

MARCHETTE CHUTE'S BIOGRAPHIES: A CRITICAL ANALYSIS  
AND DEFINITION OF HER LIFE-WRITING STYLE

THESIS

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## C H A P T E R     I

### INTRODUCTION

The present life of man, O king, seems to me, in comparison of that time which is unknown to us, like to the swift flight of a sparrow through the room wherein you sit at supper in winter, with your commanders and ministers, and a good fire in the midst, whilst the storms of rain and snow prevail abroad; the sparrow, I say, flying in at one door, and immediately out at another, whilst he is within, is safe from the wintry storm; but after a short space of fair weather, he immediately vanishes out of your sight, into the dark winter from which he had emerged. So this life of man appears for a short space, but of what went before, or what is to follow, we are utterly ignorant.<sup>1</sup>

Likening the life span of a man to a short unheralded flight by a frightened sparrow caught in a storm, Bede's account indicates that whatever time man has to live on this earth is but a moment when compared with the unknown past and the unforeseeable future. Nevertheless, within this short space that each man calls his life are the events, the dreams, the hopes, and the heartaches that make him unique. Samuel Johnson in The Rambler No. 60 wrote that "there has rarely passed a life of which a

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<sup>1</sup>J. A. Giles, ed., The Venerable Bede's Ecclesiastical History of England (London: George Bell & Sons, 1894), p. 95. Bede is quoting one of the King's chief men.

judicious and faithful narrative would not be useful."<sup>2</sup>

Additionally, he went on to state:

No species of writing seems more worthy of cultivation than biography, since none can be more delightful or more useful, none can more certainly enchain the heart by irresistible interest, or more widely diffuse instruction to every diversity of condition.<sup>3</sup>

Marchette Chute, author of six biographies--  
Geoffrey Chaucer of England (1946), Shakespeare of London  
(1949), Ben Jonson of Westminster (1953), Two Gentle Men:  
The Lives of George Herbert and Robert Herrick (1959), and  
Jesus of Israel (1961)--accepted Johnson's challenge in the  
twentieth century. Miss Chute felt that biography is a  
useful and delightful way to introduce the reading public  
to such men as Geoffrey Chaucer, for example, "the most  
readable of men,"<sup>4</sup> as she knew him, observing that "it is  
unfortunate that the shifting of the English language has  
made him a stranger to many people who would normally be

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<sup>2</sup>Samuel Johnson, The Rambler, reprinted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, ed. by James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 41.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., pp. 40-41.

<sup>4</sup>Marchette Chute, Geoffrey Chaucer of England (New York: E. P. Dutton and Co., Inc., 1946), p. 7.

his close friends."<sup>5</sup> She believed that the reading public could become more intimately "enchained" with Chaucer and find him instructive, for she stated, "I am hoping that any reader who enjoys meeting Chaucer in this book will go on and extend the acquaintance. There are few writers who are so well worth knowing."<sup>6</sup> She believed further that the fourteenth century poet's "relevance" could be translated to the twentieth century:

A really good writer is always a modern writer, whatever his century. That is to say, he is able to establish himself promptly and intimately in the minds of his readers and behave there as though he were a contemporary.<sup>7</sup>

Choosing to recreate the life of a great writer, the biographer must work to establish his subject promptly and intimately in the minds of his readers; however, bringing the subject to life without violating the basic requirements of truth is a subtle and complex art. It would seem that a biographer could choose his subject and then construct his life from such evidence as "parish

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

records, legal documents, bills, accounts, court records"<sup>8</sup> and that from these "solid grey blocks of impersonal evidence it should surely be possible to construct a road that will lead straight to the truth."<sup>9</sup> But unfortunately, the biographer's task is not that simple, for, as Miss Chute recognizes:

A biographer is not a court record or a legal document. He is a human being, writing about another human being, and his own temperament, his own point of view, and his own frame of reference are unconsciously imposed upon the man he is writing about.<sup>10</sup>

In her own biographies, choosing primarily to bring to life men of letters from an age that was not conscientiously looking at itself introspectively, Marchette Chute faced three critical problems: assembling the extant documents on her subjects; from her solid but scanty facts interpreting her subject; then constructing artistically and truthfully her life stories. A good biographer, then, establishes himself not on the basis of truthful facts

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<sup>8</sup>Marchette Chute, "Getting at the Truth," reprinted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, ed. by James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 192.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 193.

alone, but on truthful interpretation and interesting and artistic arrangement of the facts as he sees them without compromising the essence of his subject or his subject's place in time.

In this thesis I propose to examine Marchette Chute's works in light of this view of the biographical art. In my examination I will undertake a critical analysis of each of the six biographies. I will concentrate on a critical description of the artistic techniques and rhetorical licenses Miss Chute displays; thus, the substance of each of her books (content) will be examined in connection with her methodology.<sup>11</sup> I will show that Marchette Chute has achieved a remarkable measure of success as a biographer by concentration and development of a dramatic and lucid history of the "times" behind each subject, and by an imaginative creation of life-sized portraits of each subject which the general reader will find interesting and enjoyable. In order to facilitate the examination and comprehension of which of the biographical styles and techniques used by Miss Chute support a traditional manner,

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<sup>11</sup>This work is not intended to be, except incidentally, a critique on Chute's research competency; it aims primarily to be an analysis of her biographical art (interpretation and arrangement of facts).



it will be necessary to designate certain techniques which were used in early forms of life-writing, for many of these techniques and forms survive today in what most critics call the "new" or modern biography--that is, the biography of the twentieth century. It will be necessary, at the same time, to differentiate somewhat between the old forms and methods of biography and the new ones and to briefly identify their purposes, for while Miss Chute has written her biographies in the twentieth century when new methods for study of individuals are available and a potential mass readership may be aimed at, she has selected subjects from past centuries and employed some techniques of the traditional biographer.

Since there are no concrete structures which delineate the boundaries of the precise literary shape and form a biography must take, biographers past and present have drawn on each other's ideas of what a biography should be, while at the same time they have made an effort to determine what a biography should not be. An early Babylonian biographical account of men's lives, for example, was a fragmentary, commemorative narrative or chronicle which sought to preserve the reputations of great kings or leaders. The Greeks, on the other hand, preferred an orderly,

stylized essay presenting an idealized subject at the expense of a truthful portrait.<sup>12</sup> By the eighteenth century, biographers were writing in the form of dialogue, verse, or even letters.<sup>13</sup> It was not until modern times that biographers described systematically their methods of writing and the manner in which they conducted research.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, while there are no set rules on what a biography must include or on how to write a biography, observation of the practices of others and a preliminary study of what modern critics have written concerning the technical problems encountered<sup>15</sup> can provide a general guide in the subsequent description and examination of Marchette Chute's biographical methods.

Critics, however, do not always agree. For example, one critic makes this observation about a biography: It should be planned with careful research of the subject's background, his environment, and what he said and did, in order to successfully and truthfully develop

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<sup>12</sup>John A. Garraty, The Nature of Biography (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1957), pp. 32-36.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 79.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 241.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 153.

his character; also, it must aim at a faithful picture of the subject's personality and provide pleasure for the reader in an imaginative recreation in artistic form.<sup>16</sup> Another critic suggests that biography should be educational for its readers, especially youth, and that the process of writing about a character should aim at providing an example or perhaps act as a warning to the reader. It should aim at humanizing the subject and showing that "great men are not gods."<sup>17</sup> Even Samuel Johnson, in The Rambler No. 60, wrote of the necessity of showing that the hero is still a man:

The business of the biographer is often to pass slightly over those performances and incidents, which produce vulgar greatness, to lead the thoughts into domestic privacies, and display the minute details of daily life.<sup>18</sup>

However, yet another critic disagrees with the reasons for the writing of biography given above and suggests that a "pure biography" is written "with no purpose other than that of conveying to the reader an authentic portrait

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<sup>16</sup>Marston Balch, "Introduction," Modern Short Biographies, ed. by Marston Balch (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1936), p. 19.

<sup>17</sup>Emil Ludwig, Genius and Character (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1927), p. 8.

<sup>18</sup>Johnson, p. 42.

of the individual whose life is being narrated."<sup>19</sup> Any other reasons for writing biography would result in what he calls "impure" biography. Interest in the lives of others was given by still another critic who gave two basic reasons for a reader's interest in biography: "the desire to get out of ourselves, and the need of knowing others."<sup>20</sup> He suggested, also, that perhaps the more difficult it is to satisfy these desires the more eager we are to make the pursuit.<sup>21</sup>

Critics have also set down in writing their ideas on certain qualifications and talents that a good biographer should have. One critic has suggested that a biographer must be sensitive to other human beings; he must use tolerance and understanding to keep his personal bias and prejudice from distorting his subject; he must display great imaginative skill to revive paperwork into reality; he must exercise topmost skill in selection of

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<sup>19</sup>Harold Nicolson, "The Practice of Biography," reprinted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, ed. by James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 197.

<sup>20</sup>Gamaliel Bradford, Biography and the Human Heart (Boston: Houghton Mifflin Company, 1932), p. 5.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-5.

truths which will best convey the personality of his subject; he must use dramatic techniques to make the subject come alive in the minds of his readers; and he must possess the necessary literary skill to make it all work successfully.<sup>22</sup>

Critics have also written extensively on one of the major problems facing a modern would-be-biographer. This problem involves the choice of a subject. From a variety of motives claimed, some biographers have written about their friends or relatives, some have written about a specialist in a field of common interest, some have captured marketable personalities--to name a few.<sup>23</sup> For the most part, however, according to another critic, "our best biographies present men of high action or men of letters."<sup>24</sup> Furthermore, as another critic states, one class of people since Boswell's time has dominated the biographical stage, "the men and women who have created our literature."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>22</sup>Balch, "Introduction," pp. 19-21.

<sup>23</sup>Garraty, pp. 156-61.

<sup>24</sup>Paul Murray Kendall, The Art of Biography (New York: W. W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1965), p. 6.

