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Alchemical Symbolism and Hermetic Influences in Chaucer's Poetry: A Hermeneutic Exploration of the British Alchemical Tradition.

MA thesis

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Abstract

This interdisciplinary study innovatively examines the alchemical symbolism and Hermetic influences in Geoffrey Chaucer's The Canon's Yeoman's Tale within the framework of the British Alchemical Tradition. Anchored in literary analysis, through hermeneutics and intertextuality approaches, it integrates cultural study in medieval British Hermetic tradition. Through methodical textual analysis, this investigation aims to uncover the profound potential influences between Chaucer's work and medieval English Hermetic knowledge. The goal is to uncover the underlying meanings and interpretations embedded within the texts and explore the interplay between alchemical symbolism and Chaucer's literary expression, considering the cultural context and the symbolic connotations.

Keywords: Chaucer, Hermetism, Alchemy, Medieval British Tradition, Hermeneutics

"Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him and will sup with him, and he with me "

(Revelation 3:20, King James Version).

1. Introduction.

1.1 Background and Context

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1340s – 1400), an eminent genius in medieval English literature, has left an indelible mark on the literary landscape with his insightful works. The aim of this research is to research *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and reveal its primary hermetic influences, shedding light on this lesser-known work of Chaucer.

The influence of alchemy in medieval literature was discussed by some researchers (Duncan 1967; Fisher 1988; Foster 2002), with some mention of the alchemical aspects of Chaucer's work, providing insights into the presence of alchemy as a meta-narrative structure in the very text. For example, Duncan (1967) analysed the alchemy in Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, discussing the serious tone and nature of the comments on alchemy in the tale (Duncan 1967). While Fisher's work (1988) provides a comprehensive analysis of the role of alchemy in Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and its significance in the broader context of Chaucer's work and the social climate of the time (Fisher 1988). Furthermore, Foster, analysed the theme of alchemy in Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* in 2002, presenting his findings in an article titled "The Alchemy of Failure: Combining Facts and Fictions in Chaucer's 'The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" (Foster 2002). Much like the works of Duncan and Fisher, Foster's study closely examines the utilization of alchemy as a literary device in Chaucer's tale. It also places a specific emphasis on the serious tone and nature of the comments on alchemy within the story. However, there is a lack of studies analysing the Hermetic language of Chaucer's work within the context of the British Hermetic tradition, its historical development, and influences. This aspect has been largely overlooked by researchers, who have primarily acknowledged only a scant selection of overt foreign references within the text (Duncan 1967). Despite the mention of Hermes by Chaucer himself (Chaucer 2015, 564) and being referred to as the Master of Hermetic philosophy by Ashmole, who also included *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* in *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652), little research attention (Linden 2008) has so far been given to the possibility of hermetic sources within the English alchemical tradition of that period, influenced by the works of Roger Bacon and Michael Scott. It is noteworthy that there is no mention of Dunston, the 10th-century Bishop of Canterbury who also wrote a treatise on the

Philosopher's Stone. (Stubbs, 1874: cix). This research aims to fill this gap by providing a focused and nuanced analysis of the hermetic present in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale.*

1.2 Theoretical representation.

Specifically, this research takes a stage further by focusing on a detailed investigation of *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and engaging in hermeneutic exploration of the British alchemical tradition as a means to unveil the key hermetic influences and alchemical symbolism within Chaucer's poetry. To uncover the hermetic influences of Chaucer's work, a thorough examination is necessary not only of the primary text but also of references to *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* in medieval hermetic works.

Through a hermeneutic approach (Iser 2000; Heidegger 2022; Dilthey 1996) there is a possibility to decode the nuanced meanings of symbolical elements and identify the layers of other possible connotations incorporated into the data of *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* thereby adding a new dimension to the interpretation of Chaucer's literary legacy, comprehending the hermetic language utilized by Chaucer to convey the presence of hermetic doctrine, offering a fresh perspective on Chaucer's contribution and providing an essential understanding of how hermetic symbolism manifests in this particular text.

The objective also will be to identify patterns of textual emphasis and establish a structure of "text within a text" as a manifestation of intertextual citation in accordance with the theory of intertextuality (Iser 2000; Eco 1994). The methodology includes the elaboration of symbolic meanings using qualitative and comparative analysis. The hermeneutic methodology embraces an interdisciplinary perspective by integrating insights from literary studies, history, philosophy, cultural studies within the British alchemical tradition.

The medieval period witnessed the flourishing of hermetic alchemy, a profound intellectual tradition that left an indelible mark on various facets of society, including literature. While the hermetic medieval influences were likely well known in Chaucer's time, the intricacies of this knowledge have diminished in contemporary understanding. Furthermore, the intertextual understanding of Hermetic medieval philosophy requires the reader's competence and encyclopaedic knowledge of the cultural, philosophical, and historical environment of the Middle Ages. (Eco 1994) Exploring, probable English medieval hermetic influences are essential to grasp the cultural significance, cultural nuances and profound meanings embedded in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale.*

1.3 The purpose of the research.

The purpose of the research is to explore Alchemical symbolism and Hermetic influences in Chaucer's *The Canon Yeoman's Tale* within the British Alchemical Tradition through a hermeneutic exploration of the text itself. It is reasonable to assume that only limited, partial discussions exist regarding how alchemical influences manifest in Chaucer's works without a comprehensive analysis of text within the British Alchemical Tradition. Moreover, previous research lacks precision in hermeneutically exploring the entire text of *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* for Hermetic alchemical influences. Additionally, this research seeks to define and analyse the functional profile and use of potential Hermetic patterns, employing a hermeneutic methodology and intertextuality. Furthermore, this innovative interdisciplinary research occupies a distinctive niche, aiming to shed light on the relatively unexplored connection between Chaucer's work and the world of English medieval hermetic knowledge. The goal is to uncover the underlying meanings and interpretations embedded within the texts and explore the interplay between alchemical symbolism and Chaucer's poetic expression, considering the cultural context and the symbolic connotations. Therefore, the research intends to perceive the broader influences shaping the use of Alchemical symbolism and Hermetism in written discourse known during that period, with a specific focus on the English tradition of the Philosophic Stone.

The **subject** of the present paper is the comprehensive exploration of Alchemical Symbolism and Hermetic Influences in Chaucer's *The Canon Yeoman's Tale*.

The **aim** of this research is to focus specifically on identifying, defining, and gaining a nuanced understanding of the interplay between alchemical and hermetic elements in Chaucer's work. In order to accomplish the aim, the following **objectives** have been raised:

1. To identify instances of alchemical symbolism present in Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*.
2. To define and investigate in-depth the functional profile and utilization of potential Hermetic patterns within Chaucer's *The Canon Yeoman's Tale*, employing a hermeneutic methodology and intertextuality in the textual analysis.
3. To interpret possible influences of Hermetic Alchemical Symbolism, on Chaucer's *The Canon Yeoman's Tale.*

2. The literature review, the theoretical framework, and the methods.

This section will introduce the literature review, the theoretical framework, and the particular methods to be employed in the presented research.

The definition of *hermetic*[1]*that will be used in this research:*

1.: (*of or relating to the mystical and alchemical writings or teachings arising in the first three centuries a.d. and attributed to Hermes Trismegistus.*) (Merriam-Webster 2024)

The definitions of *hermetism*[2] *that also will be used in this research:*

1. a): (*a system of ideas based on hermetic teachings.*) (Merriam-Webster 2024)

b): (*adherence to or practice of hermetic doctrine.*) (Merriam-Webster 2024)

2.: *the practice of being hermetically mysterious.* (Merriam-Webster 2024)

The definition of *Hermetic writings*[3], according to *Britannica*: (*Hermetic writings, works of revelation on occult, theological, and philosophical subjects ascribed to the Egyptian god Thoth Greek Hermes Trismegistos [Hermes the Thrice Greatest], who was believed to be the inventor of writing and the patron of all the arts dependent on writing. The collection, written in Greek and Latin, probably dates from the middle of the 1st to the end of the 3rd century AD.*) (Britannica 2013)

Hermetic philosophy represents one of the most complex themes of the author's thought and is intertwined with his talent for language use, since especially the medieval author often employed secondary meanings, such as symbols, allegories, and metaphors, using key Hermetic terms to convey the primary Hermetic meaning within the context. Moreover, the difficulty of identifying key Hermetic words is that many connotations that were well known in medieval times have lost their meanings today due to the passage of centuries.

Therefore, it is particularly important to conduct interdisciplinary research on possible Hermetic text, not only examining it hermeneutically for context and intertextuality but also exploring the cultural

[1] Hermetic. *Merriam-Webster*. 2024. In Merriam-Webster.com thesaurus. Retrieved February 11, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/thesaurus/hermetic
[2] Hermetism. *Merriam-Webster*. 2024. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved February 20, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/hermetism
[3] Hermetic writings. *Britannica*. 2013. T. Editors of Encyclopaedia. *Encyclopedia Britannica*. https://www.britannica.com/topic/Hermetic-writings

component of medieval Hermetic heritage, particularly in the case of England. Since, the intellectual understanding of Hermetic philosophy requires competence, which underlies not only knowledge of the literal language, but also competent knowledge of the cultural, social, and philosophical components of the environment of the Middle Ages.

2.1 Hermetic influences in the British alchemical tradition.

Hermetic influences within the British alchemical tradition played a significant role in the connection of the spiritual, philosophical, and practical aspects of alchemy. The integration of Hermetic influences into the British alchemical tradition left a lasting legacy. Beyond Chaucer's era, Hermetism continued to shape the esoteric currents in Britain, influencing subsequent generations of alchemists, philosophers, and mystical thinkers.

It also involves the exploration of universal principles, its nature and the relationship between the macrocosm and microcosm, and the quest for spiritual enlightenment. (Hitchcox 1988) Actually, the British Hermetic tradition and alchemy share historical roots and interconnected themes, but they are distinct in their emphasis, practices, and goals.

The primary focus of alchemy in medieval England was the transmutation of base metals into gold and the discovery of *the Philosopher's Stone*. Alchemy also included the pursuit of the *Elixir of Life*, believed to grant immortality or longevity. (Bacon 1897;1962) Important to note, alchemy is often associated with practical laboratory work and experimentation. In reason, British alchemists sought to transform materials physically, such as turning base metals into gold or creating elixirs. The practical aspect of alchemy involved chemical processes and laboratory techniques. (Hitchcox 1988)

However, the British alchemical tradition is generally based on the primary sources that explores this connection, for e.g. the Hermetic text known as *the Emerald Tablet*. The phrase “As above, so below; as below, so above” is often attributed to the Emerald Tablet, focusing on the idea of the correspondence between the macrocosm and microcosm (Dunstan 1668). Hermetism, rooted in the teachings of Hermes Trismegistus, emphasizes the search of hidden knowledge and the spiritual idea of a divine connection between the macrocosm (universe) and the microcosm (man).

2.1.1 Historical and cultural origins: a developmental perspective.

In the Hellenistic period, people sought divine wisdom exclusively from Hermes (Zosimos 2020). This perspective found echoes in the ideas and beliefs of the Roman Empire, where Hermetic knowledge held significant role in forming intellectual life (Britannica 2013).

Zosimus of Panopolis, also known simply as Zosimus, was an alchemist and mystic from the late 3rd and early 4th centuries CE in Egypt. While not specifically a Hermeticist, Zosimus' writings have been associated with the Hermetic tradition due to the thematic similarities and the broader context of mystical and alchemical thought. (Berthelot 1887–1888; 1893)

In medieval Europe, Zosimus' works were indeed known and circulated, especially during the late medieval period when there was a revival of interest in alchemy and hermetism. During the 10th to 14th centuries, various alchemical texts, including those attributed to Zosimus, were translated into Latin, and disseminated throughout Europe. (Jackson 1978)

In England and other parts of medieval Europe, scholars and alchemists were exposed to these translations, contributing to the development of alchemical thought. The Hermetic tradition, with its emphasis on spiritual enlightenment and the pursuit of hidden truths through alchemy, found resonance during this time. (Burnett 2004)

Within this research, it is essential to acknowledge the varying influence of Zosimus and other Hermetic texts across regions and scholars. The exploration of major differences within medieval alchemical traditions across England, Spain, France, Germany, and Italy reveals variations in vernacular languages, intellectual emphasis, and modes of transmitting Hermetic knowledge through manuscripts and translations over centuries.

The transmission of alchemical knowledge in England involved a combination of prime sources translations, and indigenous interpretations. Monastic communities played a role in preserving and disseminating alchemical wisdom (Hitchcox 1988). English alchemy had a practical focus, with an emphasis on laboratory experiments and the transmutation of base metals. Roger Bacon (1214-1294), an English Franciscan friar, contributed to the empirical approach in hermetic alchemy (Bacon 1597).

In the context of the British medieval alchemical tradition from the 10th to the 15th centuries, Hermetism influenced many scholars, particularly those characterized by writings mostly focused on the Philosopher's Stone. As will be later expounded in the research section, this characteristic of English

Hermetism holds foremost importance, involving a distinct emphasis on explicating the lexicology of the philosopher's stone.

The reason of the constant using of the term “philosopher's stone,” is that the texts of Hermetic philosophy in English medieval monasteries were mostly based on ancient Greek Hermetic philosophy. Despite multiple translations over centuries, ancient Greek hermetic texts retained their original lexicology and terms when introduced to England through Latin or vernacular translations by educated monks. (Bacon 1597; 1897; Dunstan 1668).

The dissemination of knowledge in England was importantly facilitated by the monks. It is important to mention that the texts of Hermetic philosophy in medieval monasteries did not carry any witchcraft connotations, as occurred later during the Renaissance. The focus of monastic Hermetic themes shifted during the Renaissance, influenced by new secular Hermetic authors such as Michel Mayer, Agrippa, etc. (Hitchcox 1988).

As James Webb noticed: “hermetic philosophy claims humanity can attain salvation apart from divine intervention” (Webb 1971, 226).

The intertext of the Resurrection of God is allegorically described as the supreme stage of the eternal God, which influenced the medieval Hermetic concept of obtaining pure supreme gold after all stages of the decay of matter, the healing properties of which were considered a gift from God for healing not only the body but also the soul. (Dunstan 1668; Zosimos, 2020). Achieving the Philosopher's Stone means to understand the nature of God: (*The aim of Hermetism was the deification of mortals through the knowledge (gnosis) of the one transcendent God, the world, and humankind.*) (Britannica 2013) Within the British alchemical tradition, Hermetic concepts such as the unity of the macrocosm and microcosm, the correspondence between the celestial and terrestrial realms, and the transformative power of spiritual insight found resonance. Moreover, the British medieval alchemical tradition embraced Hermetic principles, integrating them as the basis of alchemical framework.

2.1.2 Key figures in British medieval hermetic alchemy.

During early medieval period, alchemy gained some acceptance within the monastic community to deepen theological understanding (Hitchcox 1988). The most important British hermetic tradition contributor, unfortunately mostly unresearched by contemporary scholars, is St. Dunstan (c. 909–988), a 10th-century Archbishop of Canterbury. His association with hermetic writings intertwines historical fact with his book on the Philosophic Stone. (Stubbs 1874)

According to *Memorials of Saint Dunstan, Archbishop of Canterbury* by Stubbs, there is substantial evidence that St. Dunstan's treatise, The *Philosophic Stone*, was well-known in England during the early 14th and 15th centuries, as indicated by the circulation of his manuscripts from that period (Stubbs 1874). Born in 909 AD in Glastonbury, St. Dunstan ascended to significant positions within the church, ultimately becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury. Born in 909 AD in Glastonbury, St. Dunstan ascended to significant positions within the church, becoming the Archbishop of Canterbury. Known for his intellect, piety, and skill in various arts, including metalwork. (Stubbs 1874)

St. Dunstan's connection to the Philosophic Stone has exerted a lasting influence on the British medieval hermetic tradition, though it remains largely obscure to contemporary scholars. Since recent research indicates that Robert Grosseteste (1168–1253) was among the first scholastic philosophers to write about alchemical processes. For example, in an article titled *Early Robert Grosseteste on Matter*, researcher Polloni discovered that in the treatise *On Commentaries on Aristotle's Physics*, Grosseteste initiated his notes with alchemical considerations, associating the first concept of matter with alchemy and astrology (Polloni 2020, 399). Also known as Robert Greathead or Robert of Lincoln, he was an English scholastic philosopher, scientist, and Bishop of Lincoln (Lewis 2019). He commenced lecturing in theology at Oxford, eventually being appointed as Archdeacon of Leicester[4]. Additionally, he acquired a prebend that granted him a canon position in Lincoln Cathedral (ed. Greenway 1977, 32-35). He was undeniably one of the key figures in British medieval alchemy; in fact, Roger Bacon, a notable disciple, was influenced by his teachings (Liebson 2017)

Roger Bacon (1214-1294), also known as Franciscan Friar *Doctor Mirabilis* in Latin, made notable contributions to various fields, including alchemy, optics, linguistics, and medieval philosophy. His alchemical writings, such as *The Mirror of Alchemy*, contributed to Hermes Trismegistus and the transmission of alchemical knowledge in medieval Europe, impacting subsequent generations of British alchemists and earning him recognition as one of the early advocates of empiricism. Due to his belief that knowledge could be derived from authority, reasoning, and experience, Bacon wrote about the search for the *Philosopher's Stone*, a substance believed to have the power to transmute base metals into gold and grant immortality. Bacon elaborated on alchemy as a hermetic science, with citations of Hermes in his treatises. (Bacon 1897;1962) Despite the mystical tendencies commonly associated with alchemy, Bacon approached the subject with a more pragmatic point of view, specifically emphasizing the literal

[4] "Archdeacons: Leicester." Fasti Ecclesiae Anglicanae 1066-1300: Volume 3, Lincoln. Ed. Diana E Greenway. London: Institute of Historical Research, 1977. 32-35. British History Online. Web. 11 February 2024. http://www.british-history.ac.uk/fasti-ecclesiae/1066-1300/vol3/pp32-35.

heritage of Hermes: “For Hermes said of this Science: Alchemy is a Corporal Science simply composed” (Bacon 1597)

Therefore, Bacon, is recognized as one of the key proponents of the Philosopher’s Stone hermetic narrative. Another of Bacon's most notable works is *Opus Majus* (*The Greater Work*), a treatise covering various aspects of alchemy and other subjects: the study of experimental science, languages, and mathematics. (Bacon 1897;1962) Mastery of Hebrew was significant for engaging with the Old Testament and other Jewish theological and philosophical works. Knowledge of Greek, on the other hand, opened the door to the vast corpus of classical Greek literature, philosophy, and scientific writings, including the works of Aristotle and other ancient Greek scholars. By promoting proficiency in languages beyond Latin, Bacon aimed to provide scholars with direct access to these ancient texts. He believed that by directly engaging with the original sources, scholars could gain a deeper understanding of the thought processes and insights of the past (Bacon 1597) He also made definitions for hermetic and alchemical lexicology: for e.g. the “Philosopher’s stone”, “Elixir” (*Elixir Vitae*) and the seven metals (Bacon 1597) Borrowing from Greek and Roman notions of elixirs and potions, Bacon sought the “Elixir of Life”, a substance believed since the times of Hermes to confer longevity and sometimes immortality.

