.

*Graduate School of Letters, Hiroshima University*