<sup>25</sup>Richard D. Altick, Lives and Letters: A History of Literary Biography in England and America (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1966), p. ix.

Thus, Miss Chute would seem to have pleased at least two critics in choosing as subjects Chaucer, Shakespeare, Jonson, and others.

Modern critics, then, do not always agree on definitions of biography, on the methods to be employed in researching and writing of biography, or on the reasons behind choosing biographic subjects, but they all might agree that "if the proper study of mankind is man, the appeal of biography is universal."<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>26</sup>Balch, "Introduction," p. 25.

## C H A P T E R    I I

### THE BIOGRAPHER'S VIEW

Biography according to the Oxford English Dictionary is "the history of the lives of individual men as a branch of literature."<sup>1</sup> It was not until halfway in the seventeenth century that the word "biography" was applied to writings, for before the 1660's this word and its derivatives were not generally known.<sup>2</sup> Attempting to provide general commentaries on the state of biography and its methodology in the past as well as the present, modern critics recognize this large field of life-writing and its complexities as existing long before the technical name was applied.

Accepting the Oxford English Dictionary definition of biography, Sir Harold Nicolson, biographer and critic, stresses the importance of three words in the definition: history, individual, and literature. Strict interpretation of these words places biography within a limited framework.

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<sup>1</sup>Harold Nicolson, The Development of English Biography (London: Hogarth Press, 1968), p. 7.

<sup>2</sup>Balch, "Introduction," p. 6.

Further, he declares that certain elements make up "impure" and "pure" biography.<sup>3</sup>

Within the area Nicolson designates as "impure" is the desire to commemorate the dead as evidenced in early biographical offerings. Biographical techniques found in ancient Egyptian fragments (1580-1350 B.C.) show concern for recording of certain men's achievements, but little concern for the description of either career or character of the subject. Describing the heroic deeds of important leaders, Assyrian and Babylonian chronicles show a recognizable desire to preserve the memory of one's laudable achievements and final accomplishments, but most of these early records suggest a stylized "type" of man, rather than the individualized treatment of a single subject.<sup>4</sup> Also falling into the "impure" area are the Hellenic Greek patterns. With their love of the ideal as the subject of their art and their emphasis on complete and mature forms, the Greeks' biographic ventures became commemorations of the "ideal" man.<sup>5</sup> Again, biographers were seeking to make

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<sup>3</sup>Nicolson, The Development of English Biography, pp. 7-14.

<sup>4</sup>Garraty, pp. 31-33.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 34-36.



the man fit the form instead of freely describing the history of men's lives.

However, one ancient biographer, Plutarch, deserves special notice. With Plutarch, who blended Roman and Greek culture, biographical writings took on a new outlook, Garraty observes. Although Plutarch chose traditional heroes as subjects and used traditional methods of outlining ancestry, birth, youth, character, and career, he produced a new point of view, for he desired to understand his subject; this new attempt to understand demanded sympathy, rather than detachment, of its writer and insight into the feelings and mind of the subject (a modern concept) as well as concentrated effort.<sup>6</sup> It is Plutarch's great workmanship and art, particularly his effective use of anecdotes and dramatic ordering of action to show character interestingly, that cause critics to state that he is one of the world's greatest biographers.<sup>7</sup> Nevertheless, from Plutarch's time until well into the Middle Ages, most of the biographers capable of directing the aims of biography preserved a taste for the simple form of commemorative biography, as Nicolson indicates:

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 43-44.

<sup>7</sup>Wilbur Cross, "From Plutarch to Strachey," Yale Review, II (October, 1921), 141.

Biography was invented to satisfy the commemorative instinct: the family wished to commemorate the dead, and we had elegies, laments, and runic inscriptions; the tribe wished to commemorate its heroes, and we had saga and epic; the Church wished to commemorate its founders, and we had the early lives of the Saints. Biography, thereafter, fell into the hands of the ecclesiastics, who were the sole exponents of culture.<sup>8</sup>

Thus, the lives of the saints provide another element of "impure" biography, for they were written not only to commemorate, but also to show a moral or to prove a (Christian) theory. Finally, a third instance of "impure" biography occurs when the biographer becomes excessively subjective about his character.<sup>9</sup> By showing these "impure" elements, Nicolson specifies that biography becomes "impure" when "it is either untruthful or unintelligent, or concerned with considerations extraneous to its own purposes."<sup>10</sup> "Pure" biography, on the other hand, is the converse of "impure" biography in that it adheres to historical facts which should not only be documented (or at least documentable), but which should never be arranged in patterns that conceal or ignore truth for any reason. Additionally, "pure" biography must be well constructed; it should not only provide

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<sup>8</sup>Nicolson, The Development of English Biography, pp. 135-36.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 9-10.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

pleasure to the reader, but it should motivate him by providing an experience which alters his previous thinking.<sup>11</sup> Thereby for Nicolson, "pure" biography is "the truthful and deliberate record of an individual's life written as a work of intelligence."<sup>12</sup>

Addressing the matter of biographical "truth," Virginia Woolf, an English novelist, observes that truth for the biographer must depend on verifiable facts--facts verifiable not only by the biographer, but by others as well. Thus, facts impose certain conditions on the biographer: his job in the twentieth century is to get the facts and to select, arrange, and synthesize them into the recreation of a life in all its truth. Victorian biographers told the truth, but used only partially representative facts as they worked to preserve the good name of their subjects. In the twentieth century the relationship between subject and biographer has changed, for the biographer no longer fulfills the position of a "serious and sympathetic companion"<sup>13</sup> bound up in hero-worship of his

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 10-13.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>13</sup>Virginia Woolf, "The New Biography," reprinted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, ed. by James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), p. 127.

subject. Although the modern biographer gains new freedom, he faces the perennial limitation by the facts, for while the biographer attempts to achieve an artistic arrangement he must not be tempted to "invent" facts where none exist. Since much craftsmanship in arrangement of facts must be part of the biographer's venture, Virginia Woolf maintains that a good biographer does not function as a complete artist; nevertheless, his skill in reshaping the facts denotes much imaginative power. Thus, creative facts have their place in stimulation of the reader, helping biography remain a viable force.<sup>14</sup>

Lytton Strachey, the father of modern biography in the twentieth century, believed a different approach to Victorian biography was necessary. Quality of information rather than quantity should be the criteria for artistic biography, he asserts; it is not necessary to present all the available facts that have been unearthed by the biographer. Strachey called his own studies "haphazard visions"<sup>15</sup> produced from "certain fragments of the truth."<sup>16</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Virginia Woolf, "The Art of Biography," reprinted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, ed. by James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 128-34.

<sup>15</sup>Lytton Strachey, Eminent Victorians (New York: Capricorn Books, 1963), p. vi.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

As he saw it, a biographer's duties are twofold: to remove material that is redundant or which does not bear directly on the subject and to decide freely how to best present his vision of the facts. Motivated by "convenience" and "art,"<sup>17</sup> the biographer should concentrate on certain techniques:

He will attack his subject in unexpected places; he will fall upon the flank, or the rear; he will shoot a sudden, revealing searchlight into obscure recesses, hitherto undivined.<sup>18</sup>

While Strachey's works well illustrate his theories on biography, the task of illustrating the methodology has been left to biographical critics. In general his biographies are shorter and more united in theme, show dramatic construction, and treat the subjects as ordinary people rather than heroes.<sup>19</sup>

Another critic and biographer, Gamaliel Bradford, also concentrated on biographical sketches rather than on the whole life approach so popular with the Victorians. Basing his beliefs about biography's popularity on human beings' desire to know other human beings, he cites common

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. v.

<sup>19</sup>Balch, "Introduction," p. 17.

elements which provide reality in the biographical picture. Some common elements, according to Bradford, are love, money, ambition, or even hate, all motivational factors which can provide intuitive insight into the makeup of the character's personality.<sup>20</sup> Wishing to present known facts in an identifiable manner, the biographer searches for a "key to character"<sup>21</sup> which will provide a motive for the behavioral pattern of the subject. Besides the value of biography in giving or being a source of pleasure or satisfaction, there is value in identifying with other persons. Through understanding of others, perhaps we can know ourselves better, Bradford believes, and therefore intuitive biography offers its readers this educational aid, for biography "is the record of life, and life is the one supreme thing that interests us all, because we all have to live it."<sup>22</sup>

A biographer should be familiar with many methods of treating his subject, whether the subject be treated in dramatic form, essay, detailed life chronicle, or by

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<sup>20</sup>Bradford, pp. 8-22.

<sup>21</sup>Garraty, p. 129.