The first eastern *Book on the Composition of Alchemy* (*Liber de compositione alchemiae*) was translated by Robert of Chester (or Robert of Ketton, in Latin: *Robertus Castrensis*) in 1144, it was the first book on alchemy to become available in Europe (Burnett, 2004)

It is important to mention the constant interest to the works of Hermes by English medieval philosophers, for e.g. Michel Scot's (1175–1232) *Magnum Opus*, notably the translation of the *Corpus Hermeticum* into Latin. Michel Scot's scholarly prowess positioned him as a bridge between diverse cultural and intellectual traditions (Ashmole 1652). Scot's translations had a profound and lasting impact on medieval British thought, shaping the convergence of hermetism and alchemy. John of Toledo (Toleto) (? -1275) was an English Cistercian cardinal (*Cardinalis Albus*), known also as John the Englishman who studied medicine in Toledo, where he may have written some alchemical treatises (Skinner 2007, 31–32) For example, his book *Littera de toto magisterio* refers generally to alchemy[5]. It is significant that in the Library of the British Museum, several medical manuscripts attributed to "Iohannes de Toleto" are preserved. These manuscripts, titled *De virtutibus herbarum*, *De pleurisi*, and *De raucedine*, focus on the virtues of herbs and deal with practical medicine (Salvador 2023). They were

[5] Salvador, Miranda. (2023). The Cardinals of the Holy Roman Church - *Biographical Dictionary* - Consistory of May 28, 1244 Retrieved February 11, 2024, from https://cardinals.fiu.edu/bios1244.htm#Toledo

not only sources of herbal knowledge but were also actively employed in hermetic alchemy to unlock the transformative potentials of prime matter and to acquire the elixir of life.

John Dastin (14th century) an alchemist associated with the court of Edward III; John Dastin is known for his hermetic treatise titled The *Pearl of Great Price*. Dastin's work explores the symbolic language of hermetic alchemy and its connection to spiritual alchemy, aligning with the broader Hermetic influences present in British alchemical traditions during the medieval period. Additionally, George Ripley (c. 1415-1490) and Thomas Norton (d. 1513) were also important figures in British medieval hermetic alchemy. Ripley's *The Compound of Alchemy* and Norton's *The Ordinall of Alchemy* integrated Hermetic symbolism with practical alchemical processes and its connection to spiritual transformation, highlighting the intersection of science and mysticism of the Philosopher's Stone in the British medieval alchemical tradition. (Ashmole 1652)

2.1.3 Hermetic alchemical texts in Britain.

Exploring Hermetic alchemical texts and manuscripts is essential for understanding the symbolic layers present in Chaucer's poetry. The works attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, collectively known as the *Hermetica*, form a foundational corpus of knowledge that influenced alchemical thought. (Hermes Trismegistus 1906, I–III).

Generally, these texts, often mystical and allegorical in nature, provided a framework for understanding the interplay between the material and spiritual realms. Through an analysis of key figures and Hermetic alchemical texts in these manuscripts, scholars can gain insights into the visual and textual language that informed the alchemical discourse in Britain during Chaucer's time.

For example, the *Corpus Hermeticum*, a collection of philosophical and theological Hermetic writings attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, is foundational to the Hermetic tradition. (Hermes Trismegistus 1906, I–III). Although the compilation is believed to have originated earlier, the translation of these texts into Latin during the 12th and 13th centuries made them more accessible to scholars in medieval England. It was a key source of Hermetic knowledge and hermetic teachings that encompassed spiritual and alchemical themes. *Asclepius* (also known as *The Perfect Discourse*) often considered part of the Hermetic corpus, *Asclepius* is a dialogue between Hermes Trismegistus and his disciple Asclepius. (Hermes Trismegistus 1906). The text explores philosophical and theological concepts within the Hermetic tradition. Translations and adaptations of *Asclepius* contributed to the dissemination of Hermetic ideas in medieval Europe.

The Emerald Tablet (*Tabula Smaragdina*), attributed to Hermes Trismegistus, is a concise and mysterious text encapsulating key Hermetic principles. While the origins of the tablet are uncertain, it gained prominence during the medieval period. The text's aphorisms, such as "As Above, So Below," have had a profound influence on alchemical and Hermetic thought in medieval England. (Hermes Trismegistus 1906).

Particularly noteworthy is the unique British Medieval Hermetic tradition, evident in a rich collection of primarily anonymous alchemical poems and treatises in Middle English, dating back to the 14th century. Developed into genuine Hermetic alchemical poetry during the 15th to 16th centuries, these works incorporate Hermetic symbolism with practical instructions, illustrating the enduring influence of Hermetic ideas on English alchemical literature. (Timmerman 2013).

The continuity in lexicon allows for the tracing of probable primary source manuscripts, as exemplified by Ashley's translations, which carefully preserve the Hermetic lexicon recognizable through the ages (Ashley 1652). The heritage of medieval British Hermetic tradition can be identified within Chaucer's literature, particularly in *The Canterbury Tales,* specifically in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. In this tale, Chaucer references Hermes Trismegistus, stating: "Of philosophres fader was, Hermes" (Chaucer 2012, 1220).

2.2 Brief biography and a survey of Chaucer's poetry.

Geoffrey Chaucer (c. 1343–1400) stands widely acknowledged as the progenitor of English literature and among the foremost poets of the Middle Ages. Born around 1343 into a prosperous family of wine merchants in London. Unfortunately, sources are scant about Chaucer's early life, but indications suggest he likely received a solid education in Latin and French and definitely had connections at the royal court (Turner 2019)

Moreover, Chaucer's career was marked by his ability to move through different social circles, winning the patronage of influential figures such as John of Gaunt, which provided him with social stability. Therefore, diplomatic missions successfully took Chaucer to France, Italy, and Spain, exposing him to varied cultures and literary traditions. Apparently, he would have made a pilgrimage to Santiago de Compostela (Wright 1998).

It is important to note that Chaucer's literary career was marked by versatility. Beginning in the 1360s, he wrote in a variety of genres with extraordinary talent, including both poetry and prose, and was also successful in translation. His early works include *The Book of the Duchess,* written in memory of

Blanche, the late wife of John of Gaunt, along with visionary poems like *The House of Glory* and *The Parliament of Birds*. But in fact, one of Chaucer's most significant achievements is *The Canterbury Tales*, a collection of stories narrated by characters during their pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury. Also written in Middle English, this work demonstrates the masterpiece, that serves as a vivid reflection of the variety within medieval English society and featuring a rich array of characters and narratives. Geoffrey Chaucer passed away on October 25, 1400, and was interred in Westminster Abbey (Wright 1998, xvi–xix).

It is important to note, Chaucer's influence on English literature is immeasurable. particularly in his pivotal role in shaping the development of the English language. Amidst a medieval landscape dominated by Latin and French, Chaucer's decision to write in Middle English, the language of the common people, marked a remarkable turning point. By utilizing the vernacular, he facilitated a significant shift that not only bridged societal divides but also contributed to the standardization and enrichment of English, ultimately establishing its dominance in literary and cultural expression. A survey of Geoffrey Chaucer's poetry reveals a rich and varied body of work, spanning a lot of genres, themes, and poetic meters. For example, Chaucer periodically utilized a syllabic-accentual meter that had been in use since the 12th century (McCully &Anderson 1996, 97)

Furthermore, he is recognized as the inventor of a significant poetic meter known as *the royal rhyme*. Moreover, Chaucer was the first English poet, who integrated *decasyllables* of five accents, closely resembling the *iambic pentameter* (Gaylord Chute 1946, 89). Geoffrey Chaucer's poetic works, including *Troilus and Criseyde*, *The Book of the Duchess*, *The House of Fame*, *Anelida and Arcite*, and *The Parliament of Fowls*, explore themes of love, grief, fame, and nature, showcasing his adept use of the heroic couplet and the dream vision genre. Chaucer's sources for *Troilus and Criseyde* include the works of Boethius and Boccaccio, adding depth to the narrative's psychological exploration (Barrett 2013). Geoffrey Chaucer's scholarly contributions include translations of works like Boethius's Consolation of Philosophy and Guillaume de Lorris's Roman de la Rose, with ongoing debates on whether he translated parts of the latter into The Romaunt of the Rose (Horgan 1999).

Chaucer's poetry reflects the literary trends and traditions of his time, but he also innovatively adapts and transforms them to suit his writing purposes. The main writing purposes also includes the use of colloquial English, as well as exploration of variety social themes, and skilful storytelling. It definitely contributes to Chaucer's enduring legacy within the esteemed canon of English medieval literature.

According to Wright, Chaucer had a significant library, “more than many an Oxford and Cambridge college could boast” (Wright 1998, xv). Among Chaucer's noteworthy contribution is the *Treatise on the Astrolabe*, a potential dedication to his son Lewis, scrupulously detailing the structure and functionality of the astronomical instrument. Despite the incorporation of material from variety of sources, the treatise serves as a proof of Chaucer's erudition in medieval scientific knowledge, also enhancing his competence in prose. There are a lot of foreign lexicons in the work, intentionally left untranslated by Chaucer into the vernacular English. For instance, the term “zenith” remains in its original form, highlighting Chaucer's deliberate choice to retain certain foreign expressions.

According to Truitt, within the text, Chaucer is credited with the invention of certain Middle English terms, such as “experience.” (Truitt 2023). This neologism is a discernible allusion to Roger Bacon's *Opus Majus* (Bacon 1897;1962) and its Latin term *experientia*. This deliberate incorporation of terminology not only underscores Chaucer's linguistic proficiency, but also exemplifies his engagement with and adaptation of medieval scientific discourse, as evidenced by his lexical choices rooted in the influential works of his time.

Significantly, the Equatorie of the Planetis, discovered in 1952, showcases linguistic parallels with Chaucer's style and expands on concepts from the Treatise on the Astrolabe, yet its attribution to Chaucer remains uncertain and contentious among scholars (Singh 1999, 27; Blake 1996).

Intriguingly, during the Renaissance period, certain alchemical English poems were also erroneously attributed to Chaucer (Timmerman 2013, 100). While some manifest stylistic echoes of Chaucer, others, presumed to be just a part of Britain's alchemical legacy, will be subjected to more detailed examination in the subsequent sections.

2.2.1 Chaucer's work *The Canterbury tales* and its position in medieval literature.

Chaucer's masterpiece *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1387–1400) is a collection of stories compiled in the context of a pilgrimage to the shrine of Thomas Becket in Canterbury. The plot of which is based on the fact that a group of pilgrims, different in status, representing different social classes and professions, tells stories, such as romantic and moral, comedies or satire in order to keep themselves busy on the road and moreover to win the main prize, a free dinner. (Wright 1998).

Chaucer himself means it is like a game. Chaucer's narratives serve as a mirror reflecting the complexities and contradictions inherent in medieval society. Therefore, *the Canterbury Tales* is a fairly exact analysis of medieval English society and demonstrates Chaucer's real mastery of suspenseful

storytelling, as well as his keen and competent observation of human behaviours and his abilities as a subtle medieval psychologist.

The Canterbury Tales discourse provides a microcosm of medieval English society, providing a detailed and multifaceted record of the social, cultural, and economic issues of the time. (Hitchcox 1988).

Chaucer's literary innovation in narrative structures and genre studies, represents another monumental aspect of his legacy. Chaucer's inventive techniques, such as the frame narrative in *The Canterbury Tales*, not only captivated medieval audiences, but also opened the door for subsequent generations of writers to experiment with narrative forms and creative genres.

The use of vivid language, Chaucer's keen observations of human behaviour, healthy sense of humour, moral subtleties, and social hierarchies, all this creates a sense of interactivity in the reader, where he becomes a real observer of situations with the ability to also track the psychology of human souls.

In reason, the frame narrative in *The Canterbury Tales* becomes an achievement of Chaucer's narrative ingenuity, allowing the multiple voices and perspectives of the characters to come together into a single narrative structure.

2.2.2 Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*: plot summary.

In Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, the narrative unfolds within the framework of The Canterbury Tales, providing a compelling exploration of alchemy and its complexities. The tale centres around the Canon and his Yeoman, who disclose the deceptive and fraudulent practices prevalent in the pursuit of alchemical transmutation. As the Yeoman exposes the Canon's unscrupulous behaviour, the narrative delves into the intricacies of alchemical endeavours and the inherent challenges therein. (Wright 1998).

The Prologue is the introductory section where the Yeoman, serving as the narrator, provides background information and context for the upcoming Tale. In this section, the Yeoman expresses his disillusionment with alchemy, outlining the failures and challenges associated with the practice. Moreover, the Yeoman reveals his intention to disclose the secrets of alchemy, setting the stage for the subsequent narrative. As it possible to notice, there are discernible shifts in focus and content within the overall narrative:

The initial *pars prima* of the tale introduces the Canon and the Yeoman as practitioners of alchemy. The Canon borrows money from a priest, promising to reveal alchemical secrets in return. The Canon employs deceitful tactics, performing sleights of hand with quicksilver, chalk, and a twig to make it appear as though he can transform these materials into real silver.

However, the priest possesses the ability to transmute base materials into precious metals, unaware of the deception, becomes increasingly impressed with the Canon's supposed alchemical abilities.

Surprisingly, the narrative then transitions to the second *pars*. The priest, convinced of the Canon's alchemical prowess, purchases the fraudulent secrets for a substantial amount of forty pounds. After extracting the money, the Canon promptly disappears, leaving the priest disillusioned and financially depleted.

The story concludes with a broader critique of Canon's dubious dealings, ultimately revealing the duplicitous nature of his alchemical practices. Yeoman exposes, emphasizing the deceptive moral side of nature and the difficulty of acquiring wealth through such means. The simple plot offers a critical look at the thematic intersection of science, morality, and human existence. *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* highlights the enduring relevance of Chaucer's views on the human condition. This story not only serves as a warning about the deceptive appeal of alchemy, but also invites readers to consider the ethical dimensions of their own ambitions.

However, the tale's in-depth and nuanced exploration of alchemy by Chaucer cannot solely serve for criticizing the complexities of human behaviour and the ethical dimensions of scientific pursuits in the medieval context, due to the utilization of specific knowledge about the Philosopher's Stone. The alchemical processes, described very faithfully and accurately in the Yeoman Canon's Tale, acquire deep significance as a thematic aspect. The overly careful description of the ingredients and instruments used in alchemical experiments, the ambiance that Chaucer creates in the narrative, serves as a deep meaning, and has a dual nature and implication.

The dramatic structure of *The Canon's Yeoman Tale*, which includes both a prologue and a body, follows the overarching structure of *The Canterbury Tales*. This structural sequence enhances the impact of the tale, allowing Chaucer to explore in detail human greed and the influence of material desires. The narrative's thematic resonance with other stories in *The Canterbury Tales* further highlights society's widespread concerns about greed and the ethical consequences of one's actions (Grennen 1965, 546–560)

2.2.3 Review of scholarly works on *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* regarding its potential connections to Hermetic alchemy.

The scholarly discourse surrounding *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* includes different disciplines, providing some original insights into the tale's profound meanings. A predominant theme in this literature focuses on the use of alchemy as a metaphorical means of transformation. Some scholars, representing a wide range of scientific fields, argue that the alchemist, although a literary character in a tale, transcends the ordinary status of a practitioner, becoming a powerful symbol embodying the transformative power inherent in gnostic knowledge. Through the narrative's meaning and intertext, readers can access a unique perspective on the realm of concealed knowledge and esoteric wisdom (Hitchcox 1988).

Significant for the present research is the work of Kathryn L. Hitchcox (1988), where she provides her own view on the use of alchemy in Chaucer's works, including *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. She analyses, particularly, the theological and theosophical aspects of Chaucer's work, exploring also the moral and historical context of alchemy.

Hitchcox rightly suggests that Chaucer employed alchemical signs in both *the Canon's Yeoman's Tale* and the *Second Nun's Tale* to examine the theme of transformation within not alchemical, but rather a theosophical context. Hitchcox persuasively argues that *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* engages with the symbolic lexicon of alchemy to act as a mediator between man and God, navigating the realms of physical reality and spiritual transcendence. Interesting, that in her interpretation, Chaucer utilizes alchemical signs as a means of communication, facilitating a dialogue about spiritual truth and enabling individuals to undergo a profound metamorphosis from the "old man of Adam" to the "new man in Christ" (Hitchcox 1988, 10).

