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# Pilgrims Speaking Angry Words: Change and Anger in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*

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**Abstract:** Medieval literature presents emotions such as anger as negative and destructive for the development of the medieval subject and society and defines anger not as a positive constructive affect but as an emotive reaction that should be suppressed, controlled or avoided. Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, written against a background of tremendous change generated by political and religious conflict, the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt, acknowledges anger as an essential element of medieval culture although it does not give much space to the causes of it. The Canterbury pilgrims experience and perform anger as a result of the unstructured and fast change taking place in the traditional stabilities. Indeed, the changing society represented by the pilgrims in the *Canterbury Tales* appears to have anger issues and accordingly is characterised by situations of conflict and emotional crises. The pilgrims are presented as failing in terms of conformity and obedience to the regulatory principles of the feudal structure also because they foster anger and have angry responses when they are expected to suppress, avoid and control their anger. Anger in this context is presented as an essential element of the new culture that produces it. This paper reads Chaucer's representation of anger as an affect/emotion in the *Canterbury Tales* and argues that as an emotive/affective agent, anger performed by the defiant pilgrims represents and forms the cultural response to the pervasive change and its results in the medieval feudal social structure represented in the *Canterbury Tales.*

## Öfkeli Sözler Söyleyen Hacılar: Chaucer'ın *Canterbury Hikâyeleri*'nde Değişim ve Öfke

**Öz:** Ortaçağ edebiyatı öfke gibi duyguları toplum ve bireyler için olumsuz ve yıkıcı olarak görüp, öfkenin yapıcı ve olumlu bir olgu değil, aksine bastırılması, kontrol altına alınması ve kaçınılması gereken bir duygu durumu olduğunu gösterir. Chaucer'ın politik ve dini çatışmalar, Kara Veba ve Köylü Ayaklanması gibi gelişmelerden kaynaklanan büyük bir değişim bağlamında yazdığı *Canterbury Hikâyeleri* adlı eseri, sosyo-kültürel sebeplerine çok yer vermemekle beraber, öfkeyi Ortaçağ kültürünün önemli bir ögesi olarak sunar. Canterbury hacıları geleneksel yapının hızlı ve belli bir düzeni olmayan değişimine tepki olarak öfke duyar ve öfkeli bir performans gösterirler. Aslında, *Canterbury Hikâyeleri*'nde hacıların temsil ettiği değişen toplum, çatışma ve duygusal krizlerle karakterize bir toplumdur. Hacılar, öfkelerini kontrol edip, bastırmaları ve öfkeden kaçınmaları beklenirken öfke besleyerek ve öfkeli tepkiler vererek de feodal yapının düzenlemelerine uyum

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sağlamakta başarısız olurlar. Öfke, bu bağlamda, onu üreten yeni kültürün önemli bir parçası olarak sunulur. Bu makale, Chaucer'ın *Canterbury Hikayeleri*'nde bir duygu/afekt olarak öfkenin temsilini inceleyerek, sisteme karşı duran hacıların gösterdiği öfkenin, yaygın değişimin ürettiği ve söz konusu değişime bir tepki olarak gelişen duygusal/afektif bir eyleyici olarak yer aldığını tartışır.

This paper reads Chaucer's representation of anger as an affect/emotion in the *Canterbury Tales* and argues that as an emotive/affective agent, anger represents and forms the cultural response to the pervasive change and its results in the medieval feudal social structure represented in the *Canterbury Tales.*[1] Medieval literature presents emotions such as anger as negative and destructive for the development of the medieval subject and society and defines anger not as a positive constructive affect but as an emotive reaction that should be suppressed, controlled or avoided.[2] My discussion in this paper, hence, is structured according to two important aspects of the *Canterbury Tales*, that it is a work of change and that the culture it represents is a culture of anger. It sees a correlation between the change generated by the socio-cultural developments and the anger produced by it as an essential element of medieval culture although the *Canterbury Tales* does not offer direct evidence for the socio-historical changes that generate a culture of anger. The Canterbury pilgrimage, in this context, is presented as an experience of people who are aware of the change taking place in the traditional stabilities and use anger as an agent to affect a reconstruction in their position in society. Change as a staple of the society presented in the *Canterbury Tales* has long been recognised and there are studies that address and identify anger in the *Canterbury Tales.* The notable studies of Jill Mann and Griffith present important insights on the way anger operates in relation to its philosophical and social contexts and demonstrate its negative implications for the pilgrims. Griffith traces the use of medieval tradition of anger in Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales* and argues that "the medieval world took much care in trying to legislate and

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[1] This paper is a revised version of Professor Talat Sait Halman Lecture delivered at the 16th International İDEA Conference, Studies in English 24-26 April 2024, Cappadocia University, Mustafa Pasha Campus, Nevşehir, Türkiye. The author thanks the IDEA President Prof. Dr. Işıl Baş, and the organisers of the conference, Dr. Sinan Akıllı and his team.