<sup>22</sup>Bradford, p. 33.

whatever method, specifies Emil Ludwig, biographer and critic. Like Bradford, Ludwig believes in the educational value of biographies, for the biographer must learn to sense the logic of his own life before he can interpret the lives of others adequately. In his search the biographer must be aware of his subject's most trivial habits, have a thorough knowledge of the period in which his subject lives, understand the study of man, and be a psychologist as well as an analyst. Most difficult, however, a biographer must have the same creative gift as his subject to truly understand his genius.<sup>23</sup> One problem only, states Ludwig, remains constant for the biographer, "the discovery of a human soul."<sup>24</sup>

Searching for the human soul, old and new biographers differ in two areas according to Andre Maurois, twentieth century biographer and critic. The differences occur in both the motives and the methods used by the biographers. "Old" biographers generally reflect commemorative

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<sup>23</sup>Emil Ludwig, from "Introduction: On Historical Portraiture," Genius and Character as reprinted in Biography as an Art: Selected Criticism, 1560-1960, ed. by James L. Clifford (New York: Oxford University Press, 1962), pp. 135-37.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 136.

motives (illustrating the lives of eminent men); educational motives (teaching a lesson or illustrating high moral truths); or professional motives (completing a life history which has been requested by a publisher). Led primarily by men like Strachey, the new biographers prefer humanistic motives (removing the character from his pedestal and placing him in new perspective to get a closer look at the hidden self). In both motive and method, new biographers reflect a reaction to old ways and methods and may react too far, Maurois reflects, but for the most part the new biographer refuses to paint a mask which hides the real man; the new biographer has a genuine desire to respect truth.<sup>25</sup> The methods used by the new biographers differ greatly from the old, Maurois asserts. The primary desire of the new biographer is to "build a work of art."<sup>26</sup> Concentrating on the development of his subject, the biographer should not invent material, but he should choose from his data only that material which best conveys the overall impression. When there are periods in the life where little or no information exists, artistic unity can be achieved by

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<sup>25</sup>Andre Maurois, "The Modern Biographer," Yale Review, XVII (January, 1928), 228-40.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 240.



repetition of certain themes. Certain rules can also be helpful, Maurois indicates. A first rule should be the use of chronological order, for the major character evolves and his nature changes. A second rule is to avoid making a moral judgment; art builds a world where the characters reflect the decisions. A third rule is to seek out every detail and collect all testimony possible.<sup>27</sup> Finally, an excellent technical rule is to present the hero "through the eyes of friends and enemies who judge him differently."<sup>28</sup> Dealing with the selection of a biographical subject, Maurois gives this final advice: "a great life makes better food for a human soul,"<sup>29</sup> for "the man who leaves behind him an historical record is either the great man of thought or the great man of action."<sup>30</sup>

Agreeing with Maurois that biography is selective, Lewis Mumford, twentieth century writer and social critic, points out that there may be little relationship between the actual life the subject lived and the paper documents from which the biographer works. Since the subject leaves

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 240-45.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

only the scattered documentary material behind, the biographer must select those materials which best help him to rebuild his subject. To compose a significant life the biographer must be able to draw on a wealth of historical knowledge or at least acknowledge and identify which areas are missing. In addition to presenting this outer life for his subject, the modern biographer must be aware of the subject's inner life and attempt to reconstruct it. Even if he makes mistakes, his effort is important, for "it is better to make mistakes in interpreting the inner life than to make the infinitely greater mistake of ignoring its existence and its import."<sup>31</sup> Mumford also notes that in tearing away a subject's mask in the desire to reveal "all," as did many Strachey imitators, another valuable portion of the life is discarded, for the mask too is part of the total true biographical picture. The biographer's task, then, is "neither to praise nor to blame, neither to glorify nor to deflate,"<sup>32</sup> but to place carefully both the subject's inner and outer elements within a framework which still allows him to move freely within the society and landscape of his time.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>31</sup>Lewis Mumford, "The Task of Modern Biography," The English Journal, XXIII, No. 1 (1934), p. 5.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-9.

Not all biographers after Strachey were careful to follow biographical limitations, and some took many liberties, according to Claude Fuess. Adopting Strachey's methods, without possessing his skill, "debunking" biographers sought to destroy their subject's image by illustrating his flaws in character and proving that great men are as common as the commonest of men. While debunkers benefited biography by pointing out sham and pompousness in biography, they also ran the risk of debasing it, and, Fuess asserts, "a sincere biographer would rather see a debunker than be one."<sup>34</sup> Illustrating his theories about the makeup of biography, Fuess declares: first, stress should be placed on the development of the subject's personality; second, biography should be realistic; third, the biographer should arrange his material in correct proportion and should strive to make it vivid; fourth, the biographical field should not be limited to careers of great magnitude; and, fifth, the biographer must consult every possible area of information about his subject.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Claude M. Fuess, "Debunkery and Biography," The Atlantic Monthly, March, 1933, p. 352.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 347-56.

Further evidence of debasing liberties taken by some modern biographers is cited by Bernard DeVoto. Listing such faults as guessing instead of thoroughly researching, omitting of prejudicial evidence, distorting of evidence under a creative guise, and debunking, DeVoto deplores the biographical abuses that have become increasingly evident since Strachey. Claiming flatly that literary people should not write biographies, since they fail to advance biographical standards, DeVoto listed certain techniques which should guide the modern biographer: biographers should not omit or simplify; biographers should use skepticism about all facets of their work; biographers should present facts and reality; psychoanalysis should not be accepted as a valid approach to truth; biographers should verify all steps leading to final conclusions; biographers should be bound by documentary evidence; and, finally, biographers should arrange evidence without speculating on what might have been.<sup>36</sup> Although the final picture produced under these strictures may be faulty, DeVoto believes that "it is trustworthy" and that is is "an effort in the direction of truth."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>36</sup>Bernard DeVoto, "The Skeptical Biographer," Harper's Monthly Magazine, January, 1933, pp. 181-92.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

Stressing the need for some form of biographical standard, Catherine Drinker Bowen, a modern biographer and teacher, records her advice to biographers. Accenting the importance of research as half of the biographical process, Miss Bowen lists these areas of emphasis: research about things (dress); research about people (character, actions); and research about ideas and principles.<sup>38</sup> Bowen's advice on procedure is to "master your facts or your facts will master you."<sup>39</sup> Additionally, she maintains: the biographer must find a shape for his biography, he must "know" characters, he must construct a plot, and he must make the biography exciting.<sup>40</sup> After all, Miss Bowen concludes, "it is the business of a biographer to know his subject."<sup>41</sup>

Another critic and historian, John A. Garraty, researched biographical techniques and methodology from the earliest times and in doing so adds his personal observations. Indicating biographical tasks, Garraty observes that the biographer must deal not only with the career of

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<sup>38</sup>Catherine Drinker Bowen, The Writing of a Biography (Boston: Writer, Inc., 1951), pp. 9-10.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 12.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-29.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 31.

his subject, but also with the personality and character of the man himself. This portrayal of his subject as distinguished from the development of his personality must be handled with artistic finesse. Working possibly from "mountains of evidence," he must choose his facts carefully to interpret and reconstruct his sources.<sup>42</sup> Although the biographer can use his imagination, it must be "controlled,"<sup>43</sup> for "the basic restriction upon any biographer is that he must be trying to tell the truth."<sup>44</sup> In summation, Garraty concludes: biography reconstructs a human life; it illustrates the individual's career; it must make the facts live; it must be truthful and verifiable; and it must show imagination and artistry.<sup>45</sup> Thus, the modern biographer must take his responsibility seriously.

Stressing the need for imaginative skill in writing of biography, Leon Edel, literary biographer and critic, warns the biographer, however, not to "imagine the materials."<sup>46</sup> Areas which must be of concern to the

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<sup>42</sup>Garraty, pp. 10-11.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 28.

<sup>46</sup>Leon Edel, Literary Biography (Garden City, New York: Doubleday & Company, Inc., 1959), p. 1.

biographer are as follows: the biographer must be capable of treating the past, but he must anticipate the present; he must make a judgment about facts, but he must not "sit in judgment"; he must show reverence for the dead, but he must also "tell the truth."<sup>47</sup> Edel feels that biography should be "concerned with the truth of life and the truth of experience."<sup>48</sup> While the novelist is free to experiment, the biographer can only experiment with predetermined materials, but "the art lies in the telling."<sup>49</sup> Sorting through material of a literary subject, the biographer discovers patterns which repeat themselves, "for each writer has his own images . . . and his own chain of fantasy."<sup>50</sup> Therefore, in dealing with literary subject's material, the biographer may find that the emotion put into the work is still evident, and this emotion may be relevant to the telling of a life.<sup>51</sup> Edel also suggests three forms that may be used to write a biography: the chronicle which

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<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 5.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

allows the subject to be the speaker; the pictorial which shows a sketch of the subject within specified boundaries; and the narrative-pictorial or novelistic form in which the biographer defines his vision of the subject.<sup>52</sup> Use of the narrative form, initiated by Strachey, allows the biographer to digress from strict chronology and best allows him to distinguish character and analyze evidence as he attempts to illuminate his subject.<sup>53</sup>

According to Richard Altick, biographer and critic, whether the biographer functions as an artist or a craftsman, his task remains to present his view of a man's life through the arrangement and shaping of the material with which he works. One of the most difficult tasks for the biographer is to preserve the proportions of a life when uninteresting documents are available, yet other more interesting ones remain missing. It is also difficult to shape a life which seems--as many a life does--to present its own shape by the documentary data. The final decision must be made by the biographer. Some biographers, Altick states, work to develop the effect of a novel by using

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 125.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 133.



certain stylistic forms such as highlighting pivotal events or using thematic or rhythmic devices.<sup>54</sup> Modern biographers also recognize the need to present a "point of view."<sup>55</sup> In order to present "rounded" characters, many biographers use the testimony of those who have known the subject; but again the biographer must be the controlling influence to retain a "coherent version of the truth."<sup>56</sup> Yet another concern of modern biographers must be the integration of the life with the environment. The difficulty is to refrain from the old pattern of "life and times" volumes which pad the background and which do not add relevancy to the life being explored.<sup>57</sup> The modern biographer, then, with an artist's eye, must continually strive to complete the biographer's tasks.<sup>58</sup>

The artist's view in the twentieth century may not be entirely modern, however, asserts Paul Murray

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<sup>54</sup>Altick, pp. 369-70.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid., p. 374.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 377.

<sup>57</sup>Ibid., pp. 388-90.

<sup>58</sup>Altick's chapter, "The Artist," treats fully the matter of biographical tasks and uses of artistic technique in biography. See ibid., pp. 351-400.

