MEDIEVAL HYBRID AND MIMIC IDENTITIES: GEOFFREY CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN IN *THE CANTERBURY TALES*[*]

Yrd. Doç. Dr. Nazan YILDIZ
Karadeniz Teknik Üniversitesi Edebiyat Fakültesi
İngiliz Dili ve Edebiyatı Bölümü
nyildiz@ktu.edu.tr
ORCID ID: *http://orcid.org/0000-0002-5776-0268*

Abstract

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* represents every facet of medieval society by its unique satire of medieval people exhibiting various classes. Depicting his life-like pilgrims in accordance with the social, economic and political changes of the time, one of the focal points Chaucer highlights in his *The Canterbury Tales* is social mobility which moulds the portrait of his old landowner, the Franklin. Due to social mobility, as in the case of his real counterparts in history, the portrayal of the Franklin is shaped by in-betweenness since he is a social climber without a noble birth. The Franklin, a rich social climber of peasant origin, embraces the characteristics of both his previous and present social position and inhabits a medieval "third space." Not entirely belonging to the nobility or to the commoners, parvenu Franklin is in an identity crisis and belongs to the medieval "middle grouping" of social climbers apart from the members of the traditional three estates: the clergy, the nobility and the commoners. Those people of "middle-grouping" develop their alternative identities on the borders of the acknowledged identities of the three medieval estates. Thereupon, the Franklin has to develop a hybrid identity by mimicking his social superiors, the members of the nobility, to be able to find a place for himself in society. Accordingly, this paper aims to discuss Chaucer's Franklin in *The Canterbury Tales* as a Bhabhanian hybrid and mimic who is caught in between the medieval acknowledged identities of the commoners and the nobility, and searches for a recognisable identity in dynamic medieval society.

Keywords: Chaucer's Franklin, hybridity, medieval estates, mimicry, third space.

ORTAÇAĞ'IN MELEZ VE TAKLİTÇİ KİMLİKLERİ: GEOFFREY CHAUCER'IN *CANTERBURY HİKAYELERİ*'NDEKİ FRANKLIN KARAKTERİ

Öz

Geoffrey Chaucer'ın *Canterbury Hikayeleri* farklı sınıfları resmeden eşsiz hicviyle Ortaçağ toplumunu her yönüyle ele alır. Hacılarını zamanın toplumsal, ekonomik ve siyasal değişimlerine uygun olarak gerçekçi bir biçimde tasvir eden Chaucer'ın *Canterbury Hikayeleri*'ndeki odak noktalarından biri de yaşlı bir toprak sahibi olan Franklin karakterini şekillendiren toplumsal hareketliliktir. Franklin'in portresi, toplumsal hareketlilikten dolayı asil kanı olmaksızın sosyal

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statüsünü yükselten tarihteki gerçek emsalleri gibi arada kalmışlıkla yoğrulmuştur. Asil kökenleri olmayan köylü sınıfına mensup, zenginliğiyle toplumda yükselen Franklin, hem önceki hem de şimdiki toplumsal statüsünün özelliklerini kendisinde barındırarak Ortaçağ "üçüncü alanı"nda yaşam sürer. Tam anlamıyla ne asiller ne de köylü sınıfına dâhil olan Franklin bir kimlik bunalımı içindedir ve geleneksel üç sınıfa (ruhban sınıfı, soylular ve köylü sınıfı) dâhil olmayan sonradan görmelerin oluşturduğu Ortaçağ "orta sınıf"ına mensuptur. Bu "orta sınıf"a dâhil olan Ortaçağ insanları, üç sınıfa dayanan kesin hatlarla çizilmiş Ortaçağ kimliklerinin kıyısında kendi alternatif kimliklerini geliştirirler. Franklin bu bağlamda kendisine toplumda bir yer edinebilmek için toplumsal statüleri kendisinden yüksek olan asilleri taklit ederek melez bir kimlik geliştirmek zorunda kalır. Bu çerçevede, bu makale Ortaçağ'ın kabul gören köylü ve soylu sınıflarının kimlikleri arasında kalan ve dinamik Ortaçağ toplumunda kabul görebilecek bir kimlik arayan Chaucer'ın _Canterbury Hikayeleri_'ndeki Franklin karakterini Bhabha'nın dile getirdiği anlamda melez ve taklitçi bir kimlik olarak ele alır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Chaucer'ın Franklin karakteri, melezleşme, Ortaçağ'ın üç sınıf kavramı, taklitçilik, üçüncü alan.