Furthermore, her research emphasizes the centrality of symbolic theosophy as the primary language conveying spiritual morality in Chaucer's works. Rather than an exhaustive exploration, Hitchcox strategically focuses on key alchemical symbols within the text, particularly those associated with processes and signs, aligning them with her theosophical conclusion: "*Chaucer emphasized that spiritual realities"* (Hitchcox 1988, 199). From the perspective of a narrative of alchemical discourse in Hitchcox's work, which involved some studies of influences, with the main focus being on Chaucer's medieval theosophical influences rather than alchemical ones: "false alchemy and spiritual alchemy" (Hitchcox 1988, 22).

Notably absent from Hitchcox's examination is an in-depth analysis of Chaucer's accuracy in presenting alchemical knowledge within the broader context of the British alchemical tradition surrounding the Philosopher's Stone. In her conclusion, Hitchcox exclusively emphasizes the theosophical and spiritual connotations of Chaucer's statement*:* "Yet at the end his tale, the Yeoman affirms that the Philosopher's Stone exists, and describes it as a gift which Christ' reveals to those who please him**"** (Hitchcox 1988, 128).

Generally, in Hitchcox's scholarly work, there is a notable omission of a comprehensive analysis of term like "Hermetism" within their historical context, even though occasional references to Hermes are acknowledged within a historical framework. As the result, she argues that Chaucer's alchemical references to Arnald of Villanova's *Rosarium philosophorum* primarily centre on themes of spiritual salvation within the Christian discourse (Hitchcox 1988, 164-165).

However, this approach limits the exploration of potential underlying meanings in Chaucer's words, disregarding aspects inherent in the broader Hermetic tradition. The Hermetic tradition not only encompasses an essential theosophical dimension concerning spiritual salvation by God but also involves practical dimension, that involves recognizing and discovering the miracles of God in nature, symbolized and manifested, for instance, through the reception of the gift of the Philosophical Stone (Dunstan 1668, 84).

Therefore, the research has in-depth analysis limitations of the entire text of Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, and also limitations in terms of its focus on hermetic symbolic interpretation and influence, which likely resulted in its potential lack of addressing other aspects of alchemical discourse in the Yeoman's Tale.

The next significant resource for the present research is Gabrovsky's *Chaucer the Alchemist: Physics, Mutability, and the Medieval Imagination* (2015). It undertakes a comprehensive analysis of Chaucer's complex involvement with alchemy and its complex connections to medieval physics, variability, and the broader medieval imagination. He examines Chaucer's utilization of alchemy in various works, emphasizing its integral role in shaping medieval thought and culture. (Gabrovsky 2015).

Significant is a scholarly work by Mann (2005) that analyses the complex role of alchemy in Chaucer's *The Canon Yeoman's Tale*, emphasizing the deep connection between alchemical practices and the overarching themes of transformation, deception, and the relentless pursuit of knowledge, in which his work very correlates with the Hitchcox's work (1988). Similar to Hitchcox, Mann interprets

alchemical processes as symbolic representations conveying internal states and spiritual dimensions (Mann 2005, 203).

However, in contrast to the Hitchcox work (1988). Mann derives compelling evidence from the Yeoman's description of the Canon's endeavours to create the Philosopher's Stone, demonstrating how alchemy can metaphorically represent both literal and figurative transformation. Mann's scholarly exploration posits that alchemy operates as a symbolic language, conveying profound meanings concealed beneath its surface (Mann 2005, 202).

Similar to Hitchcox, Mann explores the moral responsibility of the alchemist and highlights the risks associated with pursuing alchemical knowledge, as seen in the Yeoman's narrative (Mann 2005, 204). Unfortunately, this work also lacks a step-by-step analysis of *The Canon Yeoman's Tale and* does not make explicit references to the earliest works on hermetism directly authored in medieval England.

Additionally, Stanton J. Linden's "Dark Hieroglyphs: Alchemy in English Literature from Chaucer to the Restoration" (2008) offers a comprehensive analysis of alchemy's influence on English literature from the late Middle Ages to the seventeenth century, revealing the widespread interest in alchemical and Hermetic concepts among English writers like Chaucer, Langland, Gower, and Shakespeare (Linden 2008).

However, the work is not without its limitations, as it falls short in providing complete alchemical interpretations of *The Canon Yeoman's Tale*, detailing the developing intellectual landscape, and detailing the progressive nuances in the literary successful employment of alchemy.

2.3 Theoretical and conceptual framework.

This section presents some aspects on Hermeneutic methodology: principles and application, the alchemical symbolism: interpretation and analysis in literature, intertextuality: "text within a text" analysis.

According to the *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, hermeneutics is (*the theory and practice of interpretation, especially the interpretation of biblical texts, wisdom literature, and philosophical texts*.) (SEP 2021). This definition underscores hermeneutics' dual emphasis on theoretical frameworks and practical approaches to interpreting complex texts. In essence, hermeneutics encompasses a broad spectrum of interpretive practices, allowing scholars to engage deeply with diverse literary and philosophical traditions.

According to Merriam-Webster, hermeneutics is "the study of the methodological principles of interpretation, especially of scriptural text"[6] This definition emphasizes the structured approach hermeneutics takes towards understanding texts, particularly those of a scriptural nature. By focusing on methodological principles, hermeneutics provides a systematic framework for interpreting complex and often ambiguous literary works, facilitating a deeper comprehension of their underlying meanings.

2.3.1 Hermeneutics and Intertextuality: Principles and Application.

According to Smith, hermeneutics is defined as “the theory and methodology of interpretation, particularly focused on understanding written, verbal, or symbolic communication” (Smith 2005, 22).

In *Introduction to Hermeneutics*, Smith emphasizes that hermeneutics is “an art that requires both sensitivity to linguistic nuances and an awareness of broader cultural contexts” (Smith 2005, 52) and involves “interpreting and understanding texts within their cultural and historical context” (Smith 2005, 36). Hans-Georg Gadamer has contributed significantly to hermeneutics, and while *Truth and Method* is one of his major works, here is an example citation from another influential work of his, *Philosophical Hermeneutics*. In his exploration of philosophical hermeneutics, Gadamer contends that “the interpretative process involves a continual fusion of horizons, where the interpreter engages in a dynamic dialogue with the text, transcending temporal and cultural barriers” (Gadamer 1976, 92). Gadamer's influential work on hermeneutics argues that “the fusion of horizons is at the heart of interpretation, where the interpreter's pre-understanding interacts dynamically with the historical context of the text, creating a shared space for meaning to emerge” (Gadamer 1960, 148). However, according to Jones and Davis, hermeneutics involves “a dialectical process of understanding between the interpreter and the text, with both influencing each other in the interpretative act” (Jones & Davis, 2010, 78).

Martin Heidegger, a significant figure in existential philosophy, made important contributions to hermeneutics, and his profound influence is most notably articulated in his seminal work, *Being and Time* (1927). In this text, Heidegger analyse the concept of understanding (Verstehen) as not merely a cognitive process but as intrinsic to the very fabric of human existence. Heidegger's hermeneutics is closely tied to his phenomenological exploration of “Being”. Central to Heidegger's hermeneutics is the idea of the “hermeneutical circle,” a notion that reshapes our understanding of how interpretation unfolds. Heidegger contends that understanding is not a linear progression but a circular movement between parts

[6] Merriam-Webster. 2023. Hermeneutics. In Merriam-Webster.com Dictionary.

and wholes. This dynamic process involves a constant interplay between the particulars of a text and the overarching whole, a reciprocal movement that deepens the interpreter's grasp of meaning.

Wilhelm Dilthey, a prominent figure in the development of hermeneutics, particularly emphasized the understanding of human experience in his seminal work, *Introduction to the Human Sciences*. Published posthumously in 1996, this text encapsulates Dilthey's foundational ideas that have significantly influenced interpretative approaches in the social sciences and humanities. Dilthey's hermeneutics is distinctive for its delineation between the natural sciences (Naturwissenschaften) and the human sciences (Geisteswissenschaften). In making this distinction, he asserted that understanding human expressions, such as texts or historical events, necessitates a specialized interpretative approach. Unlike the natural sciences, which seek causal explanations, the human sciences, according to Dilthey, are concerned with grasping the meaningful connections embedded in human experiences. This methodological approach aligns with the broader hermeneutical notion that understanding involves a dialogical interaction between the interpreter and the interpreted.

Furthermore, Dilthey's hermeneutics laid the groundwork for interpretative methods in the social sciences and humanities. By highlighting the distinctive character of human expressions and advocating for empathetic engagement, he influenced subsequent generations of scholars, shaping methodologies for disciplines such as sociology, anthropology, and history.

The famous researcher Wolfgang Iser explores the intricate nature of the hermeneutic process, asserting that "the reader's engagement is the crucible where meaning is forged" (Iser 1995, 78) In Iser's hermeneutic paradigm, the interaction with texts unfolds as a dialogical exchange. The reader becomes an active participant in a hermeneutic dance, responding to the text's cues while simultaneously influencing the evolving meaning through their subjective interpretation. This dialogical nature of interaction emphasizes the reciprocal relationship between the reader and the text, with each influencing the other in a continual and dynamic interplay.

Iser continues to emphasize the dynamic nature of interpretation, stating that "meaning emerges through the ongoing dialogue between the reader and the text" (Iser 1978, 42). The hermeneutic lens, when applied to the interaction with texts, accentuates the interpretative nature of this engagement. Hermeneutics, in this context, becomes the guiding framework through which readers navigate the textual landscape, recognizing that meaning is not inherent solely in the text itself but is co-constructed through the interpretative act.

According to *Implied Reader* (1980), the main his aspect is interactives. Iser's concept of the implied reader underscores the active role of the audience in the interpretative process (Iser 1980, 63). In reason, according to Wolfgang Iser, “interpretation is not a passive reception but a dynamic interaction between the reader and the text” (Iser 1978, 25). Therefore, this hermeneutic interplay transforms the act of reading into a collaborative engagement, wherein each reader brings their unique set of experiences, perspectives, and interpretative lens to the textual encounter, thereby contributing to the rich and multifaceted nature of textual meaning. In essence, Iser's reception-oriented approach, when viewed through a hermeneutic lens, unveils a dynamic and participatory interaction with texts.

Generally, the hermeneutic nature of this engagement emphasizes that meaning is not a static entity confined to the text but a collaborative creation that appears through the ongoing dialogue between the reader and the text. As readers traverse the hermeneutic landscape of interpretation, they contribute to the kaleidoscopic richness of textual meaning, underscoring the vitality of the hermeneutic process in shaping the interpretative dynamics.

Intertextuality, a term coined by Julia Kristeva, refers to the shaping of a text's meaning by another text: “the notion of intertextuality replaces the notion of “*intersubjectivity*”” (Kristeva 1980). It focuses on the interconnection between similar or related works of literature that reflect and influence an audience's interpretation of the text. In the context of The Canon's Yeoman's Tale, intertextuality allows readers to explore themes of concealed knowledge and esoteric wisdom by drawing connections with other alchemical texts and Hermetic traditions. Umberto Eco, a renowned scholar in semiotics and medieval studies, elaborates on this concept by suggesting that every text is a mosaic of quotations and that each text absorbs and transforms other texts. This perspective is evident in his work The Role of the Reader: Explorations in the Semiotics of Texts, where Eco states, “The text is a lazy machine that demands the reader to do some of its work” (Eco 1984, 3). By engaging with intertextual references, readers can uncover deeper layers of meaning in Chaucer’s narrative, enriching their understanding of medieval alchemical traditions.

3. The Canon's Yeoman's Tale: Results and Discussion. Applying Hermeneutics and Intertextuality to Uncover Interpretations within Layers of Meaning and Potential Hermetic Influences.

Important to mention, that for this comprehensive analysis of *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, *The Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript*, created between 1400 and 1410, and republished by Delphi Classics in 2012, with its parallel modernized and annotated text, produced by the editors' team, will be used. It serves as a key primary source for this research, as *The Ellesmere Chaucer manuscript* was intended to reconstruct Chaucer's original text and intentions, as noted by J. M. Manly and E. Rickert in *Text of the Canterbury Tales* (1940). However, it has been observed that whoever edited *The Ellesmere manuscript* likely made some revisions and tried to regularize spelling (Manly & Rickert 1940). *The Hengwrt Chaucer*, being the oldest manuscript but missing all folios of The Canon's Yeoman's Tale, will be employed solely for the analysis of the General Prologue.

Through a hermeneutic approach (Iser 2000; Heidegger 2022; Dilthey 1996), nuanced meanings of symbolic elements in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* can be decoded, revealing layers of connotations embedded within the text. This approach offers a new dimension to interpreting Chaucer's literary legacy, uncovering the hermetic language employed by Chaucer to convey the presence of hermetic doctrine and providing a fresh perspective on his contribution. Additionally, the objective is to identify textual emphases and establish a structure of "text within a text" as a manifestation of intertextual citation, drawing on the theory of intertextuality (Iser 2000; Eco 1994). The methodology involves qualitative, quantitative, and comparative analysis to elaborate on symbolic meanings. This hermeneutic methodology integrates insights from literary studies, history, philosophy, and cultural studies within the British alchemical tradition.

In the introductory lines of the *Canterbury Tales*, Chaucer establishes a narrative structure resembling a game, infusing it with a sense of interactivity that actively involves the readers. This framework allows the audience not only to passively receive the tales but also to actively analyse them alongside the characters: "He seyde: 'Sin I shal biginne the game, / What, welcome be the cut, a Goddes name!" (Chaucer 2012, 739)

Chaucer invites the readers to be witnesses of a protagonist's game, where the victor of the best tale earns a complimentary dinner. This narrative framework shares parallels with aspects of Gadamer's

hermeneutic philosophy, particularly his assertion that “a work of art is a game, it is its real existence, inseparable from its representation” (Gadamer 1975, 116).

According to Gadamer, art is a game, encompassing elements of understanding and recognition within its domain. Furthermore, Gadamer underscores the significance of language in artistic expression, particularly emphasizing poetry as a unique form of art closely aligned with philosophy. Expanding on this notion, Kačerauskas suggests in a hermeneutic context that the interpretation of poetry serves as a pathway to philosophical poetics: “The interpretation of poetry leads to philosophical poetics” (Kačerauskas 2006, 202).

Furthermore, according to Heidegger, philosophical poetics is characterized by the linguistic nature of understanding and being, manifesting as the openness of the hermeneutic horizon and worldview. This assertion arises from the association of metaphor, a paradigm of philosophical poetics, with cultural aspects, thereby giving rise to a model of hermeneutics within philosophical poetics (Heidegger 1997).

Iser's approach to reader-response theory also underscores the interplay between the reader and the text, emphasizing that meaning appears through this interactive dialogue, thereby echoing Heidegger's assertion regarding the linguistic nature of understanding and being within the hermeneutic horizon and worldview (Iser 2000; Heidegger 1997).

The contemporaries of Chaucer, as well as those who lived shortly after his time, unhesitatingly interpreted his *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* as a hermetic work, often referring to him as the Master of Hermetic philosophy. For instance, Thomas Norton (1436–1513) wrote *The Ordinal of Alchemy* (1477), which contains numerous verses connecting Chaucer to hermetism in Middle English poetry. In this work, Norton mentions Chaucer's significant and rare hermetic term “Titanos” in reference to “Magnesia” (Norton 1652, 42). This recognition of Chaucer's hermetism underscores the enduring influence and interpretation of his works within the context of hermetic philosophy**: “**Plato knew her property and called her by her name, / And Chaucer reherſeth how Titanos is the ſame, / In the Channons Yeomans Taile ſaying what is thus” (Norton 1652, 42).

Equally important, Norton's reference to Chaucer played a significant role in shaping the Renaissance perception of Chaucer as an alchemist, contributing to a broader understanding of Chaucer's intellectual and literary legacy within the context of Renaissance hermetism (Schuler 1984).

Moreover, Norton, an experienced alchemist of his time, purposefully mentioned Chaucer's term "Titanos," showing its rarity in medieval literature and highlighting Chaucer's proficiency in hermetic terminology. This will become evident later in this research.

Essential for this research is that fact, Ashmole also noted Chaucer's use of rare hermetic terminology, specifically in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*. Furthermore, in his annotations, he provided an exhaustive explanation for including Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, as well as Gower's alchemical poetry, in *Theatrum Chemicum Britannicum* (1652). Ashmole describes Chaucer as being ranked among the hermetic philosophers, referring to him as a "judicious Philosopher, one that fully knew the Mystery." Additionally, Ashmole highlights Gower (1330 – 1408) as Chaucer's master in this regard, stating, (*Nowas Concerning Chaucer (the Author of this Tale) he is ranked amongst the Hermetick Philosophers, and his Master in this Science was Sir John Gower, whofe familiar and neere acquaintance began at the Inner Temple upon Chaucer' s returne into England.*) (Ashmole 1652, 470).

In *The Discoverie of Witchcraft* (1584), authored by Reginald Scot (also known as Scott) (1538 – 1599), an English doctor and Member of Parliament, its inherent ambiguity becomes evident. Initially intended as a refutation of beliefs in witchcraft, the text also serves to demystify seemingly miraculous acts of magic. Consequently, it has been recognized as one of the earliest textbooks on sorcery and enchantment. Furthermore, it stands as a comprehensive repository of hermetic knowledge within England, featuring citations of over two hundred eminent alchemists and hermetic philosophers from abroad, along with mentions of twenty-three English hermetic writers, including Chaucer (Scot 1584, xxviii). In *The xiiii Booke*, Scot remarks: (<...> *the craft of Alcumystrie, otherwise called Multiplication; which Chaucer, of all other men, most livelie deciphereth*) (Scot 1886, 294).