[2] Considering Chaucer "as a writer with privileged insight into human emotions," Stephanie Downes provides a framework for the history of the reception of Chaucerian emotions in "Geoffrey Chaucer: Reading with Feeling" 409- 414. See also, Andrew Lynch, "The History of Emotions and Literature" and Sarah McNamer, "Emotion" for a review of Chaucerian emotions and criticism, p.128.

manage anger" (7). Mann's "Anger and 'Glosynge' in the *Canterbury Tales*" focuses on the ways anger is managed in the *Manciple's Tale* and the marriage group. It illustrates how the work uses glossing in the regulation of anger. It seems, however, that the anger dominating the pilgrims' interaction with the world is more of an emotional response of agential power the pilgrims utilise to achieve their aspirations of equality and freedom.

The pilgrims speak angry words, indeed, in the *Canterbury Tales*, and are often defined as angry. The Reeve and the Wife of Bath, for instance, are introduced as angry by nature in the General Prologue. The Reeve manages the manor with anger where the manorial workers fear him as much as the plague, or death itself [3] (I 587, 605).[4] The Miller is angry and drunk at the same time throughout the pilgrimage; the guildsmen's ladies get upset if their new position is not recognised and they do not get the treatment they desire and are addressed as madam (I 376-78). The Wife of Bath is a figure of nonconformity and resistance, angered when people do not observe her right to be the first in giving donations (I 444-52), and, as argued below, ready to fight her way to independence and social recognition as a woman through anger. The Shipman is always angry and cruel to his opponents (I 398-400). Briefly, the Host as the leader of the company of the pilgrims as a hostellier, (Tupper 263) the Friar because his sermon on anger fails in the *Summoner's Tale* are angry. The Cook and the Manciple, for instance, are figures of antagonism and angry criticism. When it is the Cook's turn to tell a tale, the Host invites the Cook to tell the next tale but the Cook is too drunk to oblige, in fact, he can hardly stay on his horse because of his drunk state. When the Manciple points out the drunken appearance of the Cook, "with this speche the Cook wax wrooth and wraw/ And on the Manciple he gan nodde faste/ For lakke of speche, and doun the hors him caste" (I 46–8). Similarly, in the *Pardoner's Tale*, the three rioteers are motivated by anger with Death caused by the Black Death and are ready to kill in their rage (VI 753-759).[5] Similarly, the Host gets angry with the Pardoner when the Pardoner, after his proud account of duping the faithful people with his false relics and sermon, tries to sell his relics to the pilgrims. In turn, the Pardoner gets angry when the Host tells him off and dismisses his offer with angry threats: "This Pardoner answerde nat a word;/So wrooth he was, no word ne wolde he seye" (VI 956-57). It is instructive that the angry pilgrims are mainly the figures who sit rather uncomfortably in their estates and seek ways of changing their status. As argued below, we see examples of anger directed at the system and used to improve the status of the pilgrim particularly in the Miller and the Wife's Bath's engagement with the established regularities. Both the Miller and the Wife utter angry words and perform

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[3]  Bryant presents the consequences of the feelings of surveillance such a position creates upon the Reeve in "Accounting For Affect in the Reeve's Tale."

[4] References to Chaucer are from *The Riverside Chaucer*, edited by Larry D. Benson, Oxford University Press, 1987.

[5] Tupper's *"The Quarrels of the Canterbury Pilgrims"* is one of the first studies that provide several examples of the frictions between the pilgrims, most of which seem to be occasioned by the quarrells about their rights. See Tupper 263. See also Wawrzyniak, "Cognitive Metaphors of Anger and Madness in *The Canterbury Tales"* which identifies and groups the angry pilgrims and their angry interactions as metaphors.

anger to have an impact as figures of friction, defiance and contest. Clearly, anger dominates, and anger operates through "the occupants of medial positions" (Bryant 128) who respond angrily to their public image, and seek betterment.

