The Construction of Space(s) and Identity(s) in Medieval Literature: Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales as a Case Study*
La construcción del espacio(s) e identidad(es) en la Literatura Medieval: *The Canterbury Tales* de Geoffrey Chaucer como estudio de caso
A construção do(s) espaço(s) e identidade(s) na Literatura medieval: *Os contos de Canterbury* de Geoffrey Chaucer como estudo de caso

Mourad EL FAHLI[1]

Abstract: This paper examines the engagement of medieval literature in the construction of identities, particularly those of Europe and Muslims. While the former is represented as a unified Christian space, the latter is depicted as an external threat that endangers God's plan and kingdom. Hence, medieval literature distinguished two opposing spatiality's namely Christendom and Heathendom. Such spatial configuration deliberately overlooked internal schisms and antagonisms that characterized medieval Europe and instead opted for an ideal utopian vision, which has its origin in crusading discourses that emphasized unity in the face of "infidels." To examine these issues, the paper takes as an example Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales*, which is considered by many as one of the most influential medieval literary works. Medieval ideological othering has-ad still- shaped understandings and configurations of the various contacts between West and East and between Islam, Christianity and Judaism. The paper further enriches the discussion by a focus on cross-cultural interchange that informs Chaucer's oeuvre, particularly the influence of Medieval Arabic scientific studies on his conception of lovesickness. Such interchange paradoxically problematizes the western condemnatory attitude towards Islam.

Resumen: Este artículo examina el compromiso de la Literatura Medieval con la construcción de identidades, particularmente las de Europa y los musulmanes. Mientras que la primera se representa como un espacio cristiano unificado, la última se representa como una amenaza externa que pone en peligro el plan y el Reino de Dios. Por lo tanto, la Literatura Medieval distinguió dos espacialidades opuestas, es decir, la Cristiandad y el

[1] **Assistant Professor** of *Literature and Literary Theory* at the Faculty of Letters and the Human Sciences, Sais-Fez, Department of English, University Sidi Mohamed Ben Abdellah. *Website*: http://www.usmba.ac.ma/~usmba2. *E-mail*: mouradfahli@yahoo.com.

Heathendom. Tal configuración espacial deliberadamente pasó por alto los cismas y antagonismos internos que caracterizaron la Europa medieval y, en su lugar, optó por una visión utópica ideal, que tuvo su origen en discursos cruzados que enfatizaron la unidad frente a los "infieles". Para examinar estos temas, el artículo toma como ejemplo los *Cuentos de Canterbury* de Chaucer, considerado por muchos como una de las obras literarias medievales más influyentes. La diferenciación ideológica medieval tiene una comprensión y configuraciones de los diversos contactos entre Occidente y Oriente y entre el Islam, el Cristianismo y el Judaísmo. Nuestro trabajo enriquece aún más la discusión con un enfoque en el intercambio intercultural que informa la obra de Chaucer, particularmente la influencia de los estudios científicos árabes medievales en su concepción del *mal de amores*. Tal intercambio problematiza el paradojo de la actitud condenatoria occidental hacia el Islam.

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Medieval times were marked by intense religious clashes between Muslims and Christians, immensely materialized by the crusades[2]. Indeed, literary, political and historical discourses attest to a high degree of such struggle, using a binary discourse that delegitimizes the authority of each group. While Muslim medieval historians[3] for instance used labels like the "house of war", "infidels" (IBRAHIM, 2001: 13) and "the worshippers of the cross"[4] to describe the different Christian kingdom, Christian writers juxtaposed the land of Christendom with that of infidels (Muslims). Certainly, this medieval ideological process of othering has –and still– not only shaped understandings and configurations of the various contacts between West and East and between Islam, Christianity and Judaism, but occulted a long tradition of cultural and literary coexistence which enriched the two cultures.

With a focus on *The Canterbury Tales* this paper revisits medieval times to underline the role of literature in the articulation of a discourse of hatredness that sought to

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[2] It was also a period of cultural coexistence as illustrated in the following sections.

[3] During the period of the crusades, Muslim scholars used these labels to designate Christians.