Kendall. Motivations and occasions set some enduring patterns. Three modes of biography once used in the ancient world still exist today: first, the biography written due to a relationship established during the life of a subject and the writer (e.g., the Gospels); second, the biography written to satisfy a writer's inclination and talent (Plutarch's works); and, third, the biography written with the reading public of a particular era in mind (demand-biography).<sup>59</sup> Biographies today reflect the desire to preserve the memory of good friends, and thus the "pure" biographer is one who "regards the truth about a life as the only valid commemoration."<sup>60</sup> Although the biographer wishes to exhibit his skill in the style of a writer, he should indulge only imaginative skill which is limited by truth and which will best result in "the simulation, in words, of a man's life, from all that is known about that man."<sup>61</sup> The reading public also makes its demands upon the biographer, for most biographers look to the acceptance of their subject as indirect praise for their biographical ability to make the man "live." The biographer's job is to

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<sup>59</sup>Kendall, pp. 40-41.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

make judgments using imagination and insight to develop the truth about his subject, for even if the result is maimed truth, "maimed truth is better than, is a world removed from, outright invention."<sup>62</sup>

Twentieth century biographers face many of the very same problems biographers have struggled with in the past. They see their task as one of collecting, arranging, and constructing artistically their evidence in as truthful a picture of their chosen subject as humanly possible. But at the same time they are confronted and challenged by new tools to apply to the study of human personality which encompasses the totality of an individual's emotional and behavioral pattern. New forces in the twentieth century, the physical sciences, psychology, psychoanalysis, and literary forces, reach out pressuring the biographer to work in new directions. Encouraged by Lytton Strachey et al. to experiment with new licenses to project their interpretations of factual data (often with decided reactions from the community of biographers and other communities), many biographers have exercised new licenses to make best sellers. Some have explored ways of combining traditional and "new

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<sup>62</sup>Ibid., p. 130.

biography" methods to reach a mass reading market.

Marchette Chute chooses mainly to employ the traditional method of using the times to illuminate her subjects, since evidence about them is scarce, but she exercises many "new" methods to dramatize the life story and to convey her attitudes on how best to bring subjects alive in the twentieth century. Evidence of Miss Chute's attention to high standards of precise and thorough research abounds in her biographies (even in the absence of footnotes) and a rigorous regard for presenting a truthful illusion of her subject's life is evident as she seeks to integrate vividly the setting with the evidence of her subject's life and at the same time allow a lively personality to move about naturally in his times. Using a new perspective, that is, confining her evidence about her subjects to contemporary materials to give new direction to her novelistic innovations, dramatizing and enlivening her thematic theories, Miss Chute writes biographies which appeal to general readers who enthusiastically raised her biographic treatment of William Shakespeare to the best seller list in the twentieth century.

## C H A P T E R     I I I

### A READABLE MAN:    GEOFFREY CHAUCER

According to Catherine Drinker Bowen every biography is a "life and times."<sup>1</sup> If so, the biographical narrative form which carries the hero from birth to death can be successfully employed. This narrative form can be easily broken into three divisions: youth (family tree, education); career (path to success); and maturity and death.<sup>2</sup> Marchette Chute begins the first of her six biographies, Geoffrey Chaucer of England, bound by the historical facts available and using the narrative form. The form selected is a traditional one, and the title indicates not only that a well-known literary figure is the subject of the work, but also that the country in which the figure lived will reveal particular aspects of his life.

Since relatively little documentary evidence about Geoffrey Chaucer's background and personal life

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<sup>1</sup>Catherine Drinker Bowen, Biography: The Craft and the Calling (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1969), p. 10.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

remains today,<sup>3</sup> the major aims of investigation in the examination of this biography will be twofold: first, to identify and describe some of the techniques Miss Chute uses to fill in imaginatively those spaces of the life which have little or no documentary background, and secondly, to identify and describe Miss Chute's major artistic arrangements and the interpretations she makes of existing facts to build a truthful illusion of a man's life.

A brief look at the narrative divisions chosen by Miss Chute will not only reveal the immediate form and shape she has selected to bring Geoffrey Chaucer to life, but it will also serve to identify areas which provide evidence of the artistic techniques and licenses used by Miss Chute in creating the biographical picture. Placing Chaucer in his fourteenth century background, Miss Chute describes his youthful days, his early education, the numerous medieval courts in which he makes his livelihood as a civil servant, his pronounced interest in writing

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<sup>3</sup>Marchette Chute demonstrates her acquaintance with extant documents on Chaucer's life in this biography; this author has verified many documents used by Miss Chute in the Chaucer Life Records, ed. by Martin M. Crow and Clair C. Olson (London: Oxford at the Clarendon Press, 1966).

and poetry, and his major contributions in the writing field. While vividly illuminating the medieval backdrop, Miss Chute artistically injects the materials surrounding her subject's life and at the same time allows an illusion of the man, Geoffrey Chaucer, to emerge. Thus she reveals her aim of creating in this work a life-size image of her subject in the London and England he knew by describing the lively social and political history of the fourteenth century in which he lived. This artistic license is a clue to her art in this first work.

Why is a description of fourteenth century political and religious institutions useful in relation to Geoffrey Chaucer? Miss Chute uses the descriptions of medieval institutions to introduce her readers to a central animating theme: the reaction of Chaucer to the rigidity of such institutions as the guilds, the courts, and the Church, as later reflected in his writings. The medieval institutions as described by Miss Chute provide her readers with the information necessary to understand and appreciate the kind of life Geoffrey Chaucer probably lived, since, as she writes:

The Middle Ages operated according to a rigid pattern of order and control . . . . Medieval life

was like a great tree in which every man had his exact place in the branches, the serf obeying his lord, the apprentice his master and the Christian the Pope. The root of the tree was authority, whether political, economic or social.<sup>4</sup>

In view of the fact that information on Chaucer's early life is scarce, Miss Chute uses descriptive passages about the times, which she related to Chaucer by using them to provide a fourteenth century setting for her subject. This is Miss Chute's basic technique in this work. She begins the opening chapters by describing the city of London, as Geoffrey Chaucer might view it, by describing the business life of London as Chaucer's father would have known it, and, finally, by describing the Church as Chaucer himself would eventually find it. As viewed by Miss Chute, London in the fourteenth century was a thriving city to be proud of, for "its political prestige was enormous," "its ancestry was distinguished," and "its architecture was distinguished also."<sup>5</sup> A typical medieval business in this century, Chaucer would find, was rigidly fixed by custom and rules:

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<sup>4</sup>Chute, Geoffrey Chaucer of England, pp. 203-04.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 19.



Fortunately the medieval man was accustomed to rules. They were with him from the moment of his birth and it seemed natural to him to operate as a member of a group instead of as an individual. He was by instinct a joiner. He did not wish to be alone. He wished to be an obedient part of a corporate whole, and individualism was as alien to the medieval business world as it was to the Church.<sup>6</sup>

The Church, indeed, provides Marchette Chute an opportunity to establish another respectable medieval institution which, in the fourteenth century, would manifest its power on Chaucer, inasmuch as his entire life had been "controlled, as was that of any man in the Middle Ages, by the Holy Catholic Church. From the day of his baptism to the administration of the final rites he was in the hands of the Church."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the fourteenth century in which Chaucer lived can be seen as "a cheerful, civilized, tough-minded century,"<sup>8</sup> but it also was soon "racked by wars and labor disputes . . . high taxes and dangerous new ideas."<sup>9</sup> In fact, Miss Chute points out, Chaucer would understand why the chroniclers wrote of constant

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<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 18.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 87.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 7.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

war with France making higher taxes inevitable, of unsatisfactory labor legislation, and of ideas on the equality of man as desirable to many; for England was to experience a major internal disorder, the Peasants' Revolt, in 1381;<sup>10</sup> the old medieval pattern of rules and regulations was beginning to crumble, and Geoffrey Chaucer would be "one of those who helped it to end."<sup>11</sup> Thus Miss Chute builds a picture of Chaucer as he "must have been" and as she will use his works to show he was in major sections of the biography dealing with his literary works.

Who was this man, Geoffrey Chaucer? Miss Chute begins the task of reconstructing his life by using a number of novelistic techniques to establish his family background from the few documentable facts available. The first technique is to highlight an unusual event--a kidnapping--to dramatize the opening chapter of this biography and to gain the immediate attention of her readers. The kidnapping refers directly to Chaucer's father and allows Miss Chute to place the focus on Chaucer's genealogical background. Although most modern

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 196.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 205.

biographies which begin with the subject's birth dispense with long pedigrees and family connections unless they contribute substantially to the human drama,<sup>12</sup> Miss Chute's choice relates directly to her major consideration, to establish some sort of medieval family background for Geoffrey. Presenting John Chaucer, Chaucer's father, as the typical medieval man allows Miss Chute to establish medieval man's place in society and show the importance of family relationships:

John Chaucer entered the wine business, a step which his family connections made almost inevitable. His father had been associated with the wine business in London both as a purchasing agent and as a customs official. His stepfather, Richard Chaucer, was a vintner, and his stepbrother, Thomas Heyroun, was a vintner also. It was almost to be expected that John Chaucer in his turn should become a vintner.<sup>13</sup>

Then by skillfully linking Chaucer's name with his father's in early chapters, Miss Chute subtly suggests a father-son relationship which is not documentable or easily established. By presenting the known facts concerning the career of John Chaucer, Miss Chute artistically

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<sup>12</sup>Balch, "Introduction," p. 22.

<sup>13</sup>Chute, Geoffrey Chaucer of England, p. 16.

builds an illusionary extension to his yet unborn son, Chaucer, who will, she predicts, follow in his father's footsteps. Using the times again, Miss Chute describes John Chaucer's participation in the Scottish military campaign of 1327, a fitting anticipatory description since Geoffrey fights in a similar, documented campaign from which he had to be ransomed. She describes John Chaucer's relationship to the court and his career as customs collector on woolen goods since it allows John to "forecast the career of his son Geoffrey, who spent eleven years of his life intimately associated with wool in an important position in the London customhouse."<sup>14</sup> She also describes John Chaucer's homestead since it is the visible link to Chaucer, who as John's heir eventually gains the property. To provide Chaucer with a mother was another problem for Miss Chute, but she was able to provide a description of a lady named "Agnes" who, since documented facts show John Chaucer with only one wife, "it seems reasonably certain . . . was Geoffrey Chaucer's mother."<sup>15</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

Chaucer's birthdate is an undocumented event. To solve this problem, Miss Chute exhibits humor in her approach. After considering conjectured birthdates inconclusively, Miss Chute cites Chaucer's later court testimony about his age of "forty years old and more,"<sup>16</sup> but her readers note that she gently chides her subject when she adds that his testimony is "one of those vague statements that make life so dark for subsequent biographers."<sup>17</sup> Any final decision about the date of Chaucer's birth is skillfully directed to the readers as Miss Chute dismisses the matter by humorously stating: "At any rate he was born, which after all is the most important consideration."<sup>18</sup>

Miss Chute next treats another undocumented period of Chaucer's life, his early childhood and education. Her overall method of dealing with it is that of referring to traditional medieval practices which can be verified in records from the times, such as church documents, medieval textbooks, and chronicles. Although

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 27. Miss Chute is quoting Chaucer.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid.