Moreover, two tales in the *Canterbury Tales* inform us about the long-standing tradition and the dominant discourse of anger in the Middle Ages*.* The Middle Ages received the classical ideas about anger from Seneca and Aristotle and blended the classical views of Aristotle with the teachings of Christianity taught especially by Aquinas (Rosenwein, *Anger* 89-90). The medieval period associated Aristotle's view of human anger as virtuous with God's anger and allowed its practice by the humans against sin as righteous anger. In this context, anger was an emotion to be exercised only by the authorities and it caused disorder when performed by the lower classes. The Senecan understanding of anger as an emotion with destructive consequences and the Aristotelian idea of anger, adapted by Aquinas, as potentially good but evil when performed by humans urged the medieval authorities to have it as a privileged to use in controlling the masses (Rosenwein, *Anger* 99). To this view, anger differed in nature according to the agent of anger and its consequences. The medieval anger, thus, was of two kinds, the righteous anger needed for the protection, correction and disciplining of the people, and the evil destructive anger to be restrained and avoided (Rosenwein, *Anger* 82, 96,127). The *Parson's Tale*, for instance, provides a catalogue of the evil consequences of anger and emphasises how anger breeds hate, discord, war, manslaughter, and is generative of more anger. It also offers a significant categorisation of anger as righteous anger and bad anger, as Aquinas does (Griffith 14-15). When the Parson speaks of the anger of the authorities, he presents anger as an agential and corrective emotion of change. In other words, he, in fact, recognises anger as a necessary emotive response for the betterment of society. But, as the established system does, the Parson's sermon, too, in its definition of good anger, allows anger to be felt and used only by the powerholders (X 531-40). Similarly, in his capacity as a preacher, the Friar, in the *Summoner's Tale*, is eager to present the medieval ideas about anger in his abortive attempt to pacify the anger of a sick man lying in bed (III 1992-2004). Similar to the Parson later, the Friar delivers a discourse of anger as detrimental both to the angry subject and the relationship between the people. He foregrounds the potential of anger in provoking further anger and vengeance, particularly in women (III 2001-4). The Friar of the *Summoner's Tale*, in fact, illustrates the negative aspects of anger both in his lecture and his own angry response to the trick played upon him by the angry husband of the tale. Similar to what the Parson says of anger in his sermon, anger is "Abhominable unto the god of hevene; And to himself it is destruccion" (III 2005-6), says the Friar. He, thus, cautions the sick man that "This every lewed viker or person/Can seye, how Ire engendreth homicyde. /Ire, is, in sooth, executour of Pryde" (III 2008-2010; see Tupper 260). Both the *Parson's Tale*, and the *Summoner's Tale* insist that anger must be checked and restrained.

However, in the *Canterbury Tales,* the correctives about anger fail to have a significant result in changing the pilgrims' behaviour positively. In fact, anger seems to be

freely performed. As Jill Man states, in relation to the angry performances of the Friar in the *Summoner's Tale*, "much of the pilgrim attitude is not simply *about* anger, it is also *produced* by anger" (86). It is rather the case that anger and its manifestations circulate largely in a newly forming society of change. Hence, we can observe anger as routine response to demand and realise change among the pilgrims.

Indeed, the *Canterbury Tales* is a work of change.[6] Change is marked by the Spring as the season of pilgrimage that opens the work and the *Parson's Tale* promoting an ethical religious betterment at the end of it.[7] Through the Canterbury pilgrims and their often angry exchanges, Chaucer presents an angry world populated by angry people, a world which is necessarily angered and is struggling to live a life which accepts anger as one of its components. As Griffith in *Anger in the Canterbury Tales* states, it is "a world in which everyone, from every estate, on every rung of the hierarchy, from peasant to king and even beyond to the divine, is angry" (4). When we consider the anger in the *Canterbury Tales* in relation to the unsettling changes in the social structure and the economic system of the Middle Ages we see that the *Canterbury Tales* is written in the aftermath of the main events of the second half of the fourteenth century such as the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt. Indeed, as a period of a steady but often unwanted change, particularly in the traditional hierarchies of the dominant feudal system, the middle English period is marked by a predominantly angry form of change. As a human produced pandemic, the Black Death killed one third of the population in the first strike in 1348 and continued to claim lives regularly for decades. The Black Death's toll as a drastic drop or break in the demographic continuity created a relentless demand for change in the hierarchical order of the society as it reduced the work force considerably and weakened the land-based system of feudalism (Cooper 6, Platt 177, Amtower and Vanhoutte 21-22). Especially the traditional feudal bondage system already ruptured by the development of trade started to break away, as the workers demanded higher wages, and agriculture and food production began to suffer (Hilton 150-155). The Black Death as a mass killing disease consequently created potentialities for the commoners to even out the inequalities and differences in the hierarchical medieval order. It, at the same time, alerted the system to control and manage the changes taking place. The established order tried to restore the old order and correct the newly developed anti-establishment attitudes of the working classes. The Statute of the Labourers of the 1351 and the Sumptuary Laws aim to keep things as they are and suppress the change led by the commoners as unacceptable demands. They are reminders to those usherers of the unwanted change that they should stop. They contain precise rules in their monitoring of the changing society in terms of