[4] Al-Maqqarî. Nafh al-Tîb min Ghusn al-Andalus al-Ratîb, ed. Ihsân 'Abbâs, Beyrouth, Dâr sadir, 1968.

legitimize the politics of the crusades.[5] Yet, such condemnatory attitudes, in the words of Edward Said, unsuccessfully concealed moments of intensive cultural coexistence. Such failure to mask external influences is materialized by latent and reluctant recognition of the other.

I. Christendom versus Heathendom

The Canterbury Tales by Geoffrey Chaucer has often been celebrated as a "national" literary work that had better articulate the emerging idea of England and "Englishness. Lee Patterson notes that "Chaucer was alone among his contemporaries in believing that England could develop a national literary tradition equivalent to that of the other European countries." (PATTERSON, 2007: 5) Certainly much of the fourteenth century features in Chaucer's work, particularly the (post) crusade European worldview that vilified non-Christian communities with an emphasis on Muslims. Hence, *The Canterbury Tales* literally and symbolically crystallized a Christian Eurocentric discourse horizontally and vertically opposed to the Islamic world of "infidels."

Though Chaucer's work recognizes Muslims' contribution to scientific progress through some few references to scientists such as Averroes, Rhazes, Avicenna, Hali, Serapion (as explained below) he nonetheless excluded Islam from the realm of true faith and religion, aligning it with pagan rituals and the world of heathendom.[6] Chaucer's heathenization of Muslims rests on Roman church's "vision of sacerdotal world order," that "reshaped western Christian perspectives on outside peoples and places." (WHALEN, 2009: 3) Following such a vision, medieval Christians, including Chaucer, viewed themselves as a community unified through their faith and the defense of Christianity by securing the holy places from the "dominion of infidels."

Chaucer subscribed to the vision of a unified Christian religious community by the construction of a common western literary tradition through his translations of French works and his Italian influences, chiefly those of Petrarch, Dante and Boccaccio.

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[5] The interrelation of literature and the crusades is well examined and relected upon by several authors in the book *Literature of the Crusades* (ed. Simon Thomas Parsons, Linda M. Paterson, DS Brewer. 2018).

[6] For more on the discursive conflation of Muslims and heathens consult the interesting book *Idols in the East: European Representations of Islam and the Orient, 1100-1450* by Suzanne Conklin Akbari. Cornell University Press, 2012.

Indeed, Deschamps viewed Chaucer as a "great translator and gardener" (LEWIS, 1936: 162) who transplanted French and Italian literatures into English, symbolically bringing together belligerent nations, especially the French and the English which had been involved in the Hundred Years War. It is this openness on European literary practices that further shaped the European outlook that characterizes Chaucer's work. The knight's chivalry, for instance, comes first from his defence of Europe against Muslims, becoming the exemplar of the ideal crusader and God's agent.

II. The Knight as the Guardian of Christendom

Flourishing during the fourteenth century the genre of estate literature divided medieval society into three estates, namely the clergy, the nobility and lastly the peasants. The character of the knight, a good example of the second estate, ensures the expansion and defence of Christendom by the "righteous power" of his sword. His privileged position in medieval societies made Chaucer open both his prologue and tales by the figure of the knight. Chaucer endowed him with a messianic mission of widening Christendom's scope. In his General Prologue, Chaucer celebrates his Knight's battles with "God's enemies," and his chivalric ideals, setting the model of God's agent:

> And at knight I therefore will begin.
> There was a knight, a most distinguished man,
> Who from the day on which he first began
> To ride abroad had followed chivalry,
> Truth, honour, generousness and courtesy.
> He had done nobly in his sovereign's war
> And ridden into battle, no man more,
> As well in Christian as in heathen places,
> And ever honoured for his noble graces.
> When we took Alexandria[7], he was there.
> He often set at table in the chair
> Of honour, above all nations, when in Prussia.
> In Lithuania he had ridden, and Russia,
> No Christian man so often, of his rank.
> When, in Granada, Algeciras[8] sank;
> Under assault, he had been there, and in
> North Africa, raiding Benamarin[9];
> In Anatolia he had been as well

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[7] Referring to Alexandria when it was taken by Pierre de Lusignan, King of Cyprus, in 1365.
[8] Taken from the king of Granada in 1344.
[9] The Moroccan dynasty the Merrinids.