Chaucer himself is never mentioned in these documents, Miss Chute pictures what life for a typical medieval child probably was like, and then by occasionally using Chaucer's name during the descriptions she helps the reader visualize that kind of life for Chaucer. Miss Chute also describes Chaucer's personality in this section by an ingenious inversion of the point of view. Treating the child Chaucer as the man he grew to be, Miss Chute allows her readers to look back in time with him to see London as he might have seen it as a child:

If Geoffrey Chaucer the boy was anything like Geoffrey Chaucer the man, he must have had a delightful time in the streets around his home. His curiosity, his quick eye for detail, and his warm, uncritical love for all sorts and conditions of people should have made him an ideal child to grow up in a city as varied, as lively and as sociable as medieval London.<sup>19</sup>

Placing this child in school at age seven, Miss Chute tells her readers that, while "it is not safe to guess where Chaucer went to school, it is fairly safe to say what he was taught there."<sup>20</sup> To place a scholarly stamp

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<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

on the reliability of her description of Chaucer's probable education, Miss Chute explains that a fourteenth-century treatise on education still preserved in the Vatican indicates that a boy's study of grammar should commence at age seven, "in the springtime of his youth," and that it should be continued, "with some instruction in music and arithmetic, until he is fourteen."<sup>21</sup> From the evidence Miss Chute presents, we learn that Chaucer must have been acquainted with French, been taught grammar from the Donat, read Latin writings by such men as Cato and Ovid, been introduced to geometry and Euclid, and been taught to play some musical instrument. Final comment on Chaucer's youth in Miss Chute's discussion of a youth's life is taken from the works of two of Chaucer's contemporary fellow poets who wrote about their boyhoods. Unfortunately, Chaucer wrote nothing about himself, but Miss Chute suggests that Chaucer's life was probably much like that of his contemporaries, since "youngsters do not change much from century to century."<sup>22</sup> Completing

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<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

her description of Chaucer's early education, Miss Chute suddenly reveals to her readers that the first documented proof "that exists in connection with Geoffrey Chaucer is dated 1357 and shows him as a page in the household of Elizabeth de Burgh, Countess of Ulster and daughter-in-law of the King."<sup>23</sup> Up to this point in the biography, then, Miss Chute provides for her readers an imaginative and artistic description of Geoffrey Chaucer's background without referring to any document which tells specifically about his life or any details surrounding it; yet the reader probably believes what he has been told about Chaucer due to Miss Chute's skillful arrangement of techniques --her using scholarly descriptions of the times to provide truthful background, using contemporary accounts from Chaucer's associates which strongly suggest the life style of the times, and using information from medieval documents such as widely used educational manuals<sup>24</sup> which were in use during Chaucer's lifetime.

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-38. Miss Chute cites such medieval books as the basic primer, the Eight Parts of Speech by Donatus, a collection of adages and proverbs called the Cato, and Priscian's book on grammar, to name just a few.



How does a biographer further describe and develop a career for a fourteenth century English subject using documents which give only the subject's name and position held during certain years of his life? The isolated documents can only provide the biographer with fragments from which to work; the biographer's task must be to rebuild the total picture of the man's career from his earliest attempts to achieve the position to the descriptions of how he feels about the position as well as how he functions in this position. Placing the documents in chronological order suggests an order in which the biographer can work to construct a possible path to success or failure in the subject's chosen career. Choosing this method, Miss Chute uses the surviving documents identifying Chaucer and his title at various intervals in his life--soldier, comptroller, justice of the peace--to provide a chronological foundation for her description of Geoffrey's career as a public servant.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>25</sup>Miss Chute shows Chaucer's position as a soldier in an expeditionary force to France on page 96; his first salaried, government position on page 106; his post of Comptroller of the London wool customs on page 140; his position as justice of the peace on page 206; his sole venture into Parliament on page 213--to name a few of the many public positions he held during his lifetime.

Establishing Chaucer's position as a page in Elizabeth de Burgh's household provides Miss Chute with the opportunity to introduce and describe the makeup of the medieval court, to introduce certain figures of nobility with whom Chaucer would later establish contact--King Edward and his sons, the Duke of Lancaster, and John of Gaunt--and to conduct the reader through the known events of Chaucer's life up to his marriage. From information about Chaucer's position in a royal household, Miss Chute can establish that Chaucer is "ready to follow the excited King Edward into battle as his father before him had done."<sup>26</sup> After describing war scenes between England and France, Miss Chute reveals that Chaucer is captured by the French, but he is rescued: "The Keeper of the King's Wardrobe paid sixteen pounds on the first of March to have Geoffrey Chaucer ransomed."<sup>27</sup> Later records show that Chaucer enters the service of the King as an esquire, explains Miss Chute. Consequently, she continues, since it is a normal medieval pattern for an esquire to marry one of the well-born ladies of the court, the same

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 44.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 47.

medieval pattern can be used to establish Chaucer's subsequent marriage to Philippa, a well-bred lady at the royal court.

However, any description of married life between Geoffrey and Philippa is limited, for few facts exist. To bridge the gap interestingly, Miss Chute comments on Chaucer's marriage by introducing speculations about it to provide the reader with such dubious clues as exist, which she sometimes refutes, before she continues the narrative on Chaucer's life:

There used to be a certain amount of speculation concerning the marriage and the conclusion was reached that it was an unhappy one. Of this there is no evidence. There are no personal papers of Chaucer's extant, and his poetry, unlike that of Deschamps [contemporary French poet], never deals with his private life and emotions.

What brought Chaucer's readers to this conclusion was a misunderstanding of medieval literature.<sup>28</sup>

The descriptions of speculations and legends which have grown around the subject provide Miss Chute with material to illustrate that some illusions of the subject cannot be supported by scholarly research; yet these same

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 61.

illusions provide further data with which to proceed in Chaucer's life story. For example, by referring to the speculations on Chaucer's marriage based on his poetry, Miss Chute provides another bridge to her own subsequent critical analysis of his writings as she explains to her readers that "it is useless to search in Chaucer's poetry for clues to his private life."<sup>29</sup> She then concludes this discussion with another statement which indicates the difficulty of establishing a life story when the subject leaves behind little written material about himself: "He was one of the most impersonal of poets and it is almost impossible to find him speaking for himself."<sup>30</sup>

Interrupting the chronological pattern of Chaucer's public career after she had created the impression it was stabilized by establishing Chaucer's oath to live in London, his lease on governmental housing at Aldgate,<sup>31</sup> and his documented sources of income indicating his financial position as that of a "well-to-do man,"<sup>32</sup> Miss Chute

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 148.

uses another technique to introduce Chaucer's career as a literary figure. To provide the reader with information he needs to know to follow smoothly the development of the subject's life story, it sometimes becomes necessary to interrupt the pattern of events to place emphasis on additional information. Using this technique of interrupting the narrative to insert critiques on Chaucer's literary works, Miss Chute handles Chaucer's second career. That is, to establish Chaucer's second career--his career as a poet--Miss Chute must first choose when and how best to arrange and interpret the literary materials. No concrete evidence is available which exactly dates Chaucer's literary offerings, but Miss Chute's close examination of the works themselves provides her with a theory which causes her to arrange the materials in juxtaposition to sections of Chaucer's public career. In this way Miss Chute can describe growth and change in both Chaucer's public and literary ability and at the same time lead to proof of her theory about Chaucer's masterpiece, The Canterbury Tales. Miss Chute's theory is that Chaucer knows all along in his writing career that he is violating medieval rules and traditions. She comments on Chaucer's

dilemma, developing her theme in such statements as the following:

Chaucer was not only a poet of the earth but a poet of love, and the whole range of human passion had been condemned by the Church as evil . . . . Throughout the whole of his life the realistic, amoral and cheerfully irreverent habit of mind with which he had been born as a writer warred with the idealistic, moral and deeply reverent attitude which he had inherited as a medieval Englishman.<sup>33</sup>

Yet another statement shows the struggle existing in Chaucer's mind:

The same conflict between his training and his literary inclinations went on in Geoffrey Chaucer throughout the whole of his life, and its bitterness can be gauged by the strength of the two warring elements within him. It was the second that triumphed throughout most of his career, and without it the world would not have had the great pagan masterpiece of Troilus and Criseyde or most of the characters in The Canterbury Tales.<sup>34</sup>

Medieval rules dictated almost everything, "feudal rules, religious rules, social rules, business rules, and . . . literary rules."<sup>35</sup> Chaucer also "entered upon his own

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 88.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., 67.

trade of poetry under a similar kind of bondage."<sup>36</sup> A lengthy discussion on medieval practices concerning the writing of love poetry and the traditions of poets from the twelfth through the fourteenth centuries detracts somewhat from the narrative at this point, since it is very loosely linked to Chaucer's early love poems, which are now largely lost. However, to build her subject's image in the eyes of the reader, Miss Chute describes and compares Chaucer's literary ability with that of the contemporary French poet, Eustache Deschamps, who also held two careers, those of poet and esquire to his King:

Both [poets] were good at metrics . . . . Both introduced new words into the vocabulary. Both had a well-developed sense of humor. . . . Both were expert in the fashionable, contemporary verse forms, ballade and roundel and virelay . . . . Both alternated between the stylized, romantic treatment of love then in fashion and a realistic treatment verging on bawdry. Both, moreover, started at precisely the same place in their poetic development. But Chaucer grew into a major poet and Deschamps remained a clever journalist.<sup>37</sup>

Although from this point in the biography, Miss Chute concentrates on a lengthy interpretation of the extant

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 65.

literary works of Chaucer, which, she herself observed, citing the impersonality found in Chaucer's poetry noted earlier in this work, does little to explain his character or career development, she does continue to discuss briefly those career advancements in public life mentioned earlier, as well as several others, in order to complete the life-sized portrait of her subject.