As previously noted, Reginald Scot's book is characterized by ambiguity, prompting his use of satirical language to emphasize Chaucer's critique of alchemists lacking true knowledge. Similarly, in *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale*, Chaucer employs satire to illustrate that alchemists who sell their knowledge for profit often possess little genuine understanding. Such statements not only highlight the writer's deep understanding of the subject but also underscore the irony inherent in the situation.

From the perspective of satire, a game frequently carries comedic and satirical connotations, contrasting with their interpretation in hermeneutics. According to Gadamer, laughter not only grants aesthetic freedom but also serves to dissolve the distinction between the theatrical performance and the audience's lived experience, blurring the boundary between the two (Kačerauskas 2006, 206).

In this hermeneutic concept, irony transforms play into reality and thus bridges the distance between stage and spectator, as well as between meaning of art and its understanding. The role of laughter, contrary to misconception, does not imply a lack of seriousness. Instead, the effect of alienation it creates, even in satire, embodies a significant facet of hermeneutic comprehension. Moreover, within this framework, humour serves as a method to reveal deeper layers of meaning within artistic expression. According to Gadamer, the existence of ironic mode in a work of art, while commonly perceived with a lack of seriousness, is actually defined by the seriousness of its true meaning (Gadamer 1975). Only the core layer of meaning in the game assumes the seriousness of play itself.

The establishment of the game in the main prologue of the Canterbury Tales begins with its contextualization in time and space: “while I have time and space” (Chaucer 2012, 1322). This phrase not only sets the stage for the narrative but also highlights the temporal and spatial dimensions within which the game unfolds, suggesting its significance in the broader context of the plot.

From the perspective of hermetic works, there exists a similarity, as the ancient Greek philosophers of hermetism often contextualized their works by connecting time and space with the ability to think and understand important layers of meaning. This suggests a special cognitive ability to transcend empirical reality in order to comprehend the true essence of thought. According to Ricoeur, the ability to contemplate time transforms it into a profound mystery, as it is time itself, rather than any individual, that holds the primary essence of philosophy and literature (Naujokaitė 2001, 61−62). This interplay between time, cognition, and meaning underscores the complex relationship between hermetic philosophy and textual analysis.

Chaucer masterfully recognized the importance of entire describing each character in the Canterbury Tales to establish the integration of 'the game' in the main Prologue. Demonstrating a psychologist's keenness, he nuancedly described their intellectual standing, professions, physical traits, and diligently explored the nuances of their clothing, particularly emphasizing the significance of colours. This attention to detail not only demonstrates Chaucer's nuanced understanding of the complexities of human nature and societal dynamics but also enriches the narrative by giving the audience the ability to make additional interpretations within his literary masterpiece. The description of the Yeoman in the main prologue, introduced as the third character, pertains to the Yeoman of the Knight, not of the Canon, as contemporary researchers have noted (Thompson 2006). It is important to clarify that the Canon's Yeoman is not included among the initial descriptions of the pilgrims in the General Prologue.

3.1 Analysing the Interplay of Hermetic Symbolism and Intertextuality: The Prologue.

In scholarly research into Chaucer's prologue, it is pertinent to analyse lines 4 and 5, which describe "a man": "A man, that clothed was in clothes blake, / And undernethe he hadde a whyt surplys." (Chaucer 2012, 1198). Notably, Chaucer refrains from identifying him as a Canon in this instance, prompting further investigation into this detail.

According to researchers J. Franklyn and F. E. Budd (2001), in hermetic alchemy, the black colour is correlated with the element of Earth. It signifies stability, grounding, and the material world, indicative of transformative processes associated with the Earth element. (Franklyn & Budd 2001).

The significance of colours in medieval hermetic alchemy can be interpreted hermeneutically as symbolic representations of the transformative processes inherent to alchemical practices. Colours were not solely chosen for their aesthetic appeal but rather encompassed profound layers of meaning associated with substance transmutation, the pursuit of spiritual enlightenment, and the comprehension of the natural world, as observed by Alberto Virdis in his scholarly work The Role of Colors in the Middle Ages - Materiality and Theories. (Virdis 2022)

The hermetical significance of the colours black and white is widely recognized, Cf. Dastin's dream: "The Child coloured first Black, and after White" (Dastin 1652, 268). Within hermetic alchemy, black and white symbolize distinct stages in the Magnum Opus, or Great Work, of alchemical transformation. The black phase, referred to as nigredo, represents a period of decomposition and putrefaction, wherein the *prima materia* initiates its breakdown. This phase is often analogized to the "dark night of the soul," denoting a period of confronting inner darkness and relinquishing false aspects of the self to facilitate transformation. (Hitchcox 1988).

Conversely, the subsequent white phase, known as albedo, signifies a transition from despair to passion, emptiness to fullness, and abandonment to fulfilment. The albedo stage serves as a crucial link between the disintegration of the nigredo phase and the eventual realization of the gold stage. It denotes a time of purification, innocence, and rebirth, wherein one progresses towards wholeness and clarity, casting off the concerns of the past to embrace a new beginning:

"A clote-leef he hadde under his hood / For swoot, and for to kepe his heed from hete. / But it was Ioye for to seen him swete! / His forheed dropped as a stillatorie, / Were ful of plantain and of paritorie." (Chaucer 2012, 1199).

The term “stillatorie” originating from Middle English and derived from Medieval Latin *stillatorium,* ultimately traces back to the Latin word *stillatus*, meaning “to drip” or “trickle,” combined with the suffix "-orium," [7] indicating a place for a particular activity (Merriam-Webster 2024).

In Hermetism, distillation carries significant symbolic meaning, transcending its literal definition to symbolize a transformative process. Beyond mere physical separation or purification of substances, distillation in Hermetism is metaphorically intertwined with spiritual and psychological experiences. Hermetic writings are viewed as distillations of profound spiritual insights and psychological transformations. They are often described as “the distillation of profound spiritual and psychological experiences during the transformation of the 'body' from one 'element' into another” within the texts themselves (Hitchcox 1988).

Chaucer exhibits a notable irony, tinged with elements of cynicism, in his description, particularly when depicting this appearance. However, beneath this semblance covers a profound wisdom. Chaucer adeptly describes the process of distillation in hermetic alchemy with remarkable ease, effortlessly weaving in the names of plants that held significant importance in medieval times for hermetic purposes.

Given the significance of hermeneutic literary meaning in fostering the connection between the author and the reader, particularly in the examination of Chaucer’s characters and text, it is imperative to acknowledge the concept of the “implied reader” as delineated by Iser in The Act of Reading (2000): “If, then, we are to try and understand the effects caused and the responses elicited by literary works, we must allow for the reader’s presence without in any way predetermining his character or his historical situation.” (Iser 1978, 34) Furthermore, the predispositions of the implied reader are hermeneutically established, as Iser (1978) suggests: “laid down, not by an empirical outside reality, but by the text itself” (Iser 1978, 34). This insight underscores the significant role of the text in shaping the interpretive framework of the reader.

In Chaucer's reference to a “clote-leef,” it is apparent that he is alluding to a burdock leaf (genus: *Arctium* L.). However, it is worth noting that in Old English, “clote” also encompasses the meaning of “clivers” (*Galium aparine* L.), as outlined in Webster’s Revised Unabridged Dictionary (1913). In addition to Chaucer's reference to the “clote-leef,” he also mentions the plantain, which belongs to the genus *Plantago* L., and the wild or spreading pellitory, a plant of the genus *Parietaria* L..

[7] Stillatory. 2024. In Merriam-Webster.com dictionary. Retrieved March 21, 2024, from https://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/stillatory

This linguistic nuance adds layers of interpretation to Chaucer's mention of the plant, suggesting a broader botanical context and underscoring the intricate nature of medieval herbal knowledge embedded within his writing.

It is noteworthy that all these plants find mention in the alchemical treatises of Pseudo Lull and Rupessica, adding depth and authenticity to Chaucer's narrative. Through his skilful use of language and imagery, Chaucer artfully encourages readers to explore the enigmatic realm of alchemical symbolism.

Chaucer adeptly navigates the theme of the Yeoman in this tale with an open and accessible language, giving the audience the opportunity to recognise the alchemical essence of his narrative. This deliberate choice aligns with hermeneutic principles, particularly as explicated by Friedrich Schleiermacher (1768–1834). Schleiermacher emphasized the importance of understanding the plot and the intertextual meaning: "understanding is an unending task" since "the talent for misunderstanding is infinite" (Ellison 1990, 78).

It is noteworthy that during Chaucer's time, the majority of alchemical treatises were written in Vulgar Latin across Europe. Chaucer, however, consciously opted for Middle English, a choice that not only simplified the task for the audience to comprehend the central meaning of his plot but also served to popularize his knowledge of alchemy, rendering it accessible to a broader audience. This linguistic strategy, therefore, reflects a deliberate move by Chaucer to ensure that the esoteric knowledge of alchemy could be understood by the common English person: "He coude al clene turne it up-so-doun, / And pave it al of silver and of gold." (Chaucer 2012, 1200).

However, considering the context, Chaucer employs several literary devices in the same phrase "that I seye, and therfor kepe it secree, I yow preye," (Chaucer 2012, 1200) revealing different layers of meaning for audiences with varying levels of alchemical knowledge during his time. Chaucer playfully exposes the ironic request for secrecy as the first layer of irony, contrasting his plea for confidentiality with the subsequent open disclosure of the alchemical process. The second possible layer is dramatic irony. Chaucer's audience, likely not familiar with alchemical books *Secret of Secrets* or *The Secret Book*, would not have grasped the deeper meaning with the reference to alchemical data of pseudo-Aristotelian or Artephius works. This creates a sense of amusement for the informed audience who understands both layers, with the title *Secret* itself serving as *double entendre*, implying both a straightforward secret and the layered secrets within alchemy.

Furthermore, Chaucer provides a nuanced indication that the knowledge being discussed is not merely ordinary alchemical practice, but rather hermetic science. This is evident when he mentions God, stating, “He is to wys, in feith, as I bileve,” (Chaucer 2012, 1200) which can be seen as a rephrasing and intertext of the wisdom and faith associated with Hermetic knowledge from the Ancient Greek period. During Chaucer's time, this knowledge was known in England, thanks to treatises such as those by Zosimos of Panopolis. These works were quite popular and were even cited in English hermetic poetry of the Chaucerian era.

In the line 94: “Wherfor in that I holde him lewed and nyce,” (Chaucer 2012, 1200) the discerning reader of “Hermetike” science during that century would likely recognize the nuanced character of English hermetic culture. This culture, possibly established from the period of Saint Dunstan in hermetic treatises like the *Philosophik Stone* (1668) and subsequent hermetic works by Dastin, Thomas Hend, and others, often began with some passages critiquing the immorality and foolishness of simple alchemy practitioners. These individuals were deemed foolish due to their lack of knowledge and ignorance, with a possible reference to the work of Zosimos of Panopolis (Zosimos, 2020).

In lines 111: “Why artow so discoloured of thy face?” (Chaucer 2012, 1201) and line 114: “That it hath chaunged my colour, I trowe” (Chaucer 2012, 1201), it is possible to discern a potential hermetic intertext related to colours, a motif often employed by hermetic writers. According to Ashmole, an admirer of Chaucer, Lydgate (1370 – 1451) was also familiar with the hermetic English tradition, as evidenced by his English translation of the first part of *Secret of Secrets* attributed to Pseudo-Aristotle. (Ashmole 1652, 439). This can be seen in the line: “I have no Colour / but Oonly Chalk and sable” (Lydgate 1894, 11).

Important to mention, line 115, “I am nat wont in no mirour to prye,” (Chaucer 2012, 1201) there is a distinct possibility of tracing a reference to an earlier hermetic work that was written before Chaucer composed this line. It is highly probable that this line contains an intertextual reference to the work of Friar Roger Bacon, specifically *The Mirror of Alchemy*. However, it is worth remarking that during this period, another popular work was John Dastin's *Speculum philosophiae* which translates to “The Philosophic Mirror”. Notably, both writers were significant contributors to the English hermetic tradition.

It is compelling to observe that Chaucer's lines: “But swinke sore and lerne multiplye. / We blondren ever and pouren in the fyr” (Chaucer 2012, 1201) exhibit a resemblance to a verse found in a Medieval anonymous work: “Thou mayst this craft forth Multiply: / Lyke as a man hath lytil Fyr.”

(Anonymous 1652, 346). This parallel suggests a shared understanding of the significance of multiplication in English hermetic alchemy, as it plays an essential role in the transformation of substances.

Once again, Chaucer refers to alchemy as a medieval game in the line “He that me broghte first unto that game,” (Chaucer 2012, 1202). This reference, hermeneutically, has two layers: the overt critique of the foolish alchemical practitioners and the underlying hermetic characteristics of alchemy as an enigma or puzzle. This dual nature suggests that not all, by its very essence, could fully comprehend and unlock its core essence. As noted by R. Scot, Chaucer was among the select few who "deciphered it." (Scot 1886, 294).

3.2 Analysing the Interplay of Hermetic Symbolism and Intertextuality: Prima pars.

The beginning of the tale opens with the line: “WITH this chanoun I dwelt have seven yeer,” (Chaucer 2012, 1203). The significance of the number seven in hermetic alchemy often alludes to the seven planets and metals (Hitchcox 1988). However, Chaucer employs the seven years to instill a sense of time and presence in the audience, specifically in terms of duration, which correlates with Heidegger’s hermeneutic study *Being and Time* (1927). This usage aligns with the concept of “being-in-the-world,” a key aspect in approaching the answer to the true meaning of intelligible being (Heidegger 1927)

Chaucer, in his line 8: “And where my colour was bothe fresh and reed,” (Chaucer 2012, 1203), maintains a conscious focus on the mention of colours. This notion is further influenced by Norton's hermetic work, where he posits that this freshness transforms into a heavenly and fair colour: “Wherefore it turneth to hevenly Colour fairc.” (Norton 1652, 66). Notably, Dastin (1293-1386), a prominent English hermetic alchemist of Chaucer's century, clarifies the significance of the “fresh” colour in the preparation of the Philosophic stone. Dastin's poem underscores that the initial stages of the stone's development involve a transition from black to white: “The Child coloured first Black, and after White,” further enhanced by the “cherishing of the Sun bright” (Dastin 1652, 268).

This understanding correlates with the medieval English hermetic knowledge surrounding the Philosophic stone, as outlined in the treatise of St. Dunstan, the Archbishop of Canterbury. Here, Dunstan elaborates on the operations of the “Astrals,” noting their manifestation through a spectrum of colours: (*Aſtrals ejaculate their operations, being adorned with all manner of Colours*) (Dunstan 1668, 84). Through these interconnected references, it is possible to trace the colour symbolism in English alchemical and literary contexts of the time.

For instance, Dunstan alludes to the potential for multiplication as a means to: “be infinitely multiplied, and able to free the body of Man from the worſt and moſt deadly Diſeaſes” (Dunstan 1668, 4). Indeed, this aligns with a longstanding hermetic tradition, dating back to the writings of Zosimos in Ancient Greece, hermetic knowledge was widely applied not only for the healing of souls but also for the physical body, with a particular emphasis on extending life, as noted in certain medieval manuscripts attributed to Hermes from Chaucer's time. This notion is echoed in Chaucer's 12th line: “Lo! which avantage is to multiplye!” (Chaucer 2012, 1203)

Interesting from Dunstan's perspective on hermetic philosophy, in Chaucer's subsequent phrase in the 14th line: “That I have no good, wher that ever I fare;” (Chaucer 2012, 1203) since Dunstan mentions two different ways of preparing the Philosophic stone, where the first one can be made by poor people as well by rich, while the second method can be made by rich only: “That their work needed not great Coſt and Charges, but that it might be as well performed by the Poor, as the Rich” (Dunstan 1668, 5), since according to Dunstan, “Antient Phyloſophers uſed not common Sol and Lune in this Work” (Dunstan 1668, 5). It signifies, Dunstan's teachings indicate that individuals, regardless of their economic status, could utilize alternatives to costly materials like gold and silver in the preparation of the Philosophic stone, showcasing the ingenuity of alchemical practice during that era.

Certainly, Chaucer employs the literary device of irony in depicting the “game” of the poor Yeoman. However, in *On Some Functions of Literature* Eco discusses intertextual irony to transform what he terms the “naive reader” into a reader capable of discerning a deeper, second meaning embedded within the text (Eco 2004, 1–16).

Intertextuality can be well traced here, since exactly in the “*prima pars*,” as rightly noticed by David Wright, Chaucer uses a lot of technical terms with surprising accuracy and specialized language (Wright 2011, 584). Chaucer initiates a detailed alchemical description in line 35 with the phrase: “What sholde I tellen ech proporcioun” (Chaucer 2012, 1203), a passage that may have been an influence on the 15th-century work of Richard Carpenter, titled *Spain*: “Take this for an informacion / In weight and proporcion.” (Carpenter 2013, 272).

According to Timmermann in Verse and Transmutation, Richard Carpenter’s work *Spain* is linked through intertextuality to the hermetic alchemical treatise *Verses upon the Elixir*. What is particularly intriguing is that during the medieval centuries, this treatise was attributed to Chaucer himself (Timmermann 2013, 24, 99).

Intertext, as Eco explains in *Kant and the Platypus* (1997), is somewhat discernible through a surface reading of the text, with its full meaning reliant on the individual reader's "encyclopaedic" knowledge (Eco 1997). The hermetic alchemical "encyclopaedic" knowledge of Chaucer as a writer is incredible; even a contemporary reader with encyclopaedic knowledge can hardly recognize all the sources of Chaucerian alchemical terminology. As potential author's intertext, Umberto Eco noted, it is "a provocation and invitation to include, such that it can gradually transform the naïve reader into a reader who begins to sense the perfume of so many other texts that have preceded the one he is reading" (Eco 2004, 235).