And fought when Ayas and Attalia fell[10],
For all along the Mediterranean coast
He had embarked with many a noble host.
In fifteen mortal battles he had been
And jousted for our faith at Tramissene[11]
Thrice in the lists, and always killed his man.
This same distinguished knight had led the van
Once with the Bey of Balat, doing work
For him against another heathen Turk; (CHAUCER, 1951: 4)

Written in the age of the crusades, *The Canterbury Tales* inscribes itself in a symbolic order that rests on a sharply defined binary opposition between Christendom and heathendom[12]. While Christendom refers to the newly emergent Christian kingdoms in different parts of Europe, united under the banner of religion, heathendom includes all those Islamic nations that were in direct conflict with the Christian ones, culminating in the so-called "God's war," (TYERMAN, 2007) for to participate "in the crusades' fight against Islam was not only justified by the church but was considered a positive spiritual endeavor." (WHALEN, 2009: 219)

Chaucer's knight is an ultra-western knight, fully prepared to defend Christians irrespective of their national, cultural or ethnic origin. Hence, we find the knight fighting Muslims in different places, ranging from Alexandria, Al-Andalus, Asia Minor, Armenia, to North Africa. This same knight assisted a "heathen" king Bey of Balat against another heathen Turk. Alliances of conveniences like this one were made during the crusades between Christians and some Muslim emirs or caliphs to weaken their rivals. For instance, the last sultan of the Banu Hud Abd al-Malik ruler of Zaragoza allied himself with the Christian Alfonso I of Aragon to fight the Muslim Almoravids.

Using the pronoun "we," Chaucer explicitly recognizes himself as belonging to a large European collective self, a utopian vision that occults many of the wars, revolts and Christian religious conflicts that characterized his age and excluded from his work. In his study on Chaucer Winthrop Wetherbee argues that "apart from two disparaging references to the Peasants' Revolt, his poetry never addresses contemporary political issues." (WETHERBEE, 2004: 4) His work rather than dealing directly with these events, favoured an ideal representation through which Europe is projected as a unity

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[10] Taken by Pierre de Lusignan in about the year 1367.
[11] Tlemcen in western Algeria.
[12] Though heathenism does not include Muslims or Jews for they all believe in the same God, it was used by Chaucer to refer to Muslims.

in sharp opposition to the "heathenish" other. Indeed, this process of what I call the heathenization of the other is one of the major discursive operations that had governed Western crusading ideology in medieval Europe.

Rather than being a unity, Chaucer's Europe was one of incessant wars, revolts and religious schisms. Fighting over the succession to the French throne, the House of Plantagenet rulers in England waged a series of war against the House of Valois, rulers of the kingdom of France, known as *Hundred Years' War* (1337-1453). It was one of the most notable and the bloodiest conflicts of the Middle Ages Two major causes lay at the origin of the clash; first, the situation of the duchy of Aquitaine, which though it belonged to the king of England, it remained a fief of the French crown, and the kings of England wanted independent possession of it. Second, directly linked to the last Capetian King Charles IV, the kings of England from 1337 claimed the crown of France.

Though the conflict intensified the gap and animosity between the two countries, it was intentionally veiled in the work of Chaucer. This claim rests on the fact that Chaucer visited and even was captured and ransomed in France while serving with Edward's invading army, hence his direct involvement in the conflict; yet still he favoured his utopian vision over contemporaneous antagonisms. This is further suggested by his openness on and interest in French literature, which culminated in his translation of *The Romance of the Rose*, promoting symbolic coexistence between the two belligerent countries. Chaucer's poetry is "the most European in outlook, fully at home with French culture, and ahead of his time in appreciating the brilliant achievements of fourteenth-century Italy." (WETHERBEE, 2004: 3) It is this European cultural commonality that Chaucer emphasized throughout his work, including his translations.

As for religious matters, Chaucer is "reticent," devoting his criticism to "the specific excesses of the Friar, Pardoner and Monk." (WETHERBEE, 2004: 4) He never addresses religious upheavals that had shaken the catholic church, predominantly the Great Schism, which took place in 1378 and culminated in tow popes co-existing, Urban IV in Rome and Clement VII in Avignon. The split was resolved in 1417 with the election of Martin V. As with Hundred Years War, Chaucer remains silent on the

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matter and instead projected a Christian *Umma*[13] of believers in sharp opposition with the heathen other.