The literary material described in this biography is used primarily by Miss Chute to promote literary criticism, but it also serves biographic purposes to explore and describe Chaucer's reaction to medieval traditions which the fourteenth century saw break down under new forces too strong to be resisted. These same literary descriptions are then loosely linked to Chaucer's public career--beginning with his early diplomatic positions and running to the governmental position held when he dies--to furnish the reader with the illusion of time passing in Chaucer's life. Early in his diplomatic life while serving the English king in England and France, Miss Chute says, Chaucer breaks with tradition by translating and composing in the English language. Miss Chute explores possible reasons to further her original theory that Chaucer knew he was breaking the rules as he broke them:



first, "Chaucer was no imitator";<sup>38</sup> second, Chaucer was "an innovator and an extraordinary one";<sup>39</sup> third, Chaucer's "solid, middle-class background . . . gave him a fundamental independence";<sup>40</sup> and, fourth, Chaucer "accepted no final judgment on his work but his own."<sup>41</sup> After serving as the King's diplomat to Italy, Chaucer returns to England, and Miss Chute describes The House of Fame which Chaucer leaves unfinished. Chaucer's next foreign missions take him to France and then again to Italy, after which he probably wrote The Parliament of Birds and Anelida and Arcite. Describing The Parliament of Birds, Miss Chute indicates that the only safe thing to say about it is "that it is a poem in honor of St. Valentine's Day, and a delightful one."<sup>42</sup> Anelida remains incomplete and is Chaucer's "sole attempt to write in the epic manner."<sup>43</sup> Then Miss Chute relates Chaucer's

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 135.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 137.

translation of Consolation of Philosophy from Latin to English, but she shows "his translation is not a satisfactory one from the scholarly point of view."<sup>44</sup> The next lengthy description concerns Chaucer's Troilus and Criseyde, "a long and intricate work of art that is under the conscious control of its creator from the beginning."<sup>45</sup> In this work, evidence can be found of Chaucer's break with tradition also, for he concentrates on characterization, against all medieval rules, as "he was attempting to portray real human beings and real emotions."<sup>46</sup> Furthermore, Troilus and Criseyde is "a direct denial of the set of values which medieval Christianity promulgated."<sup>47</sup> But Chaucer later felt that, being a Christian, he should recant "his great achievement, [although] as an artist he apparently had no regrets. For he put his retraction in a postscript and did not alter any of the stanzas themselves."<sup>48</sup> Miss Chute uses the second half of the book

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., p. 183.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

to develop and describe Chaucer's literary works. The last and most important of the works treated is The Canterbury Tales. His public career has been established as Miss Chute has interrupted the literary discussions to describe Chaucer's public positions of Comptroller, justice of the peace, member of Parliament, and Clerk of the King's Works.<sup>49</sup> To establish further the strength of Chaucer's writing ability, Miss Chute personally declares that while Chaucer is no Shakespeare (she is anticipating her next biographic subject), "he came nearer him than any other poet, and even the best of later novelists and dramatists are usually not a match for him here."<sup>50</sup> Chaucer is shown again knowingly to break medieval rules in The Canterbury Tales, for "Chaucer threw the whole book of rules overboard in his Prologue."<sup>51</sup> Additionally, Chaucer as portrayed by Miss Chute at this point is a medieval man "sure enough of his ground and of himself to ignore without comment the strict rules on writing that bedeviled

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<sup>49</sup>Ibid., p. 223. Chaucer was given a new governmental position July 12, 1389, Clerk of the King's Works, after King Richard's return to power.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., p. 245.

<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 249.

his generation, or else to make fun of them."<sup>52</sup> But even Chaucer cannot escape completely from his times, for, Miss Chute writes:

Any man who outstrips his century is likely to find himself at war with his century, and Chaucer was no exception either to the privilege or to the penalty. He made one choice with his mind, and it is to be hoped that through it he found quietness of spirit. But he made another choice with his heart, and it is the choice of his heart that endures.<sup>53</sup>

Chaucer died, according to Miss Chute, "still trying to make his peace with heaven, and as the hour of the final rites approached he was overwhelmed by his sense of sin."<sup>54</sup> Miss Chute cites the testimony of Gascoigne and Hoccleve to prove the point that Chaucer died "trying to the last to make his peace with his century and the God of his century."<sup>55</sup> Miss Chute also adds words of praise to Chaucer's memory as she finishes his biography with a final explanation of his literary works:

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<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 287.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 310.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>55</sup>Ibid.

Setting himself against the weight of medieval authority, Chaucer wrote of English men and women and wrote in the English tongue. He did not do it for approval or for money or for fame. He did it for love, and there is the evidence of six centuries to show that a love like that is not betrayed.<sup>56</sup>

Throughout the biography of Chaucer, Miss Chute has consistently established and developed her art; that is, she has provided a concentrated, lucid picture of fourteenth century England in which her subject moves freely (or as freely as any medieval man might dare to move). She has shown evidence of new biographical methods such as a strong regard for research--she provides notes and more than nine pages of "selected bibliography" among which she includes a literary background as well; she uses the works of Chaucer to promote new thematic unity and to establish a dual biographic career of public servant and poet; she exhibits imaginative skill in filling those spaces where no documentary evidence exists, and she uses the times artistically and dramatically to interpret and direct the actions of her subject. This is Marchette Chute's basic method, which becomes increasingly evident in each of her subsequent biographies. Using the same

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<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 322.

narrative form which she has used for Chaucer's life and the "traditional" life and times approach established in this biography, Miss Chute offers her readers a second biographical subject, Shakespeare of London, described in the next chapter of this thesis. Restricting herself to the use of contemporary evidence and disregarding the literary works of Shakespeare, Miss Chute uses a series of descriptive images to illustrate the acting career of Shakespeare, thus hopefully leading to a life-sized portrait of her subject.

## C H A P T E R      I V

### THE PLAYER:    WILLIAM SHAKESPEARE

In the Foreword to her second biography, Shakespeare of London, Marchette Chute indicates that she will attempt to do three things: one, "bring a very great man into the light of common day"; two, "show William Shakespeare as his contemporaries saw him, rather than as the gigantic and legendary figure he has become since"; and, three, "attempt . . . a life-sized portrait."<sup>1</sup> She further indicates that the book will be a "mosaic" composed of numerous facts juxtaposed to each other from a multitude of sources, too numerous to be included entirely in the (ten page) bibliography.<sup>2</sup> The life story, however, is to be based "entirely on contemporary documents."<sup>3</sup> Based on this evidence, Miss Chute indicates that she will emphasize Shakespeare's career "as a whole against

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<sup>1</sup>Marchette Chute, Shakespeare of London (New York: E. P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1949), p. ix.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid., pp. xi-xii.

<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. xi.

the background of his own day."<sup>4</sup> The times, again in this biography, will provide the necessary background to support the illusion of Shakespeare's life which Miss Chute hopes to create in this life-story--necessary, in her view because, she writes: "Any man will become incomprehensible if he is isolated from his background."<sup>5</sup>

The same basic narrative divisions used in Chaucer's biography--youth, career, maturity and death--are employed in this biography to provide the framework for Miss Chute's life-sized portrait of Shakespeare. Placing Shakespeare in an Elizabethan setting, she describes his parentage, his youth and educational training, his marriage to Anne Hathaway, his lengthy acting career in the Elizabethan theatre, and his eventual retirement and death in the town of his birth, Stratford-upon-Avon. The methodology used to present much of this material has been called "picture writing"<sup>6</sup> by Miss Chute, for "the story is not

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. ix.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Marchette Chute, "Shakespeare of London," Horn Book Magazine, February, 1955, p. 34.



presented through explanations but through a series of images, leaving the reader to draw his own conclusions."<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the images created by Miss Chute include descriptions of the life-style and actions of people living in Stratford, bound by its traditions and customs, yet familiar to Shakespeare and his family, descriptions of London and its relationship to the theatrical companies of which Shakespeare was a member, and, most importantly, descriptions of the Elizabethan theatre as Shakespeare would grow to know it, its functions, its actors, and its plays. Since Shakespeare's background is strongly linked to life in Stratford and then to the Elizabethan theatre in London, the interpretation and descriptions of this background become the clue to Miss Chute's art in the second biography. Concentrating on this background, Miss Chute leaves Shakespeare "free to enter wherever he would."<sup>8</sup>

A very substantial image, created by the Church, is evident in most medieval towns like Stratford in the sixteenth century. Church influence is described by Miss Chute to illustrate how some of the outward actions

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

expected by the Church of its parishioners--people like the Shakespeares--affected their entire lives. Church records are also of importance to Miss Chute, since they help provide evidence about her subject from his birth to his death. Illustrating the importance of Church influence in Stratford, Miss Chute observes that "any citizen of Stratford was fined if he did not present himself, his family and his servants at church every Sunday."<sup>9</sup> Stratford would be no exception since "religion and politics were inextricably connected, and every human being in England who was loyal to the Queen was expected to be equally loyal to the Church."<sup>10</sup> Using evidence from records at Stratford, Miss Chute notes that William Shakespeare's name on the church list suggests his own baptism,<sup>11</sup> and his position as a godfather at a subsequent baptism,<sup>12</sup> thus indicating his expected affiliation with the Church of England. This affiliation is shown to continue when Shakespeare moves to London, for again evidence from church

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<sup>9</sup>Chute, Shakespeare of London, p. 9.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 10.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid.

records shows the name of William Shakespeare on the role of St. Helen's parish where he was a "taxpayer of the parish and was obliged to go to church on Sundays."<sup>13</sup> Additional parish records provide evidence for the date of Shakespeare's burial in Stratford<sup>14</sup> where his "body was interred inside the chancel rail of the parish church,"<sup>15</sup> since Shakespeare has attained the position of lay rector.<sup>16</sup> Interestingly, this description of Shakespeare's grave as described by Miss Chute from church records illustrates the strength of medieval church influence on its members, and Shakespeare would remain under its influence all of his life.