It appears that Chaucer provoke the reader to challenge their hermetic alchemical knowledge regarding influences and potential Chaucerian references. Therefore, it looks like a quest for the experienced reader, since a similar phrase "So well-proportioned every-each in his degree" (Dastin 2013, 272) can be found in the British predecessor of Chaucer, in the work of Dastin, the hermetic alchemist writer from the 13th century, specifically in his work *Dastin's Dream*, also known as "Visio". It is widely acknowledged that Chaucer possessed a remarkable ability to read various languages and housed an extraordinary library within his home.

Quite intriguing is the mention of "brent bones" in line 40, as this Chaucerian phrase evidently reappeared later in Thomas Norton's *Ordinal of Alchemy* (1477), as seen in "As it appeareth in sight of brent Bones"' (Norton 1477). This hermetic lexicon is rather uncommon for that period, suggesting that Chaucer may have been influenced by the particular hermetic works of Roger Bacon, who wrote, "So let's take Adam's bones, & lime," (Bacon 1557) using similar phrases in his works such as *Opus Majus* (Bacon 1962) aimed at prolonging human life.

The quest to extend human life is of utmost significance in hermetic studies, contrasting sharply with the goals of simple alchemical practitioners whose focus was largely on desire to get wealth through the transmutation of gold.

From line 80: "And herbes coude I telle eek many oon" (Chaucer 2012, 1203−1207) Chaucer once again provides a detailed array of plant names: agrimony, valerian, moon-wort, suche, leek, apple, which are not merely a random list but rather plants utilized not only in alchemy but also in hermetic studies for crafting the elixir of life—the antidote. This knowledge traces back to Ancient Greek Hermetic studies of Hermes, Galen's treatise on Antidotes, as well as the works of Zosimos and Pseudo-Democritus. During Chaucer's time, antidote treatises were especially sought after due to repeated waves of the Black

Plague, which significantly reduced Britain's population by a third. Noteworthy during this medieval period were popular and well-known treatises by hermetic writers such as Pseudo-Lull and Rupessica, both vernacularly titled "Canons". Thus, all the plants mentioned by Chaucer find their place within the lists of these *Canons* (Rupessica 1547).

Chaucerian “Wort” (Chaucer 2012, 1205) in Middle English referred to any of various plants or herbs, especially those used for medicinal purposes, but also stands for St. Johns-wort. (Rupessica 1547).

Moreover, the processes described by Chaucer in the lines: “That we hadde in our matires sublyming, / And in amalgaming and calcening / Of quik-silver, y-clept Mercurie crude?” (Chaucer 2012, 1204) can be found in the British hermetic work of his predecessor Dunstan (Dunstan 1668, 47), and also in the medieval hermetic poetry *Verses upon the Elixir*, which in the medieval period was believed to have been written by Chaucer himself. Cf.: “I[n] arceneck sublymed a wey there is streight / With mercury calcyned ix tymes his weight” (Anonymous 2013, 221). Some English medieval manuscripts also contain the mention of amalgaming, for example, BL MS Sloane 1092 (XVI C.) (Timmermann, 2013). These more complete versions are closer to the Chaucerian one.

Reginald Scot's work on alchemy directly references the Chaucer's lexicon, as seen in “bole armoniake, verdegrece, borace, boles, gall, arsenicke, sal armoniake, brimstone” (Scot 1668, 584). In reason, Chaucer makes mention of particular alchemical ingredients in line 71: “As bole armoniak, verdegrees, boras,” and in lines78- 79: “<...>boles galle / Arsenik, sal armoniak, and brimstoon.” (Chaucer 2012, 1205) It is particularly intriguing due to the potential hermetical influence of this passage in Chaucer, which might allude to the receipt of Pseudo-Democritos. For example, *verdigris* or copper rust is indicated as a receipt of Pseudo-Democritos (Brown 1920, 210). Additionally, “Bole-armonik'” is also noted by Dunstan (Dunstan 1668, 43).

Chaucer's use of “wexe a philosofre” in line 118 (Chaucer 2012, 1206) may not only be a direct result of influence from Dunstan's treatise (Dunstan 1668, 71, 83), as he also employs the same lexicon, but it could also suggest a subtle reference. This could be construed as Chaucer hinting at Dunstan's work, titled *The Philosopher's Stone* (Dunstan 1668).

Moreover, Chaucer correctly describes the alchemic instruments that were used at that time: “And sondry vessels maad of erthe and glas” (Chaucer 2012, 1204) This likely has an influence from Dunstan's work: “Glass; bury irin Sand in a great Furnace” (Dunstan 1668, 76). Alchemist Thomas Hend, almost contemporary to Chaucer, also mentions it in his verse: “in a vessell of glasse” (Hend 2013, 317). The

term “calcinacioun” used by Chaucer (Chaucer 2012, 1205) in line 85 may have been influenced by Dunstan. Dunstan wrote a chapter titled *The Calcination of Metals* in his book about the Philosophic Stone, dedicated to this process. (Dunstan 1668, 74).

Mentioning such processes as “watres rubifying” and “watres albificacioun” (Chaucer 2012, 1205) are hermetic processes detailed and described also by predecessor Dunstan: “Ferment the one part with the oil of Lune, that is, with white water, and the other part with the oil of Sol, that is, with the red water.” (Dunstan 1668, 37) As well as processes like “citrinacioun”, “cementing”, “fermentacioun” (Chaucer 2012, 1205), were also found in the Philosophic stonework of Dunstan (Dunstan 1668, 27,41,58)

Despite Ripley living after Chaucer, it is interesting to note that the Compound of Alchemy still reflects influences from Chaucer's work (Chaucer 2012, 1205). Both authors employ alchemical lexicon, including the term “sal preparat.” (Ripley 1652, 129). This shared use of language suggests a continuation or adaptation of alchemical ideas across different periods, highlighting a lineage or ongoing English tradition within hermetic alchemical literature. The connections between their works hint at the enduring nature of certain linguistic and intellectual threads across centuries.

Notably, Chaucer employs a hermetic lexicon that resonates with the language used by Dunstan, as seen in the terms “sal peter”, “vitriole”, “Sal tartre” and “alkaly” (Chaucer 2012, 1205), mirroring the lexicon utilized by Dunstan as well. Cf. “sal peter” (Dunstan 1668, 51, 60), “vitriole” (Dunstan 1668, 51, 60), “Sal tartre” (Dunstan 1668, 51, 86), “alkaly” (Dunstan 1668, 51, 86). Moreover, mention of the terms sal peter and vitriol goes in a row as in Chaucer’s as in his predecessor Dunstan’s works. It is intriguing to note that both Chaucer and his predecessor Dunstan mention “sal peter” and “vitriol” consecutively in their writings. This could possibly indicate a shared tradition or lineage within British hermetic alchemical literature, with these terms carrying significant meaning across different authors and centuries.

An interesting intertextual parallel can be seen in Chaucer's hermetic passage discussing the four spirits and seven bodies related to the philosophic stone, also found in the treatise by John Gower, as Ashmole notes, his hermetic teacher (Ashmole 1652, 470). For instance, in Chaucer's line 101: “The foure spirites and the bodies sevene” (Chaucer 2012, 1205), it is possible to find a resemblance to Gower's “With fowre Spirites joynt withall” (Gower 1652, 368).

Furthermore, the entire passage by Chaucer on the seven bodies reads: “The bodies sevene eek, lo! hem heer anoon:/ Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe, name / Mars yren, Mercurie quik-silver we

clepe, call / Saturnus leed, and Iupiter is tin, / And Venus coper, by my fader kin!" (Chaucer 2012, 1205) This aligns with Gower's text: (*The bodies which I ſpeke of here, / Of the Plannets benbegonrie, / The Gold is titled to the Sonne : / The Moone of Silver hath his part, / And Iron that ſtonde uppon Marti / The Leed after Saturn growcth, / and Jupiter the Braſſe beſtoweth / The Copper ſette is to Venus : /And to his part Mercurius / Hath the Quickſilvcr, as it fallcth*) (Gower1652, 368).

According to Eco, intertextuality is a way in which readers can recognize meaning in a text, particularly through archetypes (Eco, 1990: 59-86). By recognizing these universal symbols and themes, readers can connect with the deeper layers of meaning and understand its broader implications and resonances beyond the specific narrative. Significantly, both authors mirror the main hermetic work, *A briefe Commcntarie vpon of the Smaragdine Table of Hermes*, with mention of hermetic knowledge that was known in the Chaucerian period: Gold that resembles the sun, and Silver that resembles the moon (Hortulanus 1597, 2–4). They also referred to the initial part of Friar Roger Bacon's "The Mirror of Alchemy," where Bacon descriptively talks about each of these metals (Bacon 1597, 2–4).

The next Chaucer phrase can be hermeneutically interpreted as a clue for the possible reference to his knowledge in line 120: "Nay, nay, god woot, al be he monk or frere" (Chaucer 1912, 1206). It is possible to interpret Chaucer's words as reference to Hermetic alchemists, such as Hortulanus, who made comments' work on Hermes and also was a Dominican monk, as well as reference to Bacon, since he was a friar of the Franciscan Order.

In lines 125, "To lerne a lewed man this subtiltee," and 141, "For, as I trowe, I have yow told y-nowe" (Chaucer 1912, 1206), Chaucer echoes Bacon's sentiments regarding natural philosophers and the average students who lack understanding of the true depths of hermetic alchemy. The interrelation of the sciences meant that ignorance of alchemy had possibility of far-reaching implications. Chaucer also cautions against open discussion of hermetic science (Newman 1997).

In Chaucer's lines discussing finding something all in one: "As in effect, he shal finde it al oon. / For bothe two, by my salvacioun" (Chaucer 1912, 1206), an intertextual connection can be drawn to the work of Dunstan, who asserts that the concept of "all in unity" pertains to the Stone itself, while the Elixir, essential for salvation, consists of plurality (Dunstan 1668, 22).

Further reinforcing this possible interpretation, Chaucer proceeds in lines 143 and 144 to name the philosopher's stone and the Elixir itself: "A! nay! lat be; the philosophres stoon, / Elixir clept, we sechen faste echoon;" (Chaucer 1912, 1206).

Of significant hermetic meaning is the phrase about Jesus: “He that semeth the wysest, by Iesus!” (Chaucer 1912, 1209). This echoes a similar sentiment in an Anonymous British hermetic medieval verse from the *Trinity* manuscript: “nowe Iesue & yt be thy wyll” (Anonymous 2013, 303). The mention of Jesus in hermetic writings can be traced back to Ancient Greek hermetic literature, as seen in the works of Zosimos, who attempted to unite the divinity of Hermes with the divine Jesus: “Then I will show you what the devices are. Be well in Jesus Christ our God, now, always, and forever and ever. Amen” (Zosimos). This merging suggests an attempt to harmonize spiritual and philosophical insights from various traditions in the pursuit of a deeper understanding of the nature of divine.

3.3 Analysing the Interplay of Hermetic Alchemical Symbolism and Intertextuality: Secunda pars.

The plot is changed in the secunda pars, where possible to observe Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* have posited the existence of two distinct canons within the narrative. The initial canon embodies the archetype of the duplicitous alchemist, serving as the master of the Canon's Yeoman. Subsequently, a second canon emerges, also an alchemist, yet shown with even greater guile and cunning than his predecessor: “This chanoun was my lord, ye wolden wene? / Sir host, in feith, and by the hevenes quene, / It was another chanoun, and nat he” (Chaucer 1912, 1212).

This interpretation elucidates Chaucer's deliberate exploration of alchemy and its inherent propensity for deception through the dual canons. These canons are not merely individuals but symbolic representations of the broader themes of alchemy, its associated risks, and the moral quandaries it poses.

Furthermore, Chaucer's citation of Hermetic texts and figures like Arnald of Villanova illustrates his broader engagement with medieval Hermetic scholarship. According to Hitchcox, the Yeoman's subsequent allegorical exposition of esoteric alchemical principles found in the *Rosarium philosophorum* suggests a profound transformation: he appears to have undergone “mortificatio,” abandoning his literal, carnal understanding of alchemy in favour of apprehending its spiritual significance. Furthermore, by extinguishing his inner conflicts “solutio” through a resolute decision to forsake gold making and instead follow the will of Christ, he proves a significant shift toward a more spiritually focused path (Hitchcox 1988, 138 – 139). This evolution exemplifies a hermetic philosophical journey from the material to the spiritual, a common theme in alchemical allegory. The Yeoman's narrative undergoes a significant evolution as he moves from a literal interpretation to a figurative use of the symbol “gold.” This transition

marks a shift from a personal microcosm to a mythic macrocosm, illustrating a broader thematic move from individual experience to archetypal significance within the narrative framework.

Chaucer reiterates the Hermetic theme in line 403: “In the name of Crist, to wexe a philosofre” (Chaucer 2012, 2013), consistently proving, through the literary device of irony, his Hermetic influences on the reader. Despite changes in the plot, it appears that the Hermetic underlayer of meaning is still consistent. This recurrence serves to underscore the enduring presence of Hermetism in his work, highlighting its significance in the broader context of his narrative exploration.

It's notable that Zosimos, an early hermetic philosopher from around 300 A.D., directly personified ancient hermetic wisdom regarding the philosopher's stone as "light" to the Son of God as a saviour, stating: “He penetrate, and, pouring forth His Light into the mind of every [soul]...” (Zosimos 1906, 276)

St. Dunstan's philosophy also exhibits a sophisticated integration of Christian mysticism and Hermetic principles. A key aspect of St. Dunstan's hermetic philosophy is the metaphorical transmutation of both metals and souls. His texts and practices indicate an effort to harmonize spiritual enlightenment with the doctrines of Hermes, highlighting parallels between the divine mysteries of Christianity and the Hermetic quest for esoteric knowledge. (Dunstan 1668, 22).

In the secunda pars, Chaucer himself provides direct references to well-known Hermetic works of his century, such as those attributed to Arnald from Villanova: “Lo, thus seith Arnold of the Newe Toun, / As his Rosarie maketh mencioun;” (Chaucer 2012, 2020).

It is particularly intriguing that he mentions Villanova as an author, considering the several of English medieval Hermetic manuscripts at the time which attributed this work, *Rosarium philosophorum* to Dastin, an English alchemist. This probable mistake likely arose from the frequent errors in transcription and rewriting of hermetic manuscripts. Moreover, S.F. Damon as well as E. H. Duncan, in their research argue that the quote derives from Arnald’s *De lapide philosophorum*. (Damon 1924, 785; Duncan 1942, 31−33), because of its association with Christ, however English medieval treatises of Zosimos also conveyed a similar idea. In practice, Damon and Duncan used Arnald's references to “mercurie”, the dragon and his brother, in the alchemical process where metals corrupted by sulphur are purified through sublimations. Consequently, in this passage, the slaying of the dragon symbolizes the reduction of metals to a non-metallic state: “He seith [Hermes], how that the dragoun, doutelees, / Ne

deyeth nat, but-if that he be slayn / With his brother; and that is for to sayn, / By the dragoun, Mercurie and noon other." (Chaucer 1912, 1220).

Furthermore, Chaucer's mention of Hermes in lines 715−716 adds weight to the profound Hermetic influence evident in this discourse. Chaucer's reference suggests that the knowledge presented is not merely about ordinary alchemical practice, but rather about hermetic wisdom: "How that he, which that first seyde this thing, / Of philosophres fader was, Hermes;" (Chaucer 2012, 2020) It is noteworthy that the *Philosophic stone* of Dunstan also incorporates this dragon-slaying motif (Dunstan 1668, 37, 46, 96).

Important to mention, lines 728, where Chaucer refers to the renowned work of Pseudo-Aristotle: "the secret of secrets," alongside a citation from Plato in *Rosarium Philosophorum* (Chaucer 2012, 1220). These citations not only highlight Chaucer's scholarship but also prove his adeptness at hermetic alchemical tradition. Such integration also enriches the very text with profound layers of academic and intellectual depth.

However, the most intellectually subtle reference (line 735), unrecognized by researchers to this day, lies in the rare Hermetic lexicon term "Titanos.": 'Tak the stoon that Titanos men name.' (Chaucer 2012, 1220). This term was also noticed by researchers Campbell Brown (1913) and Damon (1924), yet it is still relatively unexplored in scholarly circles. Furthermore, according to later medieval alchemists such as Ashley, Scot, and Norton, the usage of this term, particularly in its form as seen in Chaucer's work rather than the "Titanibus" referenced in *Rosarium Philosophorum*, reveals Chaucer's profound understanding of the ancient Greek heritage within Hermetic alchemy.

The significance lies in the fact that "Titanos" was exclusively used by Zosimos of Panopolis. It is not found in later Eastern manuscripts (Hermes Trismegistus 1906, I–III). Hermetic Zosimos manuscripts were still circulating in England, providing Chaucer with direct access to these primary sources. Zosimos even used a special symbol for this term in his work (Brown 1920, 44) This indicates that Chaucer possessed a genuine adeptness in British Hermetic knowledge, employing from primary sources such as Zosimos.

4. Conclusions.

This analysis accentuates the elaborate hermeneutic and intertextual dimensions within Geoffrey Chaucer's alchemical references, emphasizing the profound knowledge of Hermetic philosophies in his works. Based on the theories of Heidegger, Iser, and Dilthey (Iser 2000; Heidegger 2022; Dilthey 1996), it is possible to understand how Chaucer's engagement with these traditions is emblematic of a sophisticated interpretive and textual practice. Particularly, this study has enlightened the intricate intertextual connections and hermeneutic significance of Geoffrey Chaucer's alchemical references, particularly through the lens of Hermetic Christian philosophies. The metaphorical transmutation of metals and souls aligns with Heidegger's concept of "hermeneutic circle," where understanding is achieved through the interplay of parts and whole. Chaucer's work, therefore, can be seen as a holistic interpretive act that brings together the transformative principles of Hermetism and the spiritual purification.