This strategy is made plain using the pronoun we in the Knight's description while talking about Christians regardless of their national belonging. It is also expressed in the knight's involvement in the Christian common war on Muslims, making of his participation one of the main ideals of chivalry as illustrated in the General Prologue. Departing from the traditional romance, better exemplified by *The Romance of the Rose* and his own work *Troilus and Criseyde*, Chaucer through his historical references and the wide range of characters situates his pilgrims in his own historical context, while granting their narratives mythical and fictional perspectives.

Hence, *The Canterbury Tales'* narrative structure is based on a narrative bi-polarity which Chaucer establishes in his General Prologue. This bipolarity introduces readers to two different spatiality's and temporalities, one introduces Chaucer's world, and the other introduces, the characters' fictional worlds. The Knight's tale, for instance, better illustrates such bi-polarity.

Roman and Greek writing became a commonplace among late medieval writers, particularly, Chaucer, Boccaccio and Dante. Papinius Statius' *Thebais*, for instance, achieved its greatest popularity during the middle ages. Written in 96 A.D, it became a literary model for vernacular poets, who re-appropriated Theban legends and myths in their poems. While Giovanni Boccaccio's *Teseida* borrowed heavily from Statius, Chaucer based his Knight's Tale on both *Teseida* and *Thebais*. This appropriation of Statius' Theban legend serves an allegorical purpose through which Chaucer criticizes knights who leave their chivalric ideals for lucrative gains. The tale talks about Palamon and Arcite, two young Theban lovers, who fall in love with the same woman, Emyle.

Their woes and suffering in prison are replaced by passion and jealousy to each other when they beheld Emyle in the Athenian court's garden. Central to this tale is Chaucer's praise of king's Theseus's nobility, courage, wisdom and chivalry. Chaucer devoted much space to Theseus's victories, festivities, courtesy and brave actions. When he heard the laments and woes of the Theban women, Theseus rushed to help them and restore the bodies of their dead husbands. Through such mythical story

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[13] *Umma* is the term used by Muslims to designate a unified Islamic world. For more on this check Janine Sourdel et Dominique Sourdel, *Dictionnaire historique de l'islam*, Paris, Presses Universitaires de France, coll. « Quadrige - Dicos Poche », 2004 « Communauté islamique ».

Chaucer privileges his ideal knight by juxtaposing him to Arcite and Palamon, who strayed from chivalric conduct.

Indeed, Palamon and Arcite "represent a perversion of the order of chivalry, as in the case of the breach of the bond of companionate or in the omission of an attempt at reconciliation in the judicial combat." (SÁNCHEZ MARTÍ, 2000: 161). Through the two Theban knights, Chaucer criticizes the knights who were engaged in the Hundred Years War but refrained from taking part in the crusades.[14]

Conversely, Chaucer's knight reflects the image of a right and pious Christian believer ready to defend God's dominion from the threat of the infidels. Thus, internal antagonism, as exemplified by Palamon and Arcite endangers Christian unity and the western's fight against "the enemies of God.

Chaucer's politics of representation is further articulated in the Man of Law's Tale, where a sharp opposition between truthful, pious Christian world and a "barbarous" one is established. While Christians strongly defend their faith, Muslims are ready to renounce it for worldly pleasures; a case in point is the sultan's renunciation of Islam and conversion to Christianity for the sake of Constance.

Such destruction of "mahometry" implies an impossibility of coexistence between Islam and Christianity. Yet, prior to the age of Chaucer and before the beginning of the crusades, Muslims, Christians and Jews coexisted and had politically, culturally and even religiously influenced each other as elucidated below. In al-Andalus for instance, the ninth-century Mozarab scholar, poet and theologian Alvaro of Cordoba (800-861) lamented his fellow Christians for ignoring their own Christian tradition and instead favoured the Muslim one:

> My fellow Christians find more pleasure in reading the poetry and tales of Arabs; they dedicate themselves to the study of doctrines of Muslim theologians and philosophers, not for the sake of criticizing and denouncing it but to acquire a refined Arabic style. Where can we find now a Christian reading Latin biblical exegesis? Who, except theologians, study the writings of apostles and stories of