Another image created by Miss Chute to provide a background for Shakespeare's early life is the vivid description of the medieval market community of Stratford near London:

It had never been walled . . . , but in spirit it was a tight, narrow little medieval community. Like

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 235.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 320.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 321.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

every other town in England, Stratford was run on a strict, paternalistic system that had worked well for the citizens' remote ancestors . . . . Every effort was made to protect local industry . . . , all trade was strictly controlled and supervised, and every resident was hedged about with rules designed to keep himself and the town in order.<sup>17</sup>

When a young man from a neighboring village disliked farming, he moved into the town and took up a trade; John Shakespeare, son of a tenant farmer outside Stratford and future father of William, moved into Stratford to pursue the trade of glove making.<sup>18</sup>

John Shakespeare as portrayed by Miss Chute is an ambitious young man. Her description of his rise from the position of lowly tenant farmer to the highest public position in the town of Stratford is used by Miss Chute thematically to illustrate and highlight the importance and prestige attached to the status of "gentleman" in the sixteenth century. By tracing the political steps mastered by John Shakespeare,<sup>19</sup> Miss Chute sheds light on the traditional functions of a small sixteenth century

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 2.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., pp. 1-2.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., pp. 4-12.

town as viewed by John Shakespeare as he moves from positions of councilman, constable, affeeror (sets fees), chamberlain, and alderman to high bailiff, "the highest political office in the power of the town to give."<sup>20</sup>

Miss Chute shows how John's desire for a "son who would carry on the family name and inherit the land"<sup>21</sup> is later fulfilled by the birth of a son, William, to John and Mary Shakespeare.

Since there is little evidence about Shakespeare's youth, Miss Chute uses the typical educational pattern which has been established over the years in Stratford to describe the kind of education Shakespeare probably received. Referring to the Stratford charter which called for a "free grammar school for the training and education of children,"<sup>22</sup> Miss Chute suggests that Shakespeare entered Stratford grammar school, which was "like . . . every other grammar school in England, . . . serious, thorough and dull."<sup>23</sup> Elaborating on the

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 11.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 8.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 13. Miss Chute is quoting the town charter.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

curriculum offered in the grammar school, Miss Chute describes possible subjects offered--especially Lily's Latin grammar.<sup>24</sup> Interestingly enough, Miss Chute notes that "apart from teaching him Latin, Stratford grammar school taught Shakespeare nothing at all."<sup>25</sup> Knowledge of other subjects, she indicates, would be self-taught later in London.<sup>26</sup> To expand the description of Stratford's schooling system still further, Miss Chute also suggests possible schoolmasters who might have had Shakespeare as a student, and she then continues with a description of the daily schedule students like Shakespeare might have followed during the school day.<sup>27</sup> To make the transition from a description of Shakespeare's education and youth to a description of the theatre under James Burbage in London, Miss Chute introduces descriptions of the touring companies of actors who visited Stratford and who would be welcomed by John Shakespeare in his official position

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<sup>24</sup>Ibid.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., pp. 19-21.

as High Bailiff.<sup>28</sup> Thus, William, at twelve or thirteen, would probably have had an excellent introduction to the theatre he would one day join, for as "the son of one of the most prominent of the Council members he probably always had a good place to see and hear."<sup>29</sup>

Shakespeare's marriage to Anne Hathaway is dramatized by Miss Chute to highlight for her readers one of the few personal events in his life story. She writes:

Not only was Shakespeare a minor and in no position to assume the support of a family, but his bride was eight years older than he was and the child was born six months after the wedding.<sup>30</sup>

This marriage "may have been ill-advised,"<sup>31</sup> but Miss Chute explains in detail the Elizabethan customs concerning precontracts, marriage banns, and marriage licenses<sup>32</sup> to show her readers that "there is no special reason to believe . . . fellow townsmen considered it scandalous."<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 21-22.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 50-52.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 49.

After three children were born to the couple, "the break between Anne and William Shakespeare evidently occurred . . . , probably coinciding with his decision to go on the stage."<sup>34</sup> Miss Chute suggests an interesting theory at this point concerning the marital break: "If Anne Hathaway had been brought up as a Puritan, that fact alone would constitute a full explanation of the estrangement."<sup>35</sup> This theory is then more fully developed: Anne's daughter was given a Puritan name, Anne's father and brother requested Puritan burial, and Puritans contemptuously attacked actors during this period; so if Anne were a Puritan, she could not have supported her husband in the acting profession.<sup>36</sup> No evidence can be cited to support the actual date Shakespeare left Stratford for London, so Miss Chute concludes that since evidence shows him to be a successful actor in the London theatre by 1592, "he must have entered it several years earlier."<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 55.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 53.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 53-55.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 57.



Miss Chute uses vivid images describing Elizabethan times to provide a realistic setting in London for her subject. Then narrowing her description primarily to the Elizabethan theatre, Miss Chute exhibits her artistic skill in providing a dramatic backdrop for the acting and writing career of her subject. Using contemporary evidence, she describes the building of the first theatre in London by James Burbage, an actor who headed the Earl of Leicester's company of players.<sup>38</sup> Another lengthy description sets before the readers the detailed picture of the city of London as Shakespeare would view it before Miss Chute continues with the theatrical history and stories about numerous playwrights in London.<sup>39</sup> Yet another aspect of the theatre is examined as Miss Chute explains the detailed evidence surrounding the tasks and problems encountered by actors and writers in the Elizabethan era.<sup>40</sup> Additional descriptions of the acting companies and their productions,<sup>41</sup> the plays and masques

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<sup>38</sup>Ibid., pp. 25-43.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., pp. 58-85.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid., pp. 86-121.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., pp. 122-52.

ordered by Queen Elizabeth,<sup>42</sup> and the plays and masques ordered by King James<sup>43</sup> are shown by Miss Chute to provide a colorful and provocative background for her subject to enter as he pleases. It is only fair to note at this point that Shakespeare does not enter very often. Nevertheless, since a life-sized portrait is desired, Miss Chute continually focuses on contemporary images to keep the biographic time frame intact and to help her make the necessary transitions which invite additional descriptions and comments about her subject, thus providing the illusion of Shakespeare's life.

Shakespeare's career in London is documented by a court record indication "that William Shakespeare was . . . a prominent actor in London, and he also seems to be the only actor at that time who was also writing plays."<sup>44</sup> Miss Chute introduces her subject sporadically in this section of the biography to provide the illusion of career development. Frequent observations such as "a busy actor like William Shakespeare did not have much

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<sup>42</sup>Ibid., pp. 137-48.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., pp. 254-68.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 83.

time to write plays"<sup>45</sup> keep the subject before the readers while descriptive passages about the theatre are developed to fill in and bridge long gaps in the biographic portrait. Longer descriptions are also used by Miss Chute to trace Shakespeare's development as a playwright,<sup>46</sup> as a poet,<sup>47</sup> as an actor living and working with a group of actors known as the Chamberlain's company,<sup>48</sup> as a script writer for the Chamberlain group (Romeo and Juliet is cited as a sample script although others are mentioned later),<sup>49</sup> and as a mature playwright concentrating on plot developments which also name such plays as Julius Caesar, Henry V, Hamlet, and others.<sup>50</sup> Thus, by concentrating on the contemporary evidence which is available and discarding the analysis of the literary works, Miss Chute deviates somewhat from the biographic form seen in the Chaucer life-story. Nevertheless, the series of descriptive

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<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 92.

<sup>46</sup>Ibid., pp. 93-104.

<sup>47</sup>Ibid., pp. 110-20.

<sup>48</sup>Ibid., pp. 123-35.

<sup>49</sup>Ibid., pp. 152-80.

<sup>50</sup>Ibid., pp. 213-33.

backgrounds and artistic images used by Miss Chute to emphasize and illuminate Shakespeare's career in the theater continue to lead to another life-sized portrait of her subject.

Evidence indicates that Shakespeare established a stable relationship with his contemporaries. Miss Chute describes this relationship to illustrate the kind of personality Shakespeare probably had, as she writes: "All the contemporary evidence about Shakespeare unites to show that in his professional life he was a relaxed and happy man, almost incapable of taking offense."<sup>51</sup> Early in his career, Shakespeare is described by Miss Chute as "an excited, ambitious young man, eager to succeed as a writer and seizing on every kind of assistance he could get."<sup>52</sup> Later, Shakespeare displayed a "natural good temper and instinctive courtesy,"<sup>53</sup> and it is deserving, Miss Chute comments, that his contemporaries referred to him as "gentle Shakespeare,"<sup>54</sup> for:

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<sup>51</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>52</sup>Ibid., p. 100.

<sup>53</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

<sup>54</sup>Ibid., p. 84.

In the short-tempered Elizabethan atmosphere, where a writer almost prided himself on the vigor and variety of his insults and where even gentle scholars like William Camden and John Stow became involved in bitter arguments, Shakespeare stands almost alone for the consistent courtesy with which he behaved.<sup>55</sup>

Making yet another statement about Shakespeare's relationship with his contemporaries, Miss Chute adds: "Professionally he was a fortunate man, and equally fortunate were the men who had the privilege of working with him."<sup>56</sup> Thus Miss Chute builds an interesting and complimentary picture of William Shakespeare as his contemporaries probably saw him.