This integration reflects a sophisticated interplay between the yeoman's outward appearance and deeper philosophical layers of meaning, evoking a narrative of profound hermeneutic significance. Chaucer's nuanced engagement with Hermetic texts and figures, including the misattributions in medieval manuscripts, illustrates the dynamic textual landscape of his time. (Timmerman 2013, 100, 300–315). These intertextual intricacies highlight Chaucer's scholarly intelligence in navigating and reinterpreting diverse sources, reinforcing his central role in the transmission of Hermetic knowledge.

This study reveals that the intertextual connections between Chaucer and earlier Hermetic writers, particularly Zosimos of Panopolis, are notably significant. Chaucer's utilization of the rare Hermetic term "Titanos," which appears as it was researched in this work, exclusively in ancient Greek Hermetic writings of Zosimos only, signals a deep engagement with primary Hermetic sources (Brown, 1920, 44). Zosimos, a prominent Hermetic philosopher, is notably one known source to mention "Titanos," which Chaucer reiterates, reflecting a deep intertextual connection. This intertextual linkage suggests that Chaucer not only accessed but also integrated Hermetic knowledge, reflecting a deliberate approach to these esoteric traditions. This usage indicates Chaucer's familiarity with Hermetic texts and his intention to embed esoteric wisdom within his literary works.

Chaucer's *The Canon's Yeoman's Tale* demonstrate a sophisticated Hermetic Christian alchemical thought in this context. The metaphorical transmutation of metals and souls in this work reflects the dual quest for spiritual and material perfection, a theme central to both Hermetism and Christian mysticism. A key aspect of St. Dunstan's alchemical philosophy is the metaphorical transmutation of both metals and souls (Dunstan 1668). This synthesis is evident in Chaucer's use of Hermetic lexicon and his alignment with the transformative principles found in St. Dunstan's work on the Philosophical Stone. Dunstan's concept of the Philosophical Stone and the metaphorical transformation of both metals and souls parallel Chaucer's depiction of alchemical processes as a means for spiritual enlightenment.

For instance, Gower's influence is also evident in the thematic and philosophical underpinnings of Chaucer's alchemical references. This relationship echoes Iser's theory of the "implied reader," where Chaucer's texts presuppose a reader capable of navigating and interpreting these layered references. The dialogic nature of Chaucer's texts invites readers into an active engagement with the alchemical and hermetic traditions embedded within his narratives. Gower's identification by Elias Ashmole as Chaucer's master in Hermetic science situates Chaucer within a continuum of Hermetic thought. This teacher-student dynamic highlights a continuity of Hermetic philosophy through English literature, with Chaucer acting as an essential figure in its transmission.

Additionally, this study shows that Bacon's extensive work on hermetic alchemy may have provided Chaucer with a scientific framework for understanding alchemical processes and their names. Bacon's integration of Aristotelian philosophy with alchemical practice likely informed Chaucer's knowledge of Hermetic Lexicon.

Important to mention, the influence of Chaucer's Hermetic knowledge extends beyond his own works, shaping the perspectives of later alchemists and writers. Figures like Thomas Norton, Reginald Scot, and Elias Ashmole recognized Chaucer's contribution to Hermetic philosophy, embedding his work within the broader tradition of English alchemy.

Moreover, the incorporation of Dilthey's historical hermeneutics allowed in this research to contextualize Chaucer within the intellectual milieu of his time. The recognition of Chaucer's contributions by later figures such as Reginald Scot, who cites Chaucer in *The Discoverie of Witchcraft*, demonstrates the enduring impact of Chaucer's hermeneutic and intertextual strategies. This reflects a historical consciousness that aligns with Dilthey's emphasis on the historical situatedness of understanding. Norton recognized Chaucer's contribution to Hermetic philosophy, citing him explicitly

and incorporating Hermetic terminology that Chaucer popularized. Importantly, Norton's explicit mention of Chaucer and the term “Titanos” in his alchemical writings underscores Chaucer’s enduring impact on subsequent Hermetic literature. (Norton 1652)

This study also shows that Richard Carpenter’s alchemical work *Spain,* which describes the practical and theoretical aspects of transmutation, was influenced by Chaucer’s detailed descriptions of alchemical processes, repeating word by word the pragmatic aspects of alchemy depicted in *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale* (Carpenter 2013, 272).

John Dastin’s alchemical treatises, shaped by Chaucer’s representation of alchemical undertakings, focus on the purification of substances and the philosopher’s stone. Dastin’s combination of mystical and practical alchemy aligns with the dual focus on spiritual and material transformation found in Chaucer’s work.

In conclusion, this study's hermeneutic and intertextual analysis has highlighted Chaucer's role in the transmission of Hermetic knowledge, demonstrating his lasting impact on the tradition of alchemical literature. His work *The Canon’s Yeoman’s Tale,* exemplify a hermeneutic process that integrates diverse philosophical and alchemical traditions, demonstrating Chaucer’s role as a central figure in the transmission of Hermetic knowledge. Chaucer’s works, serving as a vital link in the chain of British Hermetic tradition, continue to influence alchemists and scholars long after his time. Chaucer's nuanced incorporation of Hermetic elements did not occur in isolation, or on one particular treatise as stated before researchers, but was part of a medieval British hermetic cultural and intellectual milieu.

The intertextual parallels between Chaucer and earlier Hermetic writers, along with his influence on subsequent alchemical literature, reveal a complex web of intellectual exchange. Chaucer's works, rich with Hermetic philosophical insights, served as an important link in the chain of British Hermetic tradition, influencing not only his contemporaries but also future generations of alchemists and scholars.

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7. Summary in Lithuanian. Santrauka.

Šiame magistro darbe, tarpdisciplininis tyrimas novatoriškai nagrinėja alcheminę simboliką ir Hermetikos įtaką Geoffrey Chaucerio "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" britų alcheminės tradicijos kontekste. Remdamasis literatūriniu analizės pagrindu, per hermeneutikos ir intertekstualumo metodus, tyrimas integruoja viduramžių britų Hermetinės tradicijos kultūros studijas. Alchemijos įtaką viduramžių literatūroje aptarė kai kurie tyrinėtojai (Duncan 1967; Fišeris 1988; Foster 2002). Tačiau trūko studijų, analizuojančių Chaucerio kūrybos hermetinę kalbą britų Hermetinės tradicijos, jos istorinės raidos ir įtakų kontekste.

Tikslas – atskleisti tekstuose slypinčias prasmes ir interpretacijas bei ištirti alcheminės simbolikos ir Chaucerio poetinės raiškos sąveiką, atsižvelgiant į kultūrinį kontekstą ir simbolines konotacijas, sutelkti dėmesį būtent į alcheminių ir hermetiškų elementų sąveikos nustatymą, apibrėžimą ir niuansuotą supratimą Chaucerio darbe.

Taikant hermeneutinį metodą (Iser 2000; Heideggeris 2022; Dilthey 1996) atsirado galimybė iššifruoti niuansuotas simbolinių elementų reikšmes ir nustatyti kitų galimų konotacijų sluoksnius. Šis darbas siūlo naują Chaucerio indėlio perspektyvą ir suteikia esminį supratimą apie tai, kaip hermetiška simbolika pasireiškia šiame konkrečiame tekste.

Išanalizavus auksčiau pateiktus aspektus, šis tyrimas atskleidžia, kad intertekstualūs ryšiai tarp Chaucerio ir ankstesnių Hermetinių rašytojų, Zosimos iš Panopolio, yra ypač reikšmingi. Tai, kad Chauceris panaudojo retą Hermetinį terminą "Titanos", kuris buvo panaudotas tik senovės graikų Hermetiniuose Zosimos raštuose, (Brown 1920, 44) rodo gilų įsitraukimą į pirminius Hermetinius šaltinius. Zosimosas, žymus hermetinis filosofas, yra vienas iš žinomų "Titano" šaltinių, kurį Chauceris pakartoja. Šis intertekstualus ryšys rodo, kad Chauceris ne tik priėjo, bet ir integravo Hermetines žinias, atspindėdamas sąmoningą požiūrį į šias ezoterines tradicijas. Šis vartojimas rodo, kad Chauceris yra susipažinęs su Hermetiniais tekstais ir įterpė ezoterinę išmintį į savo literatūros kūrinį.

Rezultatai rodo, Chaucerio "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" šiame kontekste demonstruoja sudėtingą hermetišką krikščionišką alcheminę mintį. Metaforinė metalų ir sielų transmutacija šiame kūrinyje atspindi dvigubą dvasinio ir materialaus tobulumo siekį. Pagrindinis St. Dunstano alcheminės filosofijos aspektas yra metaforinė metalų ir sielų transmutacija. Ši sintezė akivaizdi Chaucerio hermetinėje leksikoje ir jo suderinime su transformaciniais principais. Dunstano filosofinio akmens samprata ir

metaforinė metalų bei sielų transformacija sutampa su Chaucerio alcheminių procesų, kaip dvasinio nušvitimo priemonės, vaizdavimu.

Apibendrinant, galima sakyti, jog šio tyrimo hermeneutinė ir intertekstuali analizė išryškino Chaucerio vaidmenį perduodant Hermetines žinias, parodydama jo ilgalaikį poveikį alcheminės literatūros tradicijai. Jo darbas "The Canon's Yeoman's Tale" iliustruoja hermeneutinį procesą, integruojantį įvairias filosofines ir alchemines tradicijas, parodydamas Chaucerio, kaip centrinės figūros, vaidmenį perduodant Hermetines žinias. Chaucerio darbai, tarnaujantys kaip gyvybiškai svarbi grandis britų hermetinės tradicijos grandinėje, ir toliau daro įtaką alchemikams ir mokslininkams ilgai po jo laiko.

Intertekstualios paralelės tarp Chaucerio ir ankstesnių hermetinių rašytojų, kartu su jo įtaka vėlesnei alcheminei literatūrai, atskleidžia sudėtingą intelektualinių mainų tinklą britų hermetinėje tradicijoje.

9. Appendices.

9.1 The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue & Tale

The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue

The prologe of the Chanons Yemannes Tale.

WHAN ended was the lyf of seint Cecyle,
Er we had riden fully fyve myle,
At Boghton under Blee us gan atake
A man, that clothed was in clothes blake,
And undernethe he hadde a whyt surplys.
His hakeney, that was al pomely grys,
So swatte, that it wonder was to see;
It semed he had priked myles three.
The hors eek that his yeman rood upon
So swatte, that unnethe mighte it gon.
Aboute the peytrel stood the foom ful hye,
He was of fome al flekked as a pye.
A male tweyfold on his croper lay,
It semed that he caried lyte array.
Al light for somer rood this worthy man,
And in myn herte wondren I bigan
What that he was, til that I understood
How that his cloke was sowed to his hood;
For which, when I had longe avysed me,
I demed him som chanon for to be.
His hat heng at his bak doun by a laas,
For he had riden more than trot or paas;
He had ay priked lyk as he were wood.

A clote-leef he hadde under his hood
For swoot, and for to kepe his heed from hete.
But it was Ioye for to seen him swete!
His forheed dropped as a stillatorie,
Were ful of plantain and of paritorie.
And whan that he was come, he gan to crye,
'God save,' quod he, 'this Ioly companye!
Faste have I priked,' quod he, 'for your sake,
By-cause that I wolde yow atake,
To ryden in this mery companye.'
His yeman eek was ful of curteisye,
And seyde, 'sires, now in the morwe-tyde
Out of your hostelrye I saugh you ryde,
And warned heer my lord and my soverayn,
Which that to ryden with yow is ful fayn,
For his desport; he loveth daliaunce.'
'Freend, for thy warning god yeve thee good chaunce,'
Than seyde our host, 'for certes, it wolde seme
Thy lord were wys, and so I may wel deme;
He is ful Iocund also, dar I leye.
Can he oght telle a mery tale or tweye,
With which he glade may this companye?'
'Who, sire? my lord? ye, ye, withouten lye,
He can of murthe, and eek of Iolitee
Nat but ynough; also sir, trusteth me,
And ye him knewe as wel as do I,
Ye wolde wondre how wel and craftily
He coude werke, and that in sondry wyse.

He hath take on him many a greet empryse,
Which were ful hard for any that is here
To bringe aboute, but they of him it lere.
As homely as he rit amonges yow,
If ye him knewe, it wolde be for your prow;
Ye wolde nat forgoon his aqueyntaunce
For mochel good, I dar leye in balaunce
Al that I have in my possessioun.
He is a man of heigh discrecioun,
I warne you wel, he is a passing man.'
'Wel,' quod our host, 'I pray thee, tel me than,
Is he a clerk, or noon? tel what he is.'
'Nay, he is gretter than a clerk, y-wis,'
Seyde this yeman, 'and in wordes fewe,
Host, of his craft som-what I wol yow shewe.
I seye, my lord can swich subtilitee —
(But al his craft ye may nat wite at me;
And som-what helpe I yet to his werking) —
That al this ground on which we been ryding,
Til that we come to Caunterbury toun,
He coude al clene turne it up-so-doun,
And pave it al of silver and of gold.'
And whan this yeman hadde thus y-told
Unto our host, he seyde, 'benedicite!
This thing is wonder merveillous to me,
Sin that thy lord is of so heigh prudence,
By-cause of which men sholde him reverence,
That of his worship rekketh he so lyte;
His oversloppe nis nat worth a myte,

As in effect, to him, so mote I go!
It is al baudy and to-tore also.
Why is thy lord so sluttish, I thee preye,
And is of power better cloth to beye,
If that his dede accorde with thy speche?
Telle me that, and that I thee biseche.'
'Why?' quod this yeman, 'wherto axe ye me?
God help me so, for he shal never thee!
(But I wol nat avowe that I seye,
And therfor kepe it secree, I yow preye).
He is to wys, in feith, as I bileve;
That that is overdoon, it wol nat preve
Aright, as clerkes seyn, it is a vyce.
Wherfor in that I holde him lewed and nyce.
For whan a man hath over-greet a wit,
Ful oft him happeth to misusen it;
So dooth my lord, and that me greveth sore.
God it amende, I can sey yow na-more.'
'Ther-of no fors, good yeman,' quod our host;
'Sin of the conning of thy lord thou wost,
Tel how he dooth, I pray thee hertely,
Sin that he is so crafty and so sly.
Wher dwellen ye, if it to telle be?'
'In the suburbes of a toun,' quod he,
'Lurkinge in hernes and in lanes blinde,
Wher-as thise robbours and thise theves by kinde
Holden hir privee fereful residence,
As they that dar nat shewen hir presence;
So faren we, if I shal seye the sothe.'

‘Now,’ quod our host, ‘yit lat me talke to the;
Why artow so discoloured of thy face?’
‘Peter!’ quod he, ‘god yeve it harde grace,
I am so used in the fyr to blowe,
That it hath chaunged my colour, I trowe.
I am nat wont in no mirour to prye,
But swinke sore and lerne multiplye.
We blondren ever and pouren in the fyr,
And for al that we fayle of our desyr,
For ever we lakken our conclusioun.
To mochel folk we doon illusioun,
And borwe gold, be it a pound or two,
Or ten, or twelve, or many sommes mo,
And make hem wenen, at the leeste weye,
That of a pound we coude make tweye!
Yet is it fals, but ay we han good hope
It for to doon, and after it we grope.
But that science is so fer us biforn,
We mowen nat, al-though we hadde it sworn,
It overtake, it slit awey so faste;
It wol us maken beggers atte laste.’
Whyl this yeman was thus in his talking,
This chanoun drough him neer, and herde al thing
Which this yeman spak, for suspecioun
Of mennes speche ever hadde this chanoun.
For Catoun seith, that he that gilty is
Demeth al thing be spoke of him, y-wis.
That was the cause he gan so ny him drawe
To his yeman, to herknen al his sawe.

And thus he seyde un-to his yeman tho,
'Hold thou thy pees, and spek no wordes mo,
For if thou do, thou shalt it dere abye;
Thou sclaundrest me heer in this companye,
And eek discoverest that thou sholdest hyde.'
'Ye,' quod our host, 'telle on, what so bityde;
Of al his threting rekke nat a myte!'
'In feith,' quod he, 'namore I do but lyte.'
And whan this chanon saugh it wolde nat be,
But his yeman wolde his privetee,
He fledde awey for verray sorwe and shame.
'A!' quod the yeman, 'heer shal aryse game,
Al that I can anon now wol I telle.
Sin he is goon, the foule feend him quelle!
For never her-after wol I with him mete
For peny ne for pound, I yow bihete!
He that me broghte first unto that game,
Er that he dye, sorwe have he and shame!
For it is ernest to me, by my feith;
That fele I wel, what so any man seith.
And yet, for al my smert and al my grief,
For al my sorwe, labour, and meschief,
I coude never leve it in no wyse.
Now wolde god my wit mighte suffyse
To tellen al that longeth to that art!
But natheles yow wol I tellen part;
Sin that my lord is gon, I wol nat spare;
Swich thing as that I knowe, I wol declare. —
Here endeth the Prologe of the Chanouns Yemannes Tale.

The Chanouns Yemannes Tale

Link for the modernised and annotated text

Here biginneth the Chanouns Yeman his Tale.

[Prima pars.]