I. INTRODUCTION

The medieval society was a hierarchical society with its strict feudal structure and estate divisions: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners. Yet, in conjunction with a large-scale social mobility, the drastic economic, social and political developments of the fourteenth century- the Hundred Years War, the Black Death of 1348, and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381- imploded this severe hierarchical arrangement of the medieval society. Consequently, in late fourteenth-century England, there were people who did not belong to any of the traditional three estates owing to the upward social mobility generated by the weakening of feudalism and three estate structure. These medieval people created a kind of "middle-grouping"[1] which could not fit in the acknowledged borders of the three estates and grew into medieval hybrids and mimics since they lived in a Bhabhanian third space formed by their former social status as commoners or peasants and their present higher social status they claimed on the borders of the nobility and the clergy. This paper argues that Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* presents those people of middle–grouping who develop their liminal identities on the borders of the acknowledged identities of the three medieval estates. Within this context, this paper aims to read Geoffrey Chaucer's Franklin in *The Canterbury Tales* as a representative of medieval middle-grouping, thus of medieval hybridity and mimicry by drawing on Bhabha's postcolonial concepts of hybridity, in-betweenness, third space and mimicry.

In *The Location of Culture* (1994), Bhabha deals with the identities formed by the people who live on the borders of distinct communities and are caught in between those communities. Bhabha considers borders as significant thresholds encapsulating various conflicts and dilemmas as they are the merging points of separation and union (1). Hence, Bhabha defines a border as "an in-between site of transition: the beyond is neither a new horizon, nor a leaving behind of the past [. . .] [which] produce[s] complex figures of difference and identity, past and present, inside and outside, inclusion and exclusion" (1). Additionally, according to Bhabha, "[t]he in-between spaces provide the terrain for elaborating strategies of selfhood -singular or communal- that initiate new signs of identity" which defines "the idea of society itself" (1). Accordingly, Bhabba defines hybridity as a "difference 'within', a subject that inhabits the rim of an 'in-between' reality" (13) and he also describes the lives of the in-betweens as the "unhomely lives" and "unhomely presence" (13) since, with their double selves, they are waiting to be recognized to be able to join the society (9, 14, 16). Thereby, the hybrid in Bhabhanian terms is "neither the One nor the Other, but something else besides, which contests the terms and territories of both" (28). This territory brings about a third space. Bhabha also defines the in-between spaces where hybrids live as the "[. . .] interstitial passage[s] between fixed identifications [pen] up the possibility of a cultural hybridity that entertains difference without an assured or imposed hierarchy" (3). These interstices, for Bhabha, emerge from "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (2). Bhabha further states that the articulation of this difference "is a complex, on-going negotiation" and "[. . .] hybridities emerge in moments of historical transformation" (2) which highlights a *complete change* in people or in society as in the fourteenth century Middle Ages. Living on some kind of Bhabhanian thresholds of "the overlap and displacement of domains of difference" (2) of the three estates, the medieval hybrids of upward mobility challenged the ideals of the three estates of the time and occupied medieval borderlines. Those hybrids were also mimics as they were of peasant origin and aped their social superiors, the nobility and the clergy, which was overtly visible in their apparels, manners and customs and even in their discourse. Bhabha defines mimicry as "the desire

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[1] The medieval people who did not fit into any of the three estates are mostly described as the members of "the middle-grouping" "strata" or "class". For the use of the term, among several other critics, see Morris Bishop, *The Penguin Book of the Middle Ages* (1971: 308); Paul Strohm, *Social Chaucer* (1989: 4-5); and Marion Turner, "Politics and London Life." *A Concise Companion to Chaucer*. Ed. Corinne Saunders (2006: 29-30).

for a reformed, recognizable Other, as a subject of difference that is almost the same, but not quite" (86). Similarly, the upwardly mobile medieval hybrids tried to be recognised as respectable nobles to find a place for their liminal identity in medieval society, yet they only became *almost* noble since they still lacked gentle birth. That is to say, the situation of the medieval hybrids of the upwardly mobile can be explained in terms of Bhabha's theory of hybridity and mimicry.

