

Ph.D. FIELD EXAMINATION
in
Middle English

To the Candidate

There are three parts to this examination. Part A consists of a question given to the student for preparation one month in advance of the examination and is to be written in the first two hours of the examination (for 50 percent). Part B consists of one question concerning Chaucer (one hour: 25%). Part C consists of one question concerning non-Chaucerian texts (one hour: 25%).

Expectations:

PART A ONLY

Hippolyte Delehaye established certain structural principles of hagiographic composition in his *Legends of the Saints*. Test Delehaye's compositional theses by applying them to each of Geoffrey Chaucer's "Man of Law's Tale," "Clerk's Tale," and "Second Nun's Tale" as well as to a Middle English saint's life of your choosing not on the reading list. To what extent do these principles assist a reader in understanding medieval English texts?

(Two hours: 50%)

PART B

Choose one of the following (one hour: 25%):

1. Examine medieval attitudes towards woman by comparing and contrasting the presentations to be found in *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, the poetry of John Lydgate, the Wakefield *Noah*, and the York "Fall of Man," as well as in Geoffrey Chaucer's "Clerk's Tale," "Wife of Bath's Tale," "Merchant's Tale," and "Nun's Priest's Tale."
2. In his Oxford lectures, C.S. Lewis made the following observation on originality in Middle English writers:

I doubt if they [medieval writers] would have understood our demand for originality or valued those works in their own age which were original any the more on that account. . . . The originality which we regard as a sign of wealth might have seemed to them a confession of poverty. . . . And the paradox is that it is just this abdication of originality which brings out the originality they really possess. The more devout and concentrated Chaucer's gaze on the *Filostrato* becomes, or Malory's on the "French Book," the more real the scenes and people become to them. That reality forces them presently to see and hear, hence to set down, at first a little more, and then a good deal more, than their book has actually told them. They are thus never more indebted to their auctor than when they are adding to him.

Consider the paradox of tradition and originality in Chaucer's use of sources in the *Book of the Duchess* and John Lydgate's "The Complaint of the Black Knight."

PART C

Choose one of the following (one hour: 25%):

1. In discussing the units of Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, one critic calls it a Gothic poem, ". . . with its various juxtaposed versions of reality . . . [and] the tension between phenomenal and ideal, mundane and divine, that informs the art and thought of the period. The variety of pilgrims and tales is thus ordered between traditionally opposed values The pilgrimage frame, with the prologue and links that define it, is likewise ambivalent; it is both realistic and symbolic." Discuss this view of Gothic art in three non-Chaucerian medieval works, such as *Piers Plowman*, *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*, Malory's *Morte D'Arthur*, or one cycle of Middle English drama.
2. Discuss the use of dreams and dream theory in Middle English literature excluding Chaucer. Consider especially *Piers Plowman*, *Pearl*, and a Romance such as *Havelok* or an Arthurian romance.