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[14] Christopher Allmand well noted that "Although enrollment for crusades occurred in late fourteenth-century England, the participation in religious campaigns was insignificant if compared with other more lucrative military expeditions, such as the Hundred Years War. This kind of war had become a source of livelihood for a military class increasingly numerous, to the extent that certain members of the nobility "sold their services to the king in return for wages and promises of obtaining what were euphemistically known as the 'advantages' of war" (ALLMAND, 1988: 47). (cited in SÁNCHEZ MARTÍ, 2000: 162).

prophets? Alas, today talented Christian youths know and appreciate only the Arabic language. They spend a large amount of money on Arabic books, declaring everywhere that such language is worth studying. If you mention to them Christian books, their answer is that they are not worth of attention. What a pity, Christians have forgotten their own language for one in a thousand cannot write a letter without mistakes. But when it comes to Arabic they surprise you with their refine writing to the extent that they write poetry in Arabic that excels that of Arabs themselves.[15]

Alvaro's testimony attests to the status of Arabic language, theology and philosophy and poetry among Christians, implying the existence of an Arab-Christian tradition that existed in the period between 750-1350 A.D when many Christians used Arabic as an official language. Indeed, the Man of law's acquaintance with Arabic philosophers and writers adjures the popularity of Arabic tradition among Christians. If the Crusades were waged to reclaim the "holy sites" occupied by Muslims, they symbolically waged a parallel war on commonalities between Arab and Christians, favouring rapture, clash and incompatibility. Chaucer and other medieval writers who lived during the age of the Crusades contributed to the circulation and perpetuation of such discourse through their crusading literature, which represented Muslims as the eternal enemy and the war on Islam as the eternal and ultimate war.

Gender features heavily in The Man of Law's Tale and the network of binaries that form the crusading discourse. In this tale the world of Christendom is allegorically embodied in the character of Constance, described by the narrator as "the queen of Europe;" humble, courteous, innocent and noble:

> Peerless in beauty, yet untouched by pride,
> Young, but untainted by frivolity,
> In all her dealings goodness is her guide,
> And humbleness has vanquished tyranny.
> She is the mirror of all courtesy,
> Her heart the very chamber of holiness,
> Her hand the minister to all distress." (CHAUCER, 1951: 127)

Contrastingly, the sultaness through whom the Muslim "barbarous nation" is embodied is represented as

> Root of iniquity!
> Virago, second queen Semiramis!
> O serpent masked in femininity!

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[15] SIMONET, F. J. *Historia de los mozárabes de Espana* T2. Madrid, 1956, p. 353.

> The serpent bound in Hell was like to this
> Pretended woman that can wreck the bliss
> Of innocence and virtue, through the spite
> Bred they devil's nest of foul delight! (CHAUCER, 1951: 133)

Hence, whereas Constance, the symbol of Christendom, is associated with heavenly imagery, the sultaness is linked to those of hell and Satin. Contrasting the two female characters rests on a gendering trope through which the community is subsumed in the female body. Throughout the tale Constance is epitomized as a saint miraculously saved by God either from the complot of the Sultaness or later from evil Donegil, king Alla's mother. Likewise, being a pagan, Donegil is depicted as a fiend and a man-shaped monster. Yet, what vilifies both the Sultaness and Donegil is their resistance of, not Constance as a woman, but a Christianity that demands the destruction of their own traditions and cultures.

III. Chaucer's Greco-Arabic-Latin Tradition

Chaucer's "condemnatory attitude" (SAID, 1979: 78) towards Islam does not exclude his fascination with the scholarly achievements of Islamic culture. His work was influenced by scientific ideas directly borrowed from Arabic texts in Latin translation. In the General Prologue Chaucer cites the magisters of the medieval curriculum in his depiction of the physician:

> He was well-versed in Aesculapius too
> And what Hippocrates and Rufus knew
> And Dioscorides, now dead and gone,
> Galen and Rhazes, Hali, Serapion,
> Averroes, Avicenna, Constantine,
> Scotch Bernard, John of Gaddesden, Gilbertine. (CHAUCER, 1951: 14)

Here Chaucer lists the most influential classical authorities of Medicine whom students were obliged to read as the following except illustrates.[16] Written by Clement