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[6] That the *Canterbury Tales* represents the change particularly in the tripartite structure of the medieval society is a staple of Chaucer criticism. Jill Mann's *Chaucer and Medieval Estates Satire* is one of the early works that establish and develop this thesis. See also Rigby, "English Society in the Later Middle Ages: Deference, Ambition and Conflict" and "Ideology" for a view of the medieval estate system as disfunctional and changing; the Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt as important landmarks of the change.

[7] See Patterson, "'The Parson's Tale' and the Quitting of the 'Canterbury Tales'".

wages, spending on food, clothes and entertaining (Mc Farlene 143, Gransden 165). In this context, a strong impetus for change in the fourteenth century English society comes from the Peasants' Revolt which carries and performs extreme forms of anger. The Revolt urging people to "Be war or ye be wo/Know your friend from your foe" (Olson 54) is an open declaration of the challenge to the established order and demands for reform. It demonstrates "a lack of confidence in the chivalric and spiritual leadership of the country" as well as "a discontent with agrarian policy or the Statute of Laborers" (54). The Peasants' Revolt as the representative of the widespread anti-establishment change involves many groups and vocations, "peasants, carpenters, armorers, chaplains, tailors, lawyers, sacristans, clerks, weavers, bakers, limeburners, cooks, and others," in Olson's words (56). It is indeed, as Hilton states, a collective angry attempt of people with diverse opinions and concerns about the established system that fuels it (163). As such it seems to give full expression to the demands of the society of anger the change generated.

A significant recognition of the correlation between anger and change can be observed in the contemporary accounts of the Peasants' Revolt. The contemporary presentations of the Revolt show the anger of the ruling classes as righteous anger at the anger of the peasants and condemn the Revolt because it demanded equality for the commoners. Moreover, the Revolt is considered to be unjustifiable because the change is demanded with violent and destructive anger. According to Froissart, the peasants' anger is, as the Parson states, "wikked wil to been avenged by word or by dede," and they are "out of alle juggement of reason" (X 534-36).Gower, too, concords that, through the Peasants' Revolt, the established system is destroyed, that it is an attack on what is good and lawful, and "This fury trampled our fatherland under foot,/Not only in cities but everywhere" (1353-58).

For the revolting peasants, however, anger seems to work as an effective useful emotion with the power to improve the faulty system of the rulers and the ruled. It is, as stated, partly a response to the repressive apparatuses used by the rulers to reinstate their authority. It develops, that is, as a counterproduct of the restorative and corrective measures taken by the upper classes to contain the change taking place and to monitor the responses of the commoners. The peasants' demand for change is a complex political reconstruction. Their leader, John Ball, in his angry articulation of the demands of the Revolt, urges for the release of people from bondage. According to John Ball, the authorities need to see that "things cannot go right in England and never will, until goods are held in common and there are no more villeins and gentlefolk, but we are all one and the same" (Froissart 212). Their anger encourages them to meet with the King and express the need for change. They insist that not their anger but the state they are in is "the evil" to be remedied: "Let us go to the king," John Ball suggests, "and show him how we are oppressed and tell him that we want things to be changed or else we will change them ourselves...And when the King sees and hears us he will remedy the evil either willingly or otherwise" (Froissart 212-13). And the people said, "he is right" (213).