Geoffrey Chaucer's *The Canterbury Tales* presents those medieval people moulded by social mobility and consequent identity crisis which render the traditional three estate model inadequate to define medieval identity. Accordingly, many of his upwardly mobile pilgrims are hybrids and mimics who experience a Bhabhanian state of in-betwenness as they occupy the spaces in between the accepted identities constructed by the three estates. Searching for a stable identity apart from those identities, these pilgrims live, in Bhabhanian terms, in the interstitial passages between the identifications of the commoners, the nobility and the clergy. Produced by the tensions and developments of the late fourteenth century, the most prominent of his upwardly mobile characters is his old landowner: the Franklin. Rising on the social scale through his considerable wealth, the Franklin, of peasant origin, pounds at the door of the nobility, claims gentility and asks for acceptance into their sphere. Yet, lacking noble origin, he is not accepted into the nobility. Not entirely belonging to the commoners any more, the Franklin is not acknowledged by the commoners either. Thus, the Franklin lives in a Bhabhanian third space formed by the territories of the nobility and the commoners and develops a hybrid identity in between these two estates. The Franklin is also a mimic since he imitates the nobility in all respects including their apparel and lifestyle as reflected in his portrait in *The General Prologue*.

II. MEDIEVAL SOCIETY: FEUDALISM AND THE THREE ESTATES

Before examining Chaucer's Franklin as a medieval hybrid and mimic, the social context enabling his upward mobility and consequent hybridity and mimicry must be covered. The medieval society was marked by the traditional three estates which divided the society into three groups: the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners.[2] According to Howard, estate divisions "became so traditional that most men thought it ordained by God; and most peasants, like most nobles, assumed that a man should patiently continue in the class which he had been born" (1997: 86). In this hierarchical system, as Huizinga suggests, "[e]very notion [. . .] is linked with ideas of a higher and more general order, on which it depends like a vassal on his lord" (2013: 216). In a similar vein, Keen defines the English society in the Middle Ages as a society of "deference" with different hierarchies "which regulated the respect and the kind of service which one man or woman may expect of another, or may expect to pay another" (2003:1). Unavoidably, this concept of deference to the superiors included widespread animosity to the individual social mobility and an emphasis on the acceptance of one's position on the social stratum (Rigby 2007: 27). In consequence, with their peasant origins, the franklins were of those commoners who were supposed to accept their positions and stay in their acknowledged territories. However, due to their increasing wealth and rising power, it was mainly the peasants of upward mobility, like franklins, who challenged the medieval social hierarchy and asked for their rights from their superiors.

Yet, this strict hierarchical structure of medieval society was turned upside down by social mobility which was at its zenith in Chaucer's time, when roughly half of the population of England died because of the Black Death in about 1348. As Knapp notes, the Black Death reduced the

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[2] Medieval people believed that society consisted of three sections or estates which were created by God. These three estates were those who fight, those who pray, and those who work. The aristocracy were those who fight and they defended those who pray and those who work. The clergy did the praying on behalf of those who fight and those who work. The commoners were those who worked to provide food for those who rule and pray (Mortimer 2009: 40). In fact, the idea of the three estates suggested that each estate should eagerly accept its duties as they were predestined by God (Bisson 1998: 143).

working population to a degree that, due to the labour shortage, the workers could bargain for increased wages. Therefore, the increasing cash economy required specialized careers which blurred the traditional distinctions between the clergy, the nobility, and the commoners (1990: 12). The great decline in the population of England meant that there were empty positions on the higher ranks of the society; and along with the renting of manorial demesnes out in the village community, land became accessible and was fairly inexpensive. The peasants insisted on higher prices and rejected traditional services which led to further vacant tenancies. Gradually, these vacant tenancies were populated by the rich peasants becoming a threat to the noble landowners (Keen 2003: 149). As a result, a rich member of the commoners belonging to the middle-grouping developed a better life style compared to a poor member of the nobility which pointed to the transformation of medieval peasantry.

As argued by Larson, it was mainly the personal ambition which enabled the transformation of medieval peasant community in the Middle Ages (2006: xix). Along with the Black Death and personal ambition, the Hundred Years War and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 were among the key factors in the transformation of the peasantry from commoners to significant wealthy members of medieval society. The Black Death and the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 turned the "social description and social practice [of the time] [. . .] from the static and the hierarchical to a more fluid and less hierarchical state" (Strohm 1986:15). To fund the Hundred Years War, even in its earlier stages, the income of the commoners was taxed; Edward III also put a tax on wool production and export for two years from 1340 onwards. In the late fourteenth century, on the eve of the Black Death, there were new taxes such as the parish tax in 1371 and the poll-taxes of the late 1370s and 1380s; the load of taxation weighed upon the peasantry (Schofield 2003: 172, 184; Blockmans and Hoppenbrouwers 2014: 333-34). These high taxes contributed much to the rising of 1381. Consequently, the medieval deference society based on stable rules and structures transformed into a society of change which favoured the commoners. John Symth, the historian of the Berkeley family, depicted the enormous transformation of the medieval society in the times of Lord Thomas IV, in the mid-1380s, and how the Lord had to change in line with the changing society:

> Then began the times to alter, and he with them [. . .] instead of manureing his demesnes in
> each manor with his own servants, oxen, kine, sheep [. . .] under the oversight of the reeves of
> the manor [. . .] this lord began to joyst and tack in other men's cattle into his pasture grounds
> by the week, month, and quarter: and to sell his meadow grounds by the acre. (qtd. in Keen
> 2003: 149)

Feudalism and the three estate structure did not correspond with the realities of the changing medieval society anymore which contributed to the dissolution of the traditional lord-vassal relationship. Gradually, serfdom died out and due to the increase in wages, in England the lords largely left their lands to the peasants (Larson 2006: 225; Abram 2013: 2-3; Bailey 2014: 5), a very significant indicator of the rising position of the peasants. Dyer states that:

> Serfs realized that they were better able to bargain with their lords for reduced rents and for the
> removal of servile duties. Serf and non-serf saw in the era release from poverty. Some wage
> earners were able to acquire land, and tenants generally found that they could expand the size
> of their holdings. Wages increased [. . .]. The upper classes felt threatened. Workers had become
> expensive and ill-disciplined, and tenants were restless for better conditions. (1997: 163)

Those restless tenants were essentially the rich peasants who became wealthier by making use of the conditions after the Black Death and Peasants' Revolt of 1381 in the best way. It was the more prosperous peasants who rented the land of the lords or old peasants' holdings whereas the poorer peasants could not race for larger and better lands. It was again the wealthier peasants who rose against the lords in the Peasants' Revolt of 1381 as they were aware of the possible opportunities for them to rise on the social ladder (Schofield 2003: 165). Indeed, as Postan aptly

states, the period from the late fourteenth to the early sixteenth century was "the golden age of the English peasantry" (1972: 142). The peasants who took the best advantages of this "golden age" were franklins. The franklins were at the top rank of the village community. They had a luxurious life style with their numerous servants. Some franklins, as though they were lords, could rent, court and farm the whole manor of a lord which was quite common after the Black Death. These franklins running an entire manor also blurred the line between the gentry and peasantry by wedding the daughters of esquires. However, such a peasant- appointing his own bailiff, keeping servants, and having cousins who were the members of the gentry and of the nobility-did not conform to the usual image of a peasant (Forgeng 2009: 19; Mortimer 2009: 50). As noted by Saul, the people at the high ranks, particularly the nobility, were irritated by this new world in which everything turned upside down, and they insisted on the traditional three orders of the society (1997: 164).

III. MEDIEVAL HYBRIDITY AND MIMICRY: FRANKLINS

The medieval mind could not easily welcome this thorough transformation of the society from the supremacy of the nobility to the golden age of peasantry. As Huizinga observed, the decline of feudalism and the consequent loss of status of the nobility was not easily accepted even in the fifteenth century. The medieval people persisted in the authority of the nobility, overestimated its significance and underestimated the social power of the rising commoners (2013: 46-47). Within this immense transformation, the people of the middle-grouping of social climbers were rejected by the highest and the lowest orders of the society and inhabited a medieval third space. Thus, the members of the middle-grouping including franklins grew into hybrids as they belonged neither completely to the nobility nor to the commoners and possessed the qualities of both estates -wealth, land and lifestyle of the nobility along with a peasant origin lacking noble blood. Although they were not welcomed into the circle of the nobility, the medieval hybrids tried to survive on the threshold of the commoners and the nobility through mimicry. Similar to the colonised who imitated the coloniser to keep up with their standards, as highlighted by Kalpaklı (2011: 78), by means of mimicry, the medieval hybrids struggled to comply with the norms of the nobility, thus they tended to mimic the nobility in numerous ways. For example, a peasant- upon becoming a squire by buying lands and having his own tenants- would imitate the apparel and manners of the nobility by keeping war equipment and going hunting (Tuchman1978: 19). Hence, the hybrid members of the medieval middle-grouping of upward mobility were also mimics in the Bhabhanian sense as they imitated the attire and the lifestyle of the nobility: dressing, eating, behaving, and even talking like them. Yet, they failed to become actual nobles, or in Bhabha's words for the colonised, a "recognizable Other" (1994: 86). In fact, like in the case of the colonised mimics, to survive and to be accepted by the medieval society, the medieval hybrids tried to be like their social superiors. However, no matter whether they were in the country, or town, the nobility did not recognise the social climbers as their equals since-again as in the case of colonial mimicry as suggested by Ashcroft et al. (1998: 139)-mimicry became a threat to the superiority of the nobility over the commoners. Similar to Bhabha's mimicry in the colonial context, medieval mimicry might be also associated with the Other and the rebellious voice of the "inappropriate" which is against the superiority of the nobility in the medieval context. Furthermore, like their colonial counterparts, for the medieval mimics, mimicry was both a menace to their social superiors and a dilemma increasing their identity crisis and ambiguous status since they were "almost the same, but not quite", as defective copies of their superiors, of the nobility.