WITH this chanoun I dwelt have seven yeer,
And of his science am I never the neer.
Al that I hadde, I have y-lost ther-by;
And god wot, so hath many mo than I.
Ther I was wont to be right fresh and gay
Of clothing and of other good array,
Now may I were an hose upon myn heed;
And wher my colour was bothe fresh and reed,
Now is it wan and of a leden hewe;
Who-so it useth, sore shal he rewe.
And of my swink yet blered is myn yë,
Lo! which avantage is to multiplye!
That slyding science hath me maad so bare,
That I have no good, wher that ever I fare;
And yet I am endetted so ther-by
Of gold that I have borwed, trewely,
That whyl I live, I shal it quyte never.
Lat every man be war by me for ever!
What maner man that casteth him ther-to,
If he continue, I holde his thrift y-do.
So helpe me god, ther-by shal he nat winne,
But empte his purs, and make his wittes thinne.
And whan he, thurgh his madnes and folye,
Hath lost his owene good thurgh Iupartye,
Thanne he excyteth other folk ther-to,

To lese hir good as he him-self hath do.
For unto shrewes Ioye it is and ese
To have hir felawes in peyne and disese;
Thus was I ones lerned of a clerk.
Of that no charge, I wol speke of our werk.
Whan we been ther as we shul exercyse
Our elvish craft, we semen wonder wyse,
Our termes been so clergial and so queynte.
I blowe the fyr til that myn herte feynte.
What sholde I tellen ech proporcioun
Of thinges whiche that we werche upon,
As on fyve or sixe ounces, may wel be,
Of silver or som other quantite,
And bisie me to telle yow the names
Of orpiment, brent bones, yren squames,
That into poudre grounden been ful smal?
And in an erthen potte how put is al,
And salt y-put in, and also papeer,
Biforn thise poudres that I speke of heer,
And wel y-covered with a lampe of glas,
And mochel other thing which that ther was?
And of the pot and glasses enluting,
That of the eyre mighte passe out no-thing?
And of the esy fyr and smart also,
Which that was maad, and of the care and wo
That we hadde in our matires sublyming,
And in amalgaming and calcening
Of quik-silver, y-clept Mercurie crude?
For alle our sleightes we can nat conclude.

Our orpiment and sublymed Mercurie,
Our grounden litarge eek on the porphurie,
Of ech of thise of ounces a certeyn
Nought helpeth us, our labour is in veyn.
Ne eek our spirites ascencioun,
Ne our materes that lyen al fixe adoun,
Mowe in our werking no-thing us avayle.
For lost is al our labour and travayle,
And al the cost, a twenty devel weye,
Is lost also, which we upon it leye.
Ther is also ful many another thing
That is unto our craft apertening;
Though I by ordre hem nat reherce can,
By-cause that I am a lewed man,
Yet wol I telle hem as they come to minde,
Though I ne can nat sette hem in hir kinde;
As bole armoniak, verdegrees, boras,
And sondry vessels maad of erthe and glas,
Our urinales and our descensories,
Violes, croslets, and sublymatories,
Cucurbites, and alembykes eek,
And othere swiche, dere y-nough a leek.
Nat nedeth it for to reherce hem alle,
Watres rubifying and boles galle,
Arsenik, sal armoniak, and brimstoon;
And herbes coude I telle eek many oon,
As egremoine, valerian, and lunarie,
And othere swiche, if that me liste tarie.
Our lampes brenning bothe night and day,

To bringe aboute our craft, if that we may.
Our fourneys eek of calcinacioun,
And of watres albificacioun,
Unslekked lym, chalk, and gleyre of an ey,
Poudres diverse, asshes, dong, pisse, and cley,
Cered pokets, sal peter, vitriole;
And divers fyres maad of wode and cole;
Sal tartre, alkaly, and sal preparat,
And combust materes and coagulat,
Cley maad with hors or mannes heer, and oile
Of tartre, alum, glas, berm, wort, and argoile,
Resalgar, and our materes enbibing;
And eek of our materes encorporing,
And of our silver citrinacioun,
Our cementing and fermentacioun,
Our ingottes, testes, and many mo.
I wol yow telle, as was me taught also,
The foure spirites and the bodies sevene,
By ordre, as ofte I herde my lord hem nevene.
The firste spirit quik-silver called is,
The second orpiment, the thridde, y-wis,
Sal armoniak, and the ferthe brimstoon.
The bodies sevene eek, lo! hem heer anoon:
Sol gold is, and Luna silver we threpe,
Mars yren, Mercurie quik-silver we clepe,
Saturnus leed, and Iupiter is tin,
And Venus coper, by my fader kin!
This cursed craft who-so wol exercyse,
He shal no good han that him may suffyse;

For al the good he spendeth ther-aboute,
He lese shal, ther-of have I no doute.
Who-so that listeth outen his folye,
Lat him come forth, and lerne multiplye;
And every man that oght hath in his cofre,
Lat him appere, and wexe a philosofre.
Ascaunce that craft is so light to lere?
Nay, nay, god woot, al be he monk or frere,
Preest or chanoun, or any other wight,
Though he sitte at his book bothe day and night,
In lernyng of this elvish nyce lore,
Al is in veyn, and parde, mochel more!
To lerne a lewed man this subtiltee,
Fy! spek nat ther-of, for it wol nat be;
Al conne he letterure, or conne he noon,
As in effect, he shal finde it al oon.
For bothe two, by my savacioun,
Concluden, in multiplicacioun,
Y-lyke wel, whan they han al y-do;
This is to seyn, they faylen bothe two.
Yet forgat I to maken rehersaille
Of watres corosif and of limaille,
And of bodyes mollificacioun,
And also of hir induracioun,
Oiles, ablucions, and metal fusible,
To tellen al wolde passen any bible
That o-wher is; wherfor, as for the beste,
Of alle thise names now wol I me reste.
For, as I trowe, I have yow told y-nowe

To reyse a feend, al loke he never so rowe.
A! nay! lat be; the philosophres stoon,
Elixir clept, we sechen faste echoon;
For hadde we him, than were we siker y-now.
But, unto god of heven I make avow,
For al our craft, whan we han al y-do,
And al our sleighte, he wol nat come us to.
He hath y-maad us spenden mochel good,
For sorwe of which almost we wexen wood,
But that good hope crepeth in our herte,
Supposinge ever, though we sore smerte,
To be releved by him afterward;
Swich supposing and hope is sharp and hard;
I warne yow wel, it is to seken ever;
That futur temps hath maad men to dissever,
In trust ther-of, from al that ever they hadde.
Yet of that art they can nat wexen sadde,
For unto hem it is a bitter swete;
So semeth it; for nadde they but a shete
Which that they mighte wrappe hem inne a-night,
And a bak to walken inne by day-light,
They wolde hem selle and spenden on this craft;
They can nat stinte til no-thing be laft.
And evermore, wher that ever they goon,
Men may hem knowe by smel of brimstoon;
For al the world, they stinken as a goot;
Her savour is so rammish and so hoot,
That, though a man from hem a myle be,
The savour wol infecte him, trusteth me;

Lo, thus by smelling and threedbare array,
If that men liste, this folk they knowe may.
And if a man wol aske hem prively,
Why they been clothed so unthriftily,
They right anon wol rownen in his ere,
And seyn, that if that they espyed were,
Men wolde hem slee, by-cause of hir science;
Lo, thus this folk bitrayen innocence!
Passe over this; I go my tale un-to.
Er than the pot be on the fyr y-do,
Of metals with a certein quantite,
My lord hem tempreth, and no man but he —
Now he is goon, I dar seyn boldely —
For, as men seyn, he can don craftily;
Algate I woot wel he hath swich a name,
And yet ful ofte he renneth in a blame;
And wite ye how? ful ofte it happeth so,
The pot to-breketh, and farewel! al is go!
Thise metals been of so greet violence,
Our walles mowe nat make hem resistence,
But if they weren wroght of lym and stoon;
They percen so, and thurgh the wal they goon,
And somme of hem sinken in-to the ground —
Thus han we lost by tymes many a pound —
And somme are scatered al the floor aboute,
Somme lepe in-to the roof; with-outen doute,
Though that the feend noght in our sighte him shewe,
I trowe he with us be, that ilke shrewe!
In helle wher that he is lord and sire,

Nis ther more wo, ne more rancour ne ire.
Whan that our pot is broke, as I have sayd,
Every man chit, and halt him yvel apayd.
Som seyde, it was long on the fyr-making,
Som seyde, nay! it was on the blowing;
(Than was I fered, for that was myn office);
'Straw!' quod the thridde, 'ye been lewed and nyce,
It was nat tempred as it oghte be.'
'Nay!' quod the ferthe, 'stint, and herkne me;
By-cause our fyr ne was nat maad of beech,
That is the cause, and other noon, so theech!'
I can nat telle wher-on it was long,
But wel I wot greet stryf it was long,
'What!' quod my lord, 'ther is na-more to done,
Of thise perils I wol be war eft-sone;
I am right siker that the pot was crased.
Be as be may, be ye no-thing amased;
As usage is, lat swepe the floor as swythe,
Plukke up your hertes, and beth gladde and blythe.'
The mullok on an hepe y-sweped was,
And on the floor y-cast a canevas,
And al this mullok in a sive y-throwe,
And sifted, and y-piked many a throwe.
'Pardee,' quod oon, 'somwhat of our metal
Yet is ther heer, though that we han nat al.
Al-though this thing mishapped have as now,
Another tyme it may be wel y-now,
Us moste putte our good in aventure;
A marchant, parde! may nat ay endure,

Trusteth me wel, in his prosperitee;
Somtyme his good is drenched in the see,
And somtym comth it sauf un-to the londe.'
'Pees!' quod my lord, 'the next tyme I wol fonde
To bringe our craft al in another plyte;
And but I do, sirs, lat me han the wyte;
Ther was defaute in som-what, wel I woot.'
Another seyde, the fyr was over hoot: —
But, be it hoot or cold, I dar seye this,
That we concluden evermore amis.
We fayle of that which that we wolden have,
And in our madnesse evermore we rave.
And whan we been togidres everichoon,
Every man semeth a Salomon.
But al thing which that shyneth as the gold
Nis nat gold, as that I have herd it told;
Ne every appel that is fair at yë
Ne is nat good, what-so men clappe or crye.
Right so, lo! fareth it amonges us;
He that semeth the wysest, by Iesus!
Is most fool, whan it cometh to the preef;
And he that semeth trewest is a theef;
That shul ye knowe, er that I fro yow wende,
By that I of my tale have maad an ende.
Explicit prima pars. Et sequitur pars secunda.
Ther is a chanoun of religioun
Amonges us, wolde infecte al a toun,
Though it as greet were as was Ninivee,
Rome, Alisaundre, Troye, and othere three.

His sleightes and his infinit falsnesse
Ther coude no man wryten, as I gesse,
Thogh that he mighte liven a thousand yeer.
In al this world of falshede nis his peer;
For in his termes so he wolde him winde,
And speke his wordes in so sly a kinde,
Whan he commune shal with any wight,
That he wol make him doten anon right,
But it a feend be, as him-selven is.
Ful many a man hath he bigyled er this,
And wol, if that he live may a whyle;
And yet men ryde and goon ful many a myle
Him for to seke and have his aqueyntaunce,
Noght knowinge of his false governaunce.
And if yow list to yeve me audience,
I wol it tellen heer in your presence.
But worshipful chanouns religious,
Ne demeth nat that I sclaundre your hous,
Al-though my tale of a chanoun be.
Of every ordre som shrewe is, parde,
And god forbede that al a companye
Sholde rewe a singuler mannes folye.
To sclaundre yow is no-thing myn entente,
But to correcten that is mis I mente.
This tale was nat only told for yow,
But eek for othere mo; ye woot wel how
That, among Cristes apostelles twelve,
Ther nas no traytour but Iudas him-selve.
Than why sholde al the remenant have blame

That giltlees were? by yow I seye the same.
Save only this, if ye wol herkne me,
If any Iudas in your covent be,
Remeveth him bitymes, I yow rede,
If shame or los may causen any drede.
And beth no-thing displesed, I yow preye,
But in this cas herkneth what I shal seye.
In London was a preest, an annueleer,
That therin dwelled hadde many a yeer,
Which was so plesaunt and so servisable
Unto the wyf, wher-as he was at table,
That she wolde suffre him no-thing for to paye
For bord ne clothing, wente he never so gaye;
And spending-silver hadde he right y-now.
Therof no fors; I wol procede as now,
And telle forth my tale of the chanoun,
That broghte this preest to confusioun.
This false chanoun cam up-on a day
Unto this preestes chambre, wher he lay,
Biseching him to lene him a certeyn
Of gold, and he wolde quyte it him ageyn.
'Lene me a mark,' quod he, 'but dayes three,
And at my day I wol it quyten thee.
And if so be that thou me finde fals,
Another day do hange me by the hals!'
This preest him took a mark, and that as swythe,
And this chanoun him thanked ofte sythe,
And took his leve, and wente forth his weye,
And at the thridde day broghte his moneye,

And to the preest he took his gold agayn,
Wherof this preest was wonder glad and fayn.
'Certes,' quod he, 'no-thing anoyeth me
To lene a man a noble, or two or three,
Or what thing were in my possessioun,
Whan he so trewe is of condicioun,
That in no wyse he breke wol his day;
To swich a man I can never seye nay.'
'What!' quod this chanoun, 'sholde I be untrewe?
Nay, that were thing y-fallen al of-newe.
Trouthe is a thing that I wol ever kepe
Un-to that day in which that I shal crepe
In-to my grave, and elles god forbede;
Bileveth this as siker as is your crede.
God thanke I, and in good tyme be it sayd,
That ther was never man yet yvel apayd
For gold ne silver that he to me lente,
Ne never falshede in myn herte I mente.
And sir,' quod he, 'now of my privetee,
Sin ye so goodlich han been un-to me,
And kythed to me so greet gentillesse,
Somwhat to quyte with your kindenesse,
I wol yow shewe, and, if yow list to lere,
I wol yow teche pleynly the manere,
How I can werken in philosophye.
Taketh good heed, ye shul wel seen at yë,
That I wol doon a maistrie er I go.'
'Ye,' quod the preest, 'ye, sir, and wol ye so?
Marie! ther-of I pray yow hertely!'

‘At your comandement, sir, trewely,’
Quod the chanoun, ‘and elles god forbede!’
Lo, how this theef coude his servyse bede!
Ful sooth it is, that swich profred servyse
Stinketh, as witnessen thise olde wyse;
And that ful sone I wol it verifye
In this chanoun, rote of al trecherye,
That ever-more delyt hath and gladnesse —
Swich feendly thoughtes in his herte impresse —
How Cristes peple he may to meschief bringe;
God kepe us from his fals dissimulinge!
Noght wiste this preest with whom that he delte,
Ne of his harm cominge he no-thing felte.
O sely preest! o sely innocent!
With coveityse anon thou shalt be blent!
O gracelees, ful blind is thy conceit,
No-thing ne artow war of the deceit
Which that this fox y-shapen hath to thee!
His wyly wrenches thou ne mayst nat flee.
Wherfor, to go to the conclusioun
That refereth to thy confusioun,
Unhappy man! anon I wol me hye
To tellen thyn unwit and thy folye,
And eek the falsnesse of that other wrecche,
As ferforth as that my conning may strecche.
This chanoun was my lord, ye wolden wene?
Sir host, in feith, and by the hevenes quene,
It was another chanoun, and nat he,
That can an hundred fold more subtiltee!

He hath bitrayed folkes many tyme;
Of his falshede it dulleth me to ryme.
Ever whan that I speke of his falshede,
For shame of him my chekes wexen rede;
Algates, they biginnen for to glowe,
For reednesse have I noon, right wel I knowe,
In my visage; for fumes dyverse
Of metals, which ye han herd me reherce,
Consumed and wasted han my reednesse.
Now tak heed of this chanouns cursednesse!
'Sir,' quod he to the preest, 'lat your man gon
For quik-silver, that we it hadde anon;
And lat him bringen ounces two or three;
And whan he comth, as faste shul ye see
A wonder thing, which ye saugh never er this.'
'Sir,' quod the preest, 'it shal be doon, y-wis.'
He bad his servant fecchen him this thing,
And he al redy was at his bidding,
And wente him forth, and cam anon agayn
With this quik-silver, soothly for to sayn,
And took thise ounces three to the chanoun;
And he hem leyde fayre and wel adoun,
And bad the servant coles for to bringe,
That he anon mighte go to his werkinge.
The coles right anon weren y-fet,
And this chanoun took out a crosselet
Of his bosom, and shewed it the preest.
'This instrument,' quod he, 'which that thou seest,
Tak in thyn hand, and put thy-self ther-inne

Of this quik-silver an ounce, and heer biginne,
In the name of Crist, to wexe a philosofre.
Ther been ful fewe, whiche that I wolde profre
To shewen hem thus muche of my science.
For ye shul seen heer, by experience,
That this quik-silver wol I mortifye
Right in your sighte anon, withouten lye,
And make it as good silver and as fyn
As ther is any in your purs or myn,
Or elleswher, and make it malliable;
And elles, holdeth me fals and unable
Amonges folk for ever to appere!
I have a poudre heer, that coste me dere,
Shal make al good, for it is cause of al
My conning, which that I yow shewen shal.
Voydeth your man, and lat him be ther-oute,
And shet the dore, whyls we been aboute
Our privetee, that no man us espye
Whyls that we werke in this philosophye.'
Al as he bad, fulfilled was in dede,
This ilke servant anon-right out yede,
And his maister shette the dore anon,
And to hir labour speedily they gon.
This preest, at this cursed chanouns bidding,
Up-on the fyr anon sette this thing,
And blew the fyr, and bisied him ful faste;
And this chanoun in-to the croslet caste
A poudre, noot I wher-of that it was
Y-maad, other of chalk, other of glas,

Or som-what elles, was nat worth a flye,
To blynde with the preest; and bad him hye
The coles for to couchen al above
The croslet, ‘for, in tokening I thee love,’
Quod this chanoun, ‘thyn owene hondes two
Shul werche al thing which that shal heer be do.’
‘Graunt mercy,’ quod the preest, and was ful glad,
And couched coles as the chanoun bad.
And whyle he bisy was, this feendly wrecche,
This fals chanoun, the foule feend him fecche!
Out of his bosom took a bechen cole,
In which ful subtilly was maad an hole,
And ther-in put was of silver lymaille
An ounce, and stopped was, with-outen fayle,
The hole with wex, to kepe the lymail in.
And understondeth, that this false gin
Was nat maad ther, but it was maad bifore;
And othere thinges I shal telle more
Herafterward, which that he with him broghte;
Er he cam ther, him to bigyle he thoghte,
And so he dide, er that they wente a-twinne;
Til he had terved him, coude he not blinne.
It dulleth me whan that I of him speke,
On his falshede fayn wolde I me wreke,
If I wiste how; but he is heer and ther:
He is so variaunt, he abit no-wher.
But taketh heed now, sirs, for goddes love!
He took his cole of which I spak above,
And in his hond he baar it prively.