According to the established system, the system originated by Adam and Eve is not one of equality but of superiors and inferiors and the inferiors are there to serve their life purpose by serving and supporting the system. The Parson in the *Canterbury Tales,* similarly, preaches control and restraint in his tale and calls for a calmer mutual interrelation in his confirmation of the traditional hierarchies: "God ordaiyned that some folk shoulde be moore high in estaat and in his degree, and some folk moore lough, and that everich sholde be served in his estaat and in his degree…And certes the lord oweth to his man that the man oweth to his lord" (X 771-79). It is not democracy but hierarchy that strengthens society according to the Parson (Rayner 144). A similar hierarchy seems to be at work in the performance of anger as the Friar in the *Summoner's Tale* warns, "Beth war, therfore, with lordes how ye pleye…./Singeth '*Placebo*,' and 'I shal if I kan,'/But if it be unto a povre man./To a povre man men sholde his vices telle,/But nat to a lord, thogh he sholde go to helle" (III 2074–8).

As opposed to the recommended attitude, the peasants' challenging chant goes, "When Adam Delved and Eve Span/Who was then the gentleman?", defying this order. But the King's reply does not address the peasants' question in terms of equality they seek, instead it reinstates the suppressive order and reiterates the dominant feudal discourse regarding the peasants' position: "Rustics you were and rustics you are still, You will remain in bondage not as before but incomparably harsher" (Patterson, "No Man" 134). Consequently, in the Peasants' Revolt, we observe that the peasants' anger for their state is not accepted by the authorities. Indeed, their anger with the authorities is considered as a violation of the established order and of the "scripted norms of feeling for a community-produced identity" as Burger and Crocker state in a different context (2). It seems that the authorities of the feudal system have the power to decide and teach the nonaristocratic communities, "how to feel about their state", in Fiona Somerset's words, (qtd. in Burger and Crocker 3) but the peasants aimed to develop and perform their own responses, as they were "highly organised and ideologically motivated" (Amtower and Vanhoutte 24).

It is likely that Chaucer's pilgrims experienced the anger of the peasants and wanted to join them or feared them like the authorities. Still, anger as historical contingency forming emotional regimes is not correlated with historical evidence in the *Canterbury Tales*. Indeed, "understanding the situational or topical in Chaucer's poetry is not easy," although Chaucer was much involved with the events of the time (Olson 16, 59). *Canterbury Tales,* in a way, voices and mutes the changes in the three pillars of the feudal system, the Knight and the aristocracy, the Parson and the clergy, the Plowman and the traditional workers do not have any issues with the system while we have "the anxieties raised by bourgeois and gentry attempt[ing] to develop new ethical subject positions" (Burger 91). The representation of the Plowman in the *Canterbury Tales,* for instance*,* illustrates how references to the Peasants' Revolt are muted and the anger driving the peasants' will to destroy the feudal system is not shared by the Plowman. On the contrary, he seems to be entirely unaffected by the swelling anger of the commoners that eventually

exploded in the Peasants' Revolt. The Plowman does happily, without complaint, or protest what the feudal order has assigned to his group. He is a "trewe swynkere…/Lyvnyge in pees and parfit charitee" (I 531-32). He tills the land, digs wells without complaint (I 530-541). It is a significant comment on the ravaging anger of the Peasants' Revolt that the Plowman remains entirely unaffected by anger and the changing circumstances of living in the post-plague and post- revolt period. As Rosenwein states, "[the] lack of emotions is also part of emotions history," (*Generations of Feeling* 215-21), and the Plowman says much about the social and political discontent of the period by submitting to the established order. A more articulate and direct anger generated by a self-acknowledged need for change dominates the attitudes of the Miller and the Wife of Bath.