As suggested so far, due to their high position in the village community, franklins were the best examples of medieval hybridity and mimicry. The franklins were trying to be accepted into the nobility long before the late fourteenth century. Yet, after the Black Death, there were more

possibilities for them to be accepted into the higher ranks of the society. Hence, a franklin living in the late fourteenth-century England was a contradictory character (Coss 2006: 64-65). As Homans notes, "there is good evidence that in rural England [. . .] a small class of freeholders existed, less wealthy than the gentry, more wealthy than the husbonds and cotters, and that these men were called franklins" (1975: 250). A fourteenth-century franklin was a peasant who kept a wider area of land, possibly 30 to 60 acres, compared to other peasants of the village. He also kept free tenure and socage for life which meant that he, unlike a villein, was not subjected to his lord's direct will in terms of labour or rent. As a freedman, a franklin had position before the king's courts, and the Justices of the Peace where he might also attend as Justice. He might speak for the interest of the manor at different juridical meetings. Thus, franklins were the political and social leaders of village society (Olson 1986: 264-65).

Although the franklins were free from the obligations of villeins and probably "self-defined as gentle", the status of a squire or belted knight was higher than that of a franklin since they kept more land, owed both fealty and homage along with military services. A typical franklin was just half-free, neither a villein nor a complete gentle, which pointed to his in-between position. That is to say, the social status of the franklins was not clearly defined as to whether they were *noveau riche* landowners or country squires. The ambiguous position of the franklins arose from the fact that it was not certain whether they were the members of the landed gentry, or they were ranked under the landed gentry, thus not counted as gentils (Olson 1986: 266; Sembler 1996: 135; Phillips 2000: 136). The poll tax of 1379 indicated that a franklin should be evaluated at 6s 8d or 3s 4d, in line with his estate which suggested that the franklins roughly possessed the same status that of the resident knights and esquires. Therefore, being very important figures in their villages, particularly if there was no inhabitant member of the gentry, the franklins might be aspiring and pompous. Although there is not certain proof; a franklin is believed to be a member of the bourgeois parvenus who refers to a person suddenly rising from a low social class or economic position to one of wealth or power (Pearsall 1985: 149; Coss 2006: 63-64). On the contrary, for Cooper, franklins belonged to the landed members of the minor gentry (1996: 45). For Gerould, the franklins were the members of nobility (1926: 262). Touching upon Chaucer's Franklin, Denholm-Young suggests that franklins were ranked below the gentry; yet, Chaucer's Franklin seems to have a higher position with his significant occupations (1969: 24). Thereby, there is no consensus among the critics about franklins' social status as it is not certain whether they were gentlemen of noble blood belonging to the gentry or social climbers who once belonged to the commoners. What is clear is that possessing considerable size of land, franklins were men of status; yet, it was not enough to be regarded as a member of the nobility in the medieval mind. The 1379 poll tax also shows that, whatever the position of the franklins were, they had not yet gained gentility when *The Canterbury Tales* was composed (Strohm 1989: 107). That is to say, the social position of the franklins- whether they were gentle or not- is not clear-cut which put them in between the nobility and the commoners designating their hybrid existence.

IV. A MEDIEVAL HYBRID AND MIMIC: CHAUCER'S FRANKLIN

The hybridity of franklins and their struggle to change the medieval mind to gain a gentle status are exposed in Chaucer's Franklin in *The Canterbury Tales*. Chaucer's Franklin is a figure of in-betweenness. He is a social climber without a noble birth. He imitates the apparel, manners and customs of the nobility which is observed in his portrait in *The General Prologue*. Unable to find a stable place for himself in medieval society, newly rich Franklin is in a dilemma about his social position which turns him into a hybrid and mimic. Not entirely belonging to the nobility or to the commoners, and dreaming of becoming a noble, the Franklin inhabits a space neither of his

previous estate nor his aspired social position. Indeed, Chaucer's Franklin precisely reflects the social conflict and turmoil of the status of the franklins in late-fourteenth century England.