And whyls the preest couchede busily
The coles, as I tolde yow er this,
This chanoun seyde, ‘freend, ye doon amis;
This is nat couched as it oghte be;
But sone I shal amenden it,’ quod he.
‘Now lat me medle therwith but a whyle,
For of yow have I pitee, by seint Gyle!
Ye been right hoot, I see wel how ye swete,
Have heer a cloth, and wype awey the wete.’
And whyles that the preest wyped his face,
This chanoun took his cole with harde grace,
And leyde it above, up-on the middeward
Of the croslet, and blew wel afterward,
Til that the coles gonne faste brenne.
‘Now yeve us drinke,’ quod the chanoun thenne,
‘As swythe al shal be wel, I undertake;
Sitte we doun, and lat us mery make.’
And whan that this chanounes bechen cole
Was brent, al the lymaille, out of the hole,
Into the croslet fil anon adoun;
And so it moste nedes, by resoun,
Sin it so even aboven couched was;
But ther-of wiste the preest no-thing, alas!
He demed alle the coles y-liche good,
For of the sleighte he no-thing understood.
And whan this alkamistre saugh his tyme,
‘Rys up,’ quod he, ‘sir preest, and stondeth by me;
And for I woot wel ingot have ye noon,
Goth, walketh forth, and bring us a chalk-stoon;

For I wol make oon of the same shap
That is an ingot, if I may han hap.
And bringeth eek with yow a bolle or a panne,
Ful of water, and ye shul see wel thanne
How that our bisinesse shal thryve and preve.
And yet, for ye shul han no misbileve
Ne wrong conceit of me in your absence,
I ne wol nat been out of your presence,
But go with yow, and come with yow ageyn.'
The chambre-dore, shortly for to seyn,
They opened and shette, and wente hir weye.
And forth with hem they carieden the keye,
And come agayn with-outen any delay.
What sholde I tarien al the longe day?
He took the chalk, and shoop it in the wyse
Of an ingot, as I shal yow devyse.
I seye, he took out of his owene sleve,
A teyne of silver (yvele mote he cheve!)
Which that ne was nat but an ounce of weighte;
And taketh heed now of his cursed sleighte!
He shoop his ingot, in lengthe and eek in brede,
Of this teyne, with-outen any drede,
So slyly, that the preest it nat espyde;
And in his sleve agayn he gan it hyde;
And fro the fyr he took up his matere,
And in thingot putte it with mery chere,
And in the water-vessel he it caste
Whan that him luste, and bad the preest as faste,
'Look what ther is, put in thyn hand and grope,

Thow finde shalt ther silver, as I hope;
What, devel of helle! sholde it elles be?
Shaving of silver silver is, pardee!' 520
He putte his hond in, and took up a teyne
Of silver fyn, and glad in every veyne
Was this preest, whan he saugh that it was so.
'Goddes blessing, and his modres also,
And alle halwes have ye, sir chanoun,' 525
Seyde this preest, 'and I hir malisoun,
But, and ye vouche-sauf to techen me
This noble craft and this subtilitee,
I wol be youre, in al that ever I may!'
Quod the chanoun, 'yet wol I make assay 530
The second tyme, that ye may taken hede
And been expert of this, and in your nede
Another day assaye in myn absence
This disciplyne and this crafty science.
Lat take another ounce,' quod he tho, 535
'Of quik-silver, with-outen wordes mo,
And do ther-with as ye han doon er this
With that other, which that now silver is.'
This preest him bisieth in al that he can
To doon as this chanoun, this cursed man, 540
Comanded him, and faste he blew the fyr,
For to come to theffect of his desyr.
And this chanoun, right in the mene whyle,
Al redy was, the preest eft to bigyle,
And, for a countenance, in his hande he bar 545
An holwe stikke (tak keep and be war!)

In the ende of which an ounce, and na-more,
Of silver lymail put was, as bifore
Was in his cole, and stopped with wex weel
For to kepe in his lymail every deel.
And whyl this preest was in his bisinesse,
This chanoun with his stikke gan him dresse
To him anon, and his pouder caste in
As he did er; (the devel out of his skin
Him terve, I pray to god, for his falshede;
For he was ever fals in thoght and dede);
And with this stikke, above the croslet,
That was ordeyned with that false get,
He stired the coles, til relente gan
The wex agayn the fyr, as every man,
But it a fool be, woot wel it mot nede,
And al that in the stikke was out yede,
And in the croslet hastily it fel.
Now gode sirs, what wol ye bet than wel?
Whan that this preest thus was bigyled ageyn,
Supposing noght but trouthe, soth to seyn,
He was so glad, that I can nat expresse
In no manere his mirthe and his gladnesse;
And to the chanoun he profred eftsone
Body and good; ‘ye,’ quod the chanoun sone,
‘Though povre I be, crafty thou shalt me finde;
I warne thee, yet is ther more bihinde.
Is ther any coper her-inne?’ seyde he.
‘Ye,’ quod the preest, ‘sir, I trowe wel ther be.’
‘Elles go by us som, and that as swythe,

Now, gode sir, go forth thy wey and hy the.'
He wente his wey, and with the coper cam,
And this chanoun it in his handes nam,
And of that coper weyed out but an ounce.
Al to simple is my tonge to pronounce,
As ministre of my wit, the doublenesse
Of this chanoun, rote of al cursednesse.
He semed freendly to hem that knewe him noght,
But he was feendly bothe in herte and thoght.
It werieth me to telle of his falsnesse,
And nathelees yet wol I it expresse,
To thentente that men may be war therby,
And for noon other cause, trewely.
He putte his ounce of coper in the croslet,
And on the fyr as swythe he hath it set,
And caste in poudre, and made the preest to blowe,
And in his werking for to stoupe lowe,
As he dide er, and al nas but a Iape;
Right as him liste, the preest he made his ape;
And afterward in the ingot he it caste,
And in the panne putte it at the laste
Of water, and in he putte his owene hond.
And in his sleve (as ye biforn-hond
Herde me telle) he hadde a silver teyne.
He slyly took it out, this cursed heyne —
Unwiting this preest of his false craft —
And in the pannes botme he hath it laft;
And in the water rombled to and fro,
And wonder prively took up also

The coper teyne, noght knowing this preest,
And hidde it, and him hente by the breest,
And to him spak, and thus seyde in his game,
‘Stoupeth adoun, by god, ye be to blame,
Helpeth me now, as I dide yow whyl-er,
Putte in your hand, and loketh what is ther.’
This preest took up this silver teyne anon,
And thanne seyde the chanoun, ‘lat us gon
With thise three teynes, which that we han wroght,
To som goldsmith, and wite if they been oght.
For, by my feith, I nolde, for myn hood,
But-if that they were silver, fyn and good,
And that as swythe preved shal it be.’
Un-to the goldsmith with thise teynes three
They wente, and putte thise teynes in assay
To fyr and hamer; mighte no man sey nay,
But that they weren as hem oghte be.
This sotted preest, who was gladder than he?
Was never brid gladder agayn the day,
Ne nightingale, in the sesoun of May,
Nas never noon that luste bet to singe;
Ne lady lustier in carolinge
Or for to speke of love and wommanhede,
Ne knight in armes to doon an hardy dede
To stonde in grace of his lady dere,
Than had this preest this sory craft to lere;
And to the chanoun thus he spak and seyde,
‘For love of god, that for us alle deyde,
And as I may deserve it un-to yow,

What shal this receit coste? telleth now!'
'By our lady,' quod this chanoun, 'it is dere,
I warne yow wel; for, save I and a frere,
In Engelond ther can no man it make.'
'No fors,' quod he, 'now, sir, for goddes sake,
What shal I paye? telleth me, I preye.'
'Y-wis,' quod he, 'it is ful dere, I seye;
Sir, at o word, if that thee list it have,
Ye shul paye fourty pound, so god me save!
And, nere the freendship that ye dide er this
To me, ye sholde paye more, y-wis.'
This preest the somme of fourty pound anon
Of nobles fette, and took hem everichon
To this chanoun, for this ilke receit;
Al his werking nas but fraude and deceit.
'Sir preest,' he seyde, 'I kepe han no loos
Of my craft, for I wolde it kept were cloos;
And as ye love me, kepeth it secree;
For, and men knewe al my subtilitee,
By god, they wolden han so greet envye
To me, by-cause of my philosophye,
I sholde be deed, ther were non other weye.'
'God it forbede!' quod the preest, 'what sey ye?'
Yet hadde I lever spenden al the good
Which that I have (and elles wexe I wood!)
Than that ye sholden falle in swich meschief.'
'For your good wil, sir, have ye right good preef,'
Quod the chanoun, 'and far-wel, grant mercy!'
He wente his wey and never the preest him sy

After that day; and whan that this preest sholde
Maken assay, at swich tyme as he wolde,
Of this receit, far-wel! it wolde nat be!
Lo, thus byiaped and bigyled was he!
Thus maketh he his introduccioun
To bringe folk to hir destruccioun. —
Considereth, sirs, how that, in ech estaat,
Bitwixe men and gold ther is debaat
So ferforth, that unnethes is ther noon.
This multiplying blent so many oon,
That in good feith I trowe that it be
The cause grettest of swich scarsetee.
Philosophres speken so mistily
In this craft, that men can nat come therby,
For any wit that men han now a-dayes.
They mowe wel chiteren, as doon thise Iayes,
And in her termes sette hir lust and peyne,
But to hir purpos shul they never atteyne.
A man may lightly lerne, if he have aught,
To multiplye, and bringe his good to naught!
Lo! swich a lucre is in this lusty game,
A mannes mirthe it wol torne un-to grame,
And empten also grete and hevy purses,
And maken folk for to purchasen curses
Of hem, that han hir good therto y-lent.
O! fy! for shame! they that han been brent,
Allas! can they nat flee the fyres hete?
Ye that it use, I rede ye it lete,
Lest ye lese al; for bet than never is late.

Never to thryve were to long a date.
Though ye prolle ay, ye shul it never finde;
Ye been as bolde as is Bayard the blinde,
That blundreth forth, and peril casteth noon;
He is as bold to renne agayn a stoon
As for to goon besydes in the weye.
So faren ye that multiplye, I seye.
If that your yën can nat seen aright,
Loke that your minde lakke nought his sight.
For, though ye loke never so brode, and stare,
Ye shul nat winne a myte on that chaffare,
But wasten al that ye may rape and renne.
Withdrawe the fyr, lest it to faste brenne;
Medleth na-more with that art, I mene,
For, if ye doon, your thrift is goon ful clene.
And right as swythe I wol yow tellen here,
What philosophres seyn in this matere.
Lo, thus seith Arnold of the Newe Toun,
As his Rosarie maketh mencioun;
He seith right thus, with-outen any lye,
‘Ther may no man Mercurie mortifye,
But it be with his brother knowleching.
How that he, which that first seyde this thing,
Of philosophres fader was, Hermes;
He seith, how that the dragoun, doutelees,
Ne deyeth nat, but-if that he be slayn
With his brother; and that is for to sayn,
By the dragoun, Mercurie and noon other
He understood; and brimstoon by his brother,

That out of sol and luna were y-drawe.
And therfor,' seyde he, 'tak heed to my sawe,
Let no man bisy him this art for to seche,
But-if that he thentencioun and speche
Of philosophres understonde can;
And if he do, he is a lewed man.
For this science and this conning,' quod he,
'Is of the secree of secrees, parde.'
Also ther was a disciple of Plato,
That on a tyme seyde his maister to,
As his book Senior wol bere witnesse,
And this was his demande in soothfastnesse:
'Tel me the name of the privy stoon?'
And Plato answerde unto him anoon,
'Tak the stoon that Titanos men name.'
'Which is that?' quod he. 'Magnesia is the same,'
Seyde Plato. 'Ye, sir, and is it thus?
This is ignotum per ignotius.
What is Magnesia, good sir, I yow preye?'
'It is a water that is maad, I seye,
Of elementes foure,' quod Plato.
'Tel me the rote, good sir,' quod he tho,
'Of that water, if that it be your wille?'
'Nay, nay,' quod Plato, 'certein, that I nille.
The philosophres sworn were everichoon,
That they sholden discovere it un-to noon,
Ne in no book it wryte in no manere;
For un-to Crist it is so leef and dere
That he wol nat that it discovered be,

But wher it lyketh to his deitee 750
Man for tenspyre, and eek for to defende
Whom that him lyketh; lo, this is the ende.'
Thanne conclude I thus; sith god of hevene
Ne wol nat that the philosophres nevene
How that a man shal come un-to this stoon, 755
I rede, as for the beste, lete it goon.
For who-so maketh god his adversarie,
As for to werken any thing in contrarie
Of his wil, certes, never shal he thryve,
Thogh that he multiplye terme of his lyve. 760
And ther a poynt; for ended is my tale;
God sende every trewe man bote of his bale! — Amen.
Here is ended the Chanouns Yemannes Tale

(Chaucer 2012, 1198 –1221).

9.2 *Verses upon the Elixir*: Version A.

This poem was erroneously attributed to Chaucer in the Middle Ages. (Timmerman 2013, 100)

Take erth of erth erthes broder
Water and erth it is non other
And fire of therth that berith the price
And of that erth loke thou be wise
The true elixir if ye list to make 5
Erth out of erth loke that ye take.
pure subtill faire and good
And do it with water of the Wode

ffor in it therth dissoluyd must be
Withouten fire by daies thre
depart the thynne then from the thyk
and vapour it in to gomm like pik
a water therof distille ye shall
Our aqua vite and our menstruall
And after that shall come a fire
Redde as blode and full of yre
A blak erth like tinder drie
hevy as metall beneth shall lye.
Wheryn is hidde gret preuyte
ffor moder of all that erth must be
Then into purgatorie she must be do.
And haue the peynes that longith therto
Till she be bright as the Sonne
ffor then is the maistry wonne
Which is don in houres thre
Whiche forsoth is gret f[u]rle
yeve that erth his water to drynk
Till it be white as ye can thynk
And after yeve it his fire so good
Till it be redde as eny blode
Then fede it forth as ye shuld do
With mylk and mete that longith therto
Till it be growen to his full age

Then shall she be strong and of gret corage
And turne all bodies that laufull be
To his owen power and dignite
This is the makyng of our stone
The trouth I haue tolde you echon
ffor truly ther is non other wey of verrey right
But body of body and light of light
Where all the folys in the worlde sechyn
A thing that they mowe neuer metyn
ffor they wolde heue metall out of theym
That neuer was founde of erthly men
ffor of all thyngges I will no mo
but 4 elementes in generall I say to you so
Sonne and mone erth and water
and here is all that men of clater
ffor our gold and our siluer is no [com]en plate
But a Sperme out of a body take
Wheryn is all sol lune and light
Water and erth fire and fright
And all comyth out of on ymage
but water of the wode makith the mariage
I[n] arceneck sublymed a wey there is streight
With mercury calcyned ix tymes his weight
And gronnden togeder with the water of myght
That berith engression lyf and light

Anon as they togedyr byn

All rennyth to water bright and sheyn

Vppon this fire they growe togeder

Till they be fast and fle no whethyr

Then fede theym forth with thyne hande

With mylke and mete to make theym strenge

And here haue ye a good stone

Wherof an vnce on forty will gon

Vppon venus and mercury

This medecyn will make the mery

I haue a doughter that hight saturne & derlyng

Of my doughter withouten drede

Byn made elixers bothe white and rede

Ofwhom ye must drawe a water clere

This science if ye list to lere

This water reducyth euery thyng

To tendernesse and fixing.

Buriouyth & groweth & yevith frute & light

Ingression lyf and lastyng sight

and all rightfull werkes the soth to say

hit helpith and bryngith in a good wey

This is the water that is most worthy

aqua perfectissima & flos mundi

All werkes this water makyth white and light

Reducyng and shynyng as siluer bright

In mennes praiers and dauys salter

pleynly it is writen before the prest at thauter

and of thoyle gret marvell ther is

ffor all thyng it bryngith to rednesse

as citrine gold he is full hye

Where non is so redde ne so worthy

And in therth gret marvel is hydde

That is fyrst so blak and then so redde

Which is don in houres thre.

This may be callid Godis preuite

Then therth shall turne redde as blode

As citrine gold riall elixir and good

And then the redde oyle to hym shall go

Redde ferment And redde mercury also

And growe togeder wekes sevyn

Nowe blissid be almyghty God of hevyn

An vnce of this medecyn worthy

Cast vppon ijC vnces of mercury

Makith gold most riell

Euer to endure and dwell

Nowe haue ye herde the makyng of our stone

The begynnyng and ende and all is on