The Miller and the Wife of Bath can be grouped together as figures sustaining ruptures in the system of the equals and unequals as they both declare their disapproval of the system and speak of the need for change. The Miller's status in medieval society is controversial. As Patterson states, the millers were brought back under the manorial control in the 13th century, and they were the participants of the Peasants' Revolt ("No Man" 126, 128). Accordingly, a particularly important instance of supporting change angrily and gaining the right consequently to speak is illustrated when the Miller refuses to observe the order established for tale telling and wants to cut in with what he claims to be a noble story like the one told by the Knight to "quit" the Knight (I 3125-26). His anger is accompanied by an extremely drunk state, as he himself admits (I 3137-40), and is thus undermined as drunken protest by the Host and his fellow pilgrims, too. When the Host "saugh that he was dronke of ale," he tells the Miller to go on with telling his tale because he is "a fool" and his "wit is overcome" (I 3134-35).The Reeve, similarly, protests that the Miller is allowed to tell an inappropriate tale in a drunken state: "Lat be thy lewed dronken harlotrye" (I 3145), he says. In this sense, the Miller performs the kind of anger the Parson and the authorities on anger consider as destructive. He, in fact, suffers exclusion and lack of regard because of his drunken anger and attempted violence. It is important that the narrator explains the reasons for including the obviously offensive tale of the Miller in his account of the tale telling. Despite the fact that the Miller is oppositional to the order agreed on, the narrator presents the Miller's anger as an emotional reaction, and his subsequent tale as an alternative that can be preferred or declined according to the taste of the pilgrims/reader, "…whoso list it nat yheere/Turne over the leef and chese another tale" (I 3176-77). The narrator stresses the fact that, as everyone knows, the Miller is a "churl", a low-born figure, and behaves accordingly (I 3182). The Prologue to the *Miller's Tale,* thus, problematises the right the Miller has to perform tale telling as a member of the pilgrim company. The narrator explains that he is responsible for including and repeating all the tales "be they bettre or werse" or he will not be able to complete his task (I 3174-75). Consequently, the Miller proceeds with his tale and in the order he wants it despite the protests and calls for observing the social hierarchy. The Miller's angry claim to the right to tell a noble tale is a clear indication of the class struggle underlying the

*Canterbury Tales*. One of the reasons for downplaying the Miller's anger is obviously his lower status. As the accounts of the Revolt demonstrate, the anger or the angry demands of the peasants were not acknowledged and there was a tendency to label their efforts as insanity. The Friar of the *Summoner's Tale* warns that angry men should not hold high positions as their exercise of authority will do more harm than good: "It is greet harm and certes greet pitee/To sette an irous man in heigh degree" (I 2015-16), and that the angry men in general should be shunned: "Ne be no felawe to an irous man/Ne with no wood man walke by the weye/Lest thee repente" (I 2086-88). According to the nobility, the peasants were "a different race" (Hilton 34). Accordingly, the Miller is "cousin to the Revolt's Jack the Miller, seen through the eyes of the elite court" (Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject* 320)[8] and is of that different race, too. Such views of the commoners show that as a commoner, the Miller is not entitled to anger, especially to protest the authority. He is rather someone whose emotional reactions are scripted by the dominant ideology, and who is taught to restrain and suppress his anger by the medieval order. We observe that, indeed, in that sense, the Miller is angry with the system and is emboldened by his anger. The dominant system represented by the Host does not treat the Miller's demands as proper, while the Miller believes in the righteousness of his anger.[9] The Prologue to the *Miller's Tale* reads: "The Millere..gan to crie.../And swoor, 'By armes, and by blood, and bones, /I kan a noble tale for the nones/ With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale" (I 3124-27). He seems to be asking the questions John Ball directs at the aristocracy. John Ball demands to know "In what way are those whom we call lords greater masters than ourselves? How have they deserved it? Why do they hold us in bondage? If we all spring from a single father and mother, Adam and Eve, how can they claim or prove that they are lords more than us, except by making us produce and grow the wealth which they spend?" (Froissart 212). Hence, the Miller's anger at the storytelling order appears to be more forceful and functional in conveying the social discrimination of the hierarchical social order prevalent in his society. For instance, the Host seems to be exercising the control expected from the powerful authorities and finding different reasons, such as his drunkenness, for the Miller's anger. There seems to be a similarity between the *Chronicles* and *the Canterbury Tales* in their presentation of the anger of the commoners in this context. Froissart identifies the prosperous state of the peasants as the main reason for the Revolt and their claims of equality, and challenges their protests that they were not treated properly. He states, on the contrary, "it was because of the abundance and prosperity in which the common people then lived that this rebellion broke out", although the commoners, "these bad people...said, theye were held in too much subjection"

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[8] Olson stresses the nobility's attitude illustrated in the *Summoner's Tale* in the case of the fart to be divided equally among four participants as an impossibility because it is suggested by a peasant. See *Chaucer and the Subject of History,* p. 320.

[9] See Paul Friedman, "Peasant Anger in the Late Middle Ages", 171-188. Also Stephen D. White, "The Politics of Anger", p. 139, about the priviledge of the rulers to publicly display their anger. White argues that the prerogative of the ruler to perform anger makes anger a powerful political force, p.152.