Similar to his historical counterparts, Chaucer's Franklin is one the pilgrims in *The Canterbury Tales* whose "position in the pecking order is open to question" (Saul 1992: 46). With his ambiguous social position, the Franklin's status perfectly fits in the concept of hybridity defined by Bhabha as he lives in the interstitial passage formed by the different domains of the nobility and the commoners. The overlapping domains of difference of the Franklin grow out of the different characteristics of his previous and present social status, as a commoner and a social climber. One of the main indicators of the hybridity of real franklins in the fourteenth century was their ambiguous social status and their keeping the position of knights and squires. As the Black Death shifted financial circumstances in favour of the smaller landowners; the ranks below the knights on the social order were filled not only by 'esquires' but by 'franklins' as well. Franklins were free, yet they were not gentil; thus, in spite of their keeping the positions of knights and squires, they were still the social inferiors of knights and esquires having noble blood (Coleman 1981: 58-9; Brown and Butcher 1991: 62-63). Consequently, franklins came out as new men "with an interest in levelling up and blurring traditional hierarchy [. . .] [as reflected in the Franklin's] tale end[ing] with an implication that "gentillesse" is innate and can be found in any class" (Senapati 2002: 66-67). As in the case of his equals in history, in spite of his inferior social position, Chaucer's Franklin- a new man blurring the estate boundaries- keeps the position of knights. The Franklin, unlike the Squire or the Knight, does not possess any chivalric aspect or a hereditary position; however, he undertakes several managerial duties which were once merely identified with squires and knights (Robertson 1980: 277; Brown and Butcher 1991: 60). Thus, Chaucer's Franklin in *The General Prologue* is a man of status:

> At sessiouns ther was he lord and sire;
> Ful ofte tyme he was knyght of the shire.
> . . . .
> . . . .
> A shirreve hadde he been, and a contour.
> Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour.[3]   (*CT*, I, 355-56; 359-60)

Chaucer's Franklin is a distinguished member of medieval society: a justice of the peace ("lord and sire"), knight of the shire, sheriff, cantour and a vavasour. He reflects the powerful, yet hybrid franklins of the late fourteenth century by keeping mostly the positions of those of the nobility without having a noble lineage himself. In 1368, the social status of the Justices of the Peace ("lord and shire") was protected by statute. By the late fourteenth century, each county possessed eight justices, and they were the inevitable members of the justice in England. Unlike the Justices of the Peace, the knights of the shire were selected from the commoners. Sheriffs of all counties were asked to arrange the selection of two knights from every shire, two citizens from every city, and two burgesses from every borough, from amongst the most capable, for Parliament (McKisack 1959: 137, 202, 187).

Franklins were also holding the office of sheriff in medieval society. It was the position which brought the people of the commoners and the nobility together. Being a sheriff was a great honour in medieval England. Contrary to the House of Lords, the House of Commons included a combination of gentry: knights and other rich freemen from the shires (sheriffs) and merchants from the town (McDowall 1989: 23, 30) similar to Chaucer's Franklin. Hence, sheriff, like the Justice of the Peace, is an occupation which demonstrates the significant social status of Chaucer's

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[3] All Chaucer quotations are taken from *The Riverside Chaucer* (2008). Ed. Larry Dean Benson. Oxford: Oxford University Press.

Franklin and his closeness to the nobility. It is this closeness which paves way to his ambiguous status along with his hybrid and mimic existence.

Another office of Chaucer's Franklin is cantour. There is not agreement among the scholars in relation to the meaning of cantour. According to Robertson, cantour means accountant or auditor (1980: 275); on the other hand, for Saul it is an advocate in court, or lawyer (1983: 19). In fact, among the offices of Chaucer's Franklin, vavasour is the most problematic one. The word vavasour evolved from a French literary tradition where the vavasour had an unclear status on the borders of aristocracy (Carruthers 1981: 283-84). For Robertson, the word vavasour does not include any legal office and shows that the Franklin is a landowner (1980: 277). To Frankis, the word vavasour was not commonly used in England and it meant a vassal of vassals (1990: 46). In Latin, vassal refers to a young man, and when it is used at the beginning of another Latin word *puer* having the same meaning; it means home slave [my translation] (Bloch 2007: 274). About the ambiguity of the word vavasour, Stenton points out:

> The origin of the word is obscure, but in the eleventh century it was current in every part of Feudal Europe in the general sense of vassal. In the greater part of France the word seems to have carried a certain sense of distraction. The vavassor of early feudal documents is inferior to the baron, but normally he is a knight, and he is raised above the landless men of the military class by possession of a fief which may well be of considerable extent. (1961: 17)