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[16] Historia We, therefore, assenting with the favour of paternal benevolence to your worthy desires in this matter and wishing that the qualifications and competent expertise of these bachelors be fully established, by apostolic authority, on the advice and appeal of our beloved sons, masters Guillelmo of Brescia and Jean d'Ales, physicians and our chaplains, as well as of Master Arnau of Vilanova, physician, for the benefit of this same university, do decree that every bachelor in this faculty who is a candidate for promotion to this rank within this university should be obliged to possess, at the time of his promotion: the commented books [of the Articella]: Galen's On Complexions, The Vices of Different Complexions, On Simple Medicine, On Disease and Accident, On Crisis and

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V and addressed to the medical school at Montpellier the letter stresses the importance of studying Latin translations of Arabic treatise on medicine. Chaucer further substantiates such codification by mentioning the most prominent Arab and Persian scholars who influenced medieval scientific studies. He mentions scientists such as Rhazes, Hali, Serapion, Averroes, Avicenna and Constantine. Hali refers to the Persian 'Ali ibn al-'Abbas who compiled a medical compendium called *Kitab al-sina'a al tibbiyya* (*The Complete Book of Medical Art*), also known as *Kitab al-Maliki* (*Royal Book*).

The *Kitab* was translated into Latin as the *Liber Pantegni* by the eleventh-century medical scholar Constantinus Africanus who was a North African monk from Kairouan, Tunisia. Chaucer's reference to Hali as an authority "adds to the physician's credibility." (21) Chaucer's Rhazes refers to the ninth-century Persian philosopher Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi who wrote *Kitab al-Mansuri* (the Book of al-Mansur) and the famous *Kitab al-Hawi fi al-tibb* (*Comprehensive Book on Medicine*). *Kitab a-Mansur* was translated into Latin in the twelfth century by Gerard of Cremona as *the Liber Almansoris*. *The Comprehensive Book on Medicne* was translated into Latin as *Continents* by the Sicilian-Jewish physician Faraj bin Salim known in Latin as Farragius.

Avicenna refers to the Persian philosopher Abu 'Ali Husayn ibn Abdullah ibn Sina whose two books *al-Qan'un fi al-tibb* (*Canon of Medicine*) and *Kitab al-shifa* (Book of the Healing) became core medical texts throughout western universities. Averroes refers to the Andalusian Arab philosopher Muhammed Abu al-Walid ibn Ahmed ibn Rushd. His philosophical ideas concerning essence and existence of the soul had a major influence on western late medieval philosophers. His famous book *Kulliyyat fi al-tibb* (*Generalities of Medicine*) was translated into Latin in 1255 by the Jewish scholar Jacob Bonacosa. Chaucer also cites Serapion, the ninth-century Syrian Yahya ibn Saryfun, Known in Latin as Johannes Serapion. Serapion completed "a comprehensive manual of medicine (Kunnash) in Damascus," existing in both a long and a short version. These works contributed to the development of medical knowledge in England as was emphasized by Roger Bacon:

Critical Days, and Therapeutic Method; the books of Avicenna, or failing him, Rhazes, and also of Constantine and Isaac. Furthermore, they are expected to have read [studied and lectured on] two commented and one uncommented [works], namely, the Art of Medicine [of Galen] and the Prognosis or Aphorisms of Hippocrates (the latter up to part 5) and Regimen and Johannitius and the book on fevers by the same Isaac on the Antidotary [of Nicholas of Salerno] or [Galen's] On Disease and Accident and Therapeutic Method up to book 8. (JAGOT, 2013: 40).

> There are certain hindrances to the acquisition of knowledge on the part of ordinary persons. One is the ignorance of the languages in which medicine is discussed. For the authoritative works are Arabic, Greek, Chaldean and Hebrew works, so that it is impossible for anyone to understand what the authors mean, as is shown in many places, and because they are ignorant of the Greek and Arabic and Hebrew languages from which an infinite number of words in the Latin books are taken, and because of their lack of knowledge they are not able to understand drugs nor how to make them. (JAGOT, 2013: 36)

Likewise, Chaucer's physician is aware of the contribution of Arab scholars to medical knowledge. This awareness highlights the paradoxical attitude towards Islam and Islamic scientific achievements; while the first was condemned as an Abrahamic heresy the second was appreciated, appropriated and recommended. Arabic influence on Chaucer is not only limited to mentioning names of Arab scientific authorities, but also the endorsement of their ideas in his conception of *fin' amors*. John Livingston Lowes was the first literary critic to argue that Chaucer's 'loveris maladye / Of Hereos' owes a debt to the Arabic medical tradition.