(Froissart 211).[10] The change thus demanded and articulated very angrily is considered to be "the greatest evils [of]disorder and anarchy" (Froissart, Introduction 21). Because "they were envious of the nobles and the rich. These began saying that the country was badly governed and was being robbed of its wealth by those who called themselves noblemen" (Froissart 213). The Host, too, is condescending; he does not respond angrily, but answers politely and invites the Miller to observe social and narrative decorum: "Abyd, Roby, my leeve brother;/Som bettre man shal tel us first another/Abyd, and let us werken thriftily" (I 3129-31). The Host is calm and kind when he reminds the Miller that he will follow the plan of telling tales as decided. But, clearly, his words to the Miller echo the Parson's, as well as the established system's, conviction that the established order is "God ordaiyned" (771) and the Miller is not good enough to tell a tale after the Knight. Thus, the proposition of the Host generates more anger for the Miller who insists that he is entitled to tell a tale when he wants. The Miller performs anger, as Jill Mann states, as "a fundamental refusal to accept the way things are" (Anger, 97). Accordingly, like the peasants described by Froissart and Gower, the Miller's anger is too strong to manage. He is relentless in his demands and does not accept any negotiation: "...That wol nat I/ For I wol speke or elles go my wey" (I 3132-33), his angry response to the Host's proposal reads. It is important to note that the Miller is aware that to tell a tale after the Knight and engage in a tale telling that does not suit his class/estate proprieties is not acceptable. His anger is generated by that precise understanding. It is where anger becomes productive of change, as he still presses for acceptance of his new position by the others. The questioning of his right to tell a tale after the Knight is accordingly countered by him with a question to the Reeve: "Why artow angry with my tale now" (I 3157). The Miller clearly not only subverts the established order and its regulations by claiming to have rights still not endorsed by the system through anger, but also manages to speak his words puncturing the established order: "He nolde his wordes for no man forbere", and tells "his cherles tale in his manere" (I 3168-69). Thus, he boastfully offers his own culture, social position and storytelling as equal, despite the abortive attempts of the Host, Harry Bailey, who would prefer the Monk to speak (I, 3138). Evidently, anger in the case of the Miller in direct inconsideration of what the others think gets the Miller what he wants. The narrative registers the struggle for equality performed with anger by the Miller and presents the Miller's attempted rupture of the system as accepted. His anger in a way gets approved, albeit because he leaves no other options to the pilgrim company. He manages to change the hierarchical order, in direct opposition to what Ganim argues to be the collectively learned response of the medieval people. The Miller shows that he does not think "in terms of an hierarchical model, in which one accepted one's place", in Gawin's words (226). He, in fact, is in direct opposition to the "complex network of loyalties

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[10] Postan, in *Medieval Economy and Society,* sees the Peasants' Revolt as a result of the prosperity of the working class, pp.201-2.

developed under feudalism" (Ganim 226), and tries for a recognition of his revisions of the system. His words, "…That wol nat I/ For I wol speke or elles go my wey" become performative of anger expressing the change of status he declares to be his right.[11] Thus doing, his prologue cuts through the complex relationship between anger and change and repositions anger as agential in the socio-political change characterising the medieval period.[12]

Anger employed for change is louder and more direct in the Wife of Bath's Prologue, particularly in her relationship with her fifth husband.[13] A powerful criticism of the established order, The Wife's Prologue opens with anger with the dominant discourse of marriage and wifehood and focuses especially on her negotiations for freedom and independence with her fifth husband Jenkyn who is a clerk. Jenkyn is interested in change, too, and tries to create a decent, submissive, obedient wife out of the Wife of Bath by reading her, every night, stories of the wicked women of the clerical tradition (III 641-42 ff). The Wife is not subdued but rather becomes violently angry at the attitude of her husband and the stories that he uses to tame her. Her response is to rip pages out of her husband's book (III 788-96). Her response to her husband's reading is, indeed, the "most remarkable instance of anger in a woman that invites empathy and remains brilliantly ambivalent" as Blamires states (35). The fight that ensues between them leaves her deaf but also wins her mastery over her husband in her marriage (III 811-25), thus she achieves a perpetual change in her position in the marriage as a wife. As Glenn Burger argues, if we take her deafness as the representation of "the disabling effects of the social on the body" (102) we can see how anger operates to correct the social as well.