Thus, vavasour is another ambiguous occupation of the Franklin pointing to his vague social position. Rendering his social position more unclear, in the fourteenth century there were no vavasours who occupied all of the offices of Chaucer's Franklin. For instance, there was no vavasour who was a sheriff- which was a higher position- at the same time. Chaucer seems to create a mixture of several professions in his portrayal of the Franklin. That is, in the portrait of the Franklin, Chaucer brings different offices together which did not really exist in the fourteenth century (Mann 1973: 152; Eckhardt 1990: 244; Coss 2006: 64). According to Saul, giving occupations to his Franklin more significant than the real franklins of his time, Chaucer might be satirising the aspirations of the franklins rather than their actual positions (1983: 23). Unlike Saul, Coss affirms that rather than satirising the social pretensions of franklins, bringing different professions together in his Franklin, Chaucer criticises the arrogance and extreme concern of those keeping higher ranks of the medieval society, who felt uneasy about the burel (unlearned) and wealthy men of the time such as franklins (2006: 64). Hence, the offices of Chaucer's Franklin, rather than their real attainments, reflect the aspirations of the franklins of the time. Yet, after one or two generations, following the Black Death, the situation would change since franklins could enlarge their holdings and increase their influence on the local peasantry; thereby, they were appointed to these occupations and entered into the gentle society (Saul 1992: 52). In sum, it is important to note that Chaucer's Franklin in *The General Prologue* seems to have positions occupied mostly by knights in the late fourteenth century which contributed much to his hybrid position. Therefore, in accordance with his counterparts in history, in spite of lacking noble blood, or gentility, Chaucer's Franklin is introduced as a man of status who occupies the positions of knights and squires, and spends time with the members of the nobility.

What is more, Chaucer's Franklin dresses and behaves like the nobility which was not acceptable in the medieval society where even what to wear and eat for each estate were fixed by law. In this respect, besides a hybrid, the Franklin grows into a mimic. The first noticeable indicator of his mimicry in *The General Prologue* is his attire. The attire of the Franklin is described in only two lines; Chaucer does not describe his clothes in detail, but his accessories are enough to display his aspirations to become like a noble: "An anlaas and a gipser al of silk/ Heeng at his girdel, whit as morne milk." (*CT*, I, 357-358). Erol states that the attire of the Franklin reflects his social status as a wealthy and respectable landowner (1981: 103). Erol further remarks that

the 'anlaas' was a broad, two sided dagger used for hunting and the 'gipser' was a pouch worn attached to the girdle. [. . .]The dagger is a specific one used for hunting, as the Franklin is a land owner of great standing he has the privilege of hunting, since, only the nobility and the gentry of certain wealth and income could hunt. As for the 'gipser', it is of supreme quality, made of silk, the most valued material of the Middle Ages. (1981: 104)

As discussed so far, the status of the franklins was ambiguous; it is certain that he is a social climber; however, it is not certain whether they are accepted into the nobility or not. Hence, his going hunting, an activity suitable for the nobility, and wearing silk, a sign of nobility, (Given-Wilson 1996: 3; Saul 2011: 52-54) become questionable. In addition to hunting and dressing like a noble, Chaucer's Franklin behaves like a noble which signifies his hybridity and mimicry again. In *The General Prologue*, the Franklin's imitation of the noble way of life is indicated in his lavish lifestyle, generosity, and hospitality, which were the indispensable characteristics of the aristocratic self-display. First of all, Franklin's rich table which he keeps ready all day shows his aspirations to the nobility besides his economic power and social status. As Hussey argues, "the Knight [is] his social superior," and "[t]hough his social position is less significant we sense that he knows how to live like a lord" (1967: 90). The Franklin's lordly lifestyle is depicted in *The General Prologue* as follows:

> An housholdere, and that a greet was he;
> Seint Julian was he in his contree.
> His breed, his ale, was alweys after oon,
> A bettre envyned man was nowher noon.
> With-oute bake mete was never his hous,
> Of fish and flesh, and that so plentevous,
> It snewed in his hous of mete and drinke,
> Of alle deyntees that men coude thinke.
>
> . . . .
> His table dormant in his halle always
> Stood redy covered al the longe day.　　　(*CT*, I, 339-46; 353-54)

Hence, the Franklin has a good lifestyle and extravagant hospitality. Robertson describes the Franklin as "a pleasure-loving, self-seeking upstart" (1963: 470). Living for the enjoyments of life, the Franklin is described as the son of Epicurus:

> Wel loved he by the morwe a sop in wyn;
> To lyven in delit was evere his wone,
> For he was epicurus owene sone,
> That heeld opnioun that pleyn delit
> Was verray felicitee parfit.　　　(*CT*, I, 334-38)

Indeed, due to the growth of trade in the fourteenth century, there was a great rise in the standards of living in the noble households which increased the social emulation showing itself through splendid hospitality, expensive buildings and clothes (Myers 1978: 59). Likewise, as Keen points out "[h]ospitality was something expected of every aristocrat, from gentleman to earl or duke [. . .] [Furthermore] [. . .] just as the patience was a required characteristic of the poor, spending was taken as a social obligation for the medieval nobles and gentlemen" (1990:169-170). The hospitality, generosity and high living standards of the medieval aristocracy were sometimes associated with their greed, selfishness, and gluttony; yet, this display was very significant for keeping their social distinction. This self-display was a kind of competition among the members of the high ranks (Dyer 1989: 89). It seems that Chaucer's Franklin is practising hospitality of the

nobility; in other words, he imitates the noble way of life pointing to his mimicry. Speecht points out that:

> [. . .] fairly lavish standard of living generally attributed to a franklin's wealth and taste for good living had by the mid-fifteenth century become almost a commonplace. [. . .] the franklins contemporary with Chaucer were materially on an equal footing certainly with the vast majority of esquires, and probably with many knights of the medieval countryside. (1981: 76)

However, the Franklin seems to be overdoing this traditional hospitality of the nobility which Olson associates with his aspirations for knighthood as he spreads a lavish table, and grinds his sauce rather than his spear (1986: 267). Thus, Franklin's aristocratic display presents a hybrid and a mimic character. Just like a noble who lives in line with the "culture of display" of aristocratic life (Saul 2011: 52), Franklin- lacking noble lineage, yet, possessing a considerable wealth- lives in accordance with the rules of self-display to prove his status and claim gentility. As suggested by Bryant, the Franklin wants to demonstrate his richness before less prosperous neighbours since his standard of life is undoubtedly much better than that of the other villagers in his county (1948: 319), which was an accepted behaviour if you were a noble. In this sense, it can be suggested that Chaucer's hybrid Franklin, like his colonial counterparts, tries to gain a place for himself in the medieval noble society through mimicry. However, as Eckhardt argues, the Franklin "belongs to many worlds. He is linked to the image of the daisy, to both Christ and Epicurus, to the saint of hospitality, to food and generosity, to English rural government, and (somehow) to the family of Vavasour" (1990: 248). Belonging to many worlds, or estates, thus not entirely belonging to a certain estate, the Franklin becomes a medieval hybrid and mimic. Similar to Boehmer's statement for the colonised in relation to their imitation of the coloniser, the Franklin- imitating their clothes, manners and values- becomes an "imperfect copy" (1995: 69) of the nobility. Additionally, similar to the colonial situation, mimicry for the Franklin is a means of resisting the superiority of the nobility along with a way to be accepted into their sphere. Yet, mimicry also increases his dilemma since mimicking his superiors, the Franklin is welcomed neither by the nobility nor by the commoners

V. CONCLUSION

It might be argued that besides the well-accepted three estates, the fourteenth- century medieval society included the middle-grouping of the social climbers, who belonged to none of the traditional three estates which gave birth to identity crisis and consequent hybrid identity construction. It is clear that those medieval hybrid identities were the products of the clash between the strict estate divisions and great social mobility of the medieval society. Chaucer's Franklin is the quintessence of the medieval hybrid identities constructed as a result of upward social mobility. The Franklin becomes a hybrid since he occupies a Bhabhanian third space in between the fixed identifications of the commoners and the nobility as a commoner with aspirations to the nobility. Apart from his hybridity, the Franklin is also a medieval mimic who imitates the nobility in terms of their apparel, manners and customs to claim a space among them. Indeed, the Franklin is a character who employs mimicry to be exactly the same as the nobility through his aristocratic self-display: his attire, land, wealth, hospitality and generosity. Through mimicry, similar to his colonial counterparts, the Franklin also opposes the superiority of the nobility in the changing social circumstances of the fourteenth century which favours the social climbers. That is to argue, as Bhabhanian hybridity suggests, the Franklin develops a new identity which is constructed through the mixture of the characteristics of the commoners and the nobility. Occupying a medieval third space in between the territories of those estates, the Franklin asks for a reformed and recognizable identity. Yet, he becomes almost the same but not quite noble as a result of his peasant origin and lacking noble blood which render him a medieval hybrid and mimic.

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