Indeed, Avicenna's *The Canon of Medicine*, which was part and parcel of medical curricula in the Latin West includes a section on lovesickness, which "befalls men who indulge in excessive meditation on the beauty of the beloved." (JAGOT, 2013: 49) This conception of passionate love as a disease was common in the Arabic medical tradition to the extent that the Latin idea of *amor heroes* was particularly influenced by the translations of Constantinus, whom Chaucer cited as a medieval authority, and the works of Avicenna, which contained the most developed diagnosis of lovesickness, Chaucer describes Arcite as a lover:

> Crying out in pain
> Alas! For never could he hope to see
> His lady more. To sum his misery,
> There never was a man so woe-begone,
> Nor is, nor shall be while the world goes on.
> Meat, drink and sleep-he lay of all bereft,
> Thin as a shaft, as dry, with nothing left.
> His eyes were hollow, grisly to behold,
> Fallow his face, like ashes pale and cold,
> And he went solitary and alone,
> Wailing away the night and making moan;
> And if the sound of music touched his ears
> He wept, unable to refrain his tears.
> So feeble were his spirits and so low,
> And changed so much, one could not even know

Him by voice; one heard and was in doubt.
Not merely like a lover on the rack
Of Eros, but more like a maniac
In melancholy madness, under strain
Of fantasy-those cells that front the brain.
Briefly, his love had turned him upside-down
In looks and disposition, toe to crown,
This poor distracted lover, Prince Arcite. (CHAUCER, 1951: 40)

Arcite's love is construed as a disease that has both physical and mental symptoms. While the malady is manifested physically through changes in appearance (Arcite's hollow eyes and pale face), it is mentally manifested by his behaviour and melancholic state of mind. Arab medieval scientists, drawing on translations of *De Melancholia* and the Galenic treatises devoted medical studies of the symptoms caused by melancholia and that affect the body, soul and mind. For instance, Constantinus' *Viaticum Peregrinantis* defines love as a melancholic disease:

> Since this illness has more serious consequences for the soul, that is, excessive thoughts, their eyes always become hollow [and] move quickly because of the soul's thoughts [and] worries to find and possess what they desire. Their eyelids are heavy [and] their colour yellowish; this is from the motion of heat which follows upon sleeplessness. Their pulse grows hard and does not dilate naturally, nor does it keep the beat it should. If the patient sinks into thoughts, the action of the soul and body is damaged, since the body follows the soul in its actions, and the soul accompanies the body in its passion. (Cited in JAGOT, 2013: 56)

Interestingly, Constantinus's symptoms echo Arcite's physical and mental states, which suggests Chaucer's acquaintance with Arabic medical treatise on lovesickness. Such acquaintance necessitates a reconsideration of Chaucer's Arabic influences which were mostly reduced to his direct reference to names. Scholars need to revisit Chaucer's work to examine the interchange between Greek, Arabic and Latin ideas in his work.

Conclusion

This paper examined two conflicting attitudes that characterized medieval Europe and that were articulated in medieval literature. Through a study of *The Canterbury Tales* by Geoffrey Chaucer, the paper traced back the origin and the politics behind the western construction of Muslims as God's enemies in the Middle Ages and how this representation is paradoxically demystified by a latent fascination with Islamic scientific achievements.

While Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* endorsed the crusading discourse, it could not obliterate Islamic contribution to western revival which culminated in the Renaissance. Discussions and studies of cross-cultural interchange between the Latin West and the Islamic East have been confined "within the framework of postcolonial or orientalist interpretations." (JAGOT, 2013: 11)

Such discussions should inform literary theory to revisit our understanding of literature, literary influences and the categories of national and world literature. Exploring such themes, one realizes that the concept of literature has undergone a process of "spatialization" and "nationalisation"[17], occulting its cross-cultural interconnectedness that was a major feature of literary production as illustrated by the example Chaucer. The purpose of this paper is to unthink and decolonize literary studies from the manacles of absolutism and essentialism implicitly and explicitly crystallized in the category of national literature.

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[17] Peter Widdowson well examined these two processes in his book *Literature*. Routledge, 1999

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