It is important to note that the Wife becomes an angry figure only when provoked and in response to the pressure that will limit her rights and freedom. She, in a way, finds herself pressed for giving back what her life as a successful working woman eventually enabled her to have. As Miller states, "a trope of economic exchange" governs her subjectivity and drives her as a member of "the most dynamic segment of the English economy" (558). The relationship with her fifth husband is one of superiors and inferiors in which the husband is self-righteous and demanding. As Downes states, her husband "takes pleasure in emotionally abusing his wife by reciting anti-feminist stories and proverbs. He owns a book of "wikked wyves" (line 685) from which he frequently reads

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[11] Barbara Rosenwein, in *Anger: The Conflicted History of an Emotion*, states, "Emotion words are performative, and this is certainly true in the case of anger. When we say 'I am angry' aloud, or when the tone of our voice is angry, we are performing our anger, as if in a play" p. 67.

[12] Patterson suggests in "No Man His Reason Herde", p. 137, that the *Miller's Tale* reverses the peasants' defamation and establishes a freer world where stigmatization and suppression have no place. See also, Patterson, *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 264, for a similar view.

[13] Olson states that with the Wife of Bath's Prologue "we move from the political opposition generated by class inequality of Fragment I to an ideological antithesis determined by gender," *Chaucer and the Subject of History*, p. 281.

for his amusement ("his desport"), laughing uproariously ("[a]t which boke he lough alwey ful faste," lines 670–2)" (417).

The Wife's anger, thus, originates from her conviction that her life is governed by principles that deny her the right to perform freely and equally in her marriage of love, and society. Her violent anger breeds further anger as expected, but, in the end, her angry response to her fifth husband and the established order becomes productive of change in her marital and economic relations as she changes her husband, not herself.  Clearly, in the case of the Wife, it is the Wife who uses anger as an agent of change. In Bryant's words, struggling to survive in "a system interested in controlling affect and controlling through affect" (120), the Wife performs as a figure of anger to obtain and have accepted what she desires. It is likely, therefore, that the Wife, too, reconstructs anger as the good anger in celebrating the consequences of her angry reaction. She is entitled to anger but she also has the power to transform the anger of the authorities represented by her clerk husband into a peaceful and life changing acceptance of the demands of the discontented. Her anger, like that of the Peasants' Revolt, is directed at the ills of the system and its abuses. She shows that what she is forced to abide by and practice as a wife "is a set of assumptions, a catalog of postures" (Dinshaw 30) that can be reconstructed and changed. Her anger consequently introduces and reinforces a necessary change in her status. As Crocker states, for the Wife, "what was an outlawed position must visibly move toward the center to achieve social or political credibility" (110). She, like the Miller, is insistent on forming an emotional community through anger that would guarantee that they are "bound together to form emotional 'regimes' [against the] .... hegemony" (Burger and Crocker 7).

In conclusion, the pilgrims speaking angry words in the *Canterbury Tales* show that anger is deeply correlated with change, it is produced by change and is simultaneously an agent of change. What we observe in the *Canterbury Tales* in terms of anger as a systematically and frequently performed emotive response is that it involves both the ones who attempt to reconfigure the established regularities and those who object to such reconstruction vigorously. Clearly, while the authorities on anger aim to present anger as a disabling socio-religious affect, the angry pilgrims consider anger as an ideological construct deeply embedded in the living conditions of the time. A reading of the representation of anger in the *Canterbury Tales*, hence, urges us to stand beside the pilgrims as Chaucer does and exercise a double vision facilitated by the often-muted socio-cultural background that seems to be taxing the people of the period and encouraging them for more equality and freedom than the established system allows. The anger as an emotive reaction observed in the interactions of the pilgrims such as the Miller and the Wife of Bath becomes the representative of emotional regimes formed through and against the established order. Accordingly, as Patricia DeMarco argues in a different context, "in order to situate their anger, we need to consider it not simply as an abstract philosophical or theological concept which pertains to every individual, but as an emotion whose complex meanings depend upon socially constructed ideas about [their

profession...], the roles and duties of [the angry subjects] and the cultural context  [...]in which [their anger] operates" (57). We need to view the pilgrim anger, that is, in Sara Ahmed's terms, as "what sticks, or what sustains or preserves the connection between ideas, values, and objects" (29).

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