Shakespeare's success in his career allowed him to follow in his father's footsteps and rise to the status of gentleman. To illustrate this common ambition in both men Miss Chute traces evidence of this desire first in John Shakespeare's life and then also in the life of his son, William, to establish a thematic form of unity in a biography she described earlier as a mosaic. Although Elizabethan society was expected to live and act in a

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<sup>55</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-85.

<sup>56</sup>Ibid., p. 134.

prescribed manner, Miss Chute describes what she sees as reality:

Each Elizabethan was supposed to remain contentedly in the class for which heaven had designed him, but each Elizabethan interpreted this rule as applying to his neighbor rather than to himself. There was a scramble to leave one level of "degree" and rise to the next, and . . . determination of the lower classes to belong to the gentry and of the gentry to belong to the nobility.<sup>57</sup>

Since it was John Shakespeare who desired to move to the class of the gentry and since he was the one who applied for a coat of arms, "it was he who became the gentleman, but it seems almost certain that it was William Shakespeare who arranged to have the matter reopened,"<sup>58</sup> after some unexplained failure in his father's career.<sup>59</sup> After the death of his father, William gained the title "gentleman,"<sup>60</sup> and "the prestige of the Shakespeare family in Stratford took another enormous step forward. On the fourth of May, 1597, William Shakespeare bought the second largest

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<sup>57</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>58</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>59</sup>Ibid., pp. 46-47.

<sup>60</sup>Ibid., p. 185.

house in town."<sup>61</sup> This house brought its owner "high social standing in Stratford,"<sup>62</sup> "a special pew in church called the Clopton Pew,"<sup>63</sup> and "a position of unquestioned prominence in the community."<sup>64</sup> In addition to the purchase of "a hundred and seven acres of land in the Stratford area,"<sup>65</sup> Shakespeare also purchased a small cottage and land in Chapel Lane.<sup>66</sup> In 1605, he made another investment in Stratford where records show "a lease on some of the Stratford tithes"<sup>67</sup> was secured. These tithes carried another privilege for Shakespeare--a special place of burial in Stratford.<sup>68</sup> Therefore, after twenty years of acting, Shakespeare retired to his home in Stratford, Miss Chute relates, for "he had worked long enough and . . .

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<sup>61</sup>Ibid., p. 186.

<sup>62</sup>Ibid.

<sup>63</sup>Ibid., p. 187.

<sup>64</sup>Ibid.

<sup>65</sup>Ibid., p. 243.

<sup>66</sup>Ibid., p. 244.

<sup>67</sup>Ibid., p. 278.

<sup>68</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

he was entitled to a rest."<sup>69</sup> While Miss Chute goes on to explain briefly Shakespeare's retirement, she returns to yet another thematic technique after his death to finalize her portrait.

Shakespeare's will proves "he was determined to leave all his property intact to a single male heir."<sup>70</sup> Miss Chute describes Shakespeare's will in great detail<sup>71</sup> to establish again thematic unity in closing this biography. John Shakespeare's desire for a son to carry the family name and inherit the land is developed by Miss Chute, and then the desire is transferred and developed in his son, William, who indicates in his will that he is still attempting to follow his father's desire. Miss Chute writes:

Shakespeare's will had one dominant, driving purpose: to leave all the property intact to a single male descendant. John Shakespeare's eldest and only surviving son was determined to fulfill his father's dream of a Shakespeare family established in perpetuity among the landed gentry of Warwickshire, and what sounds like a complicated series of bequests

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<sup>69</sup>Ibid., p. 294.

<sup>70</sup>Ibid., p. 307.

<sup>71</sup>Ibid., pp. 316-20.



had a single end in view. The land had been bought; the land had been protected; and the land was to go to a male heir.<sup>72</sup>

The Shakespearean dream, however, never materialized, Miss Chute explains, as she brings the life-sized portrait near closure, since "the longed-for heir never made his appearance."<sup>73</sup>

Although a male heir fails to appear to carry on the Shakespeares' heritage, Miss Chute describes the attempt of Shakespeare's actor friends to perpetuate his name through a collection of his plays. With this description Miss Chute makes her final attempt to bring a great man, Shakespeare, into the common light of day. The First Folio, a complete edition of Shakespeare's plays which his fellow actors compiled seven years after his death, is the actors' memorial to "the greatest man in England."<sup>74</sup> Miss Chute's attempt to show William Shakespeare as his contemporaries saw him is concluded when she indicates that a close friend of Shakespeare, Ben

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<sup>72</sup>Ibid., p. 317.

<sup>73</sup>Ibid., p. 323.

<sup>74</sup>Ibid.

Jonson (Miss Chute's next biographical subject), is "the ideal man to write a commendatory address for the volume."<sup>75</sup> The description of the commemorative folio completes Miss Chute's attempt to build a life-sized portrait of her subject which, she herself states, "is not the whole man."<sup>76</sup> But she emphasizes that the portrait "is built solidly and of reliable materials. No contemporary evidence was omitted and not the smallest piece of it was forced out of shape."<sup>77</sup> Miss Chute continues by adding that "there is no point in writing a biography unless you are rigidly careful with the evidence,"<sup>78</sup> for "the basic restriction upon any biographer is that he must be trying to tell the truth."<sup>79</sup> Miss Chute stresses the word "trying" at this point, for she observes: "Truth is hard to come by, and no one can say that you are giving the whole truth about what happened three or four hundred years ago."<sup>80</sup>

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<sup>75</sup>Ibid., p. 333.

<sup>76</sup>Marchette Chute, "From 'Bad Risk' to Best Seller," Library Journal, LXXVI, No. 17 (1951), p. 1487.

<sup>77</sup>Ibid.

<sup>78</sup>Ibid.

<sup>79</sup>Ibid.

<sup>80</sup>Ibid.

In the biography on Shakespeare, Miss Chute continues to demonstrate her skill in developing her art. Once again Miss Chute uses her basic traditional biographical methods of presenting colorful images of the times which clearly picture life as it probably was lived in the sixteenth century English town of Stratford and in the London of Shakespeare's acquaintance. Also well placed in sixteenth century perspective is Shakespeare's career in the Elizabethan theatre. But some new biographical methods appear in this biography as well. Using contemporary evidence such as church records, legal and financial records, and literary testimonials to document her work, Miss Chute again indicates her respect for scholarly facts and research. In fact, in this biography Miss Chute adds three appendixes to handle noncontemporary material such as the Sonnets as well as the legends and stories which have been advanced about Shakespeare, but which have been disregarded by Miss Chute in the biographic treatment of Shakespeare, since she cannot validate their reliability. To show her own attention to research, Miss Chute lists more than nine pages of selected bibliography, which is only a fraction of the books actually used to complete this book as indicated by Miss Chute in the Foreword to

her biography. Miss Chute concentrates in this work on picturing her subject as his contemporaries saw him, counting on the detachment of the twentieth century reader and on her own ability artistically to convey her knowledge of the times in which her subject lives to produce a sympathetic yet stimulating illusion of Shakespeare's life. Using the same basic life and times method and following the narrative form, already established in two biographies, Miss Chute presents her third biographical subject, Ben Jonson, seventeenth century poet and playwright, the life to be examined in the next chapter.

## C H A P T E R    V

### O R A R E   O N E :    B E N   J O N S O N

Chaucer has his place in the diplomatic and social corps of medieval England, Shakespeare has his place in the Elizabethan theatre, and now Ben Jonson has his place in the Jacobean court.<sup>1</sup> Miss Chute has written no foreword or introduction in this biography to help the reader. However, in the Foreword to Shakespeare's biography, Miss Chute commented: "More is known about Shakespeare than about any other playwright of the period with the single exception of Ben Jonson."<sup>2</sup> Miss Chute's biographic form and methodology have not changed from the basic pattern introduced and established in the biographies of Chaucer and Shakespeare, and once again a life-sized portrait will be created.

Although more evidence is available about Jonson than about any other of Miss Chute's biographic subjects, there are still many gaps in the life-story where

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<sup>1</sup>Marchette Chute, "How a Book Grows," Library Journal, LXXXIV, No. 15 (1959), p. 2431.

<sup>2</sup>Chute, Shakespeare of London, p. ix.

documentation is scanty or not available. In these places, Miss Chute again uses descriptions of the times and events to bridge successfully the gaps, and thus she attempts to create a life-sized portrait of this subject. Using the same narrative pattern--youth, career, maturity and death--established in earlier biographies, Miss Chute explores and relates evidence about her subject to her readers to present the illusion of his entire life. Placing Jonson in a Westminster setting, Miss Chute first describes his ancestry, youth, and education. Next, by describing Jonson's numerous jobs as bricklayer, soldier, playwright, and poet, Miss Chute develops his career. Then, placing Jonson in a Jacobean court setting, she emphasizes his lengthy and colorful career as playwright and poet laureate of England. Since Jonson continued to work until he died, Miss Chute also describes his mature works, some of which remained incomplete at his death.

Jonson's youthful background and early education was in "the ancient and royal city of Westminster."<sup>3</sup> In this biography Miss Chute uses a brief introductory chapter describing Westminster to provide a setting for her subject

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<sup>3</sup>Marchette Chute, Ben Jonson of Westminster (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1953), p. 13.

and to introduce a unifying forecast about Jonson which will be developed throughout his career. Contrasting late Elizabethan London, marked by its changing values and middle-class orientation, with the "medieval and motionless" Westminster, Miss Chute designates two institutions which still greatly influenced its people's lives: "Westminster was dominated by the two institutions that had made it a city--the Court and the Church--and it had developed a rather hothouse, specialized atmosphere that was unlike anything else in England."<sup>4</sup> "The city was inhabited by two extremes, the very rich and the very poor, with the latter naturally in the majority."<sup>5</sup> The one link between the Church and the Court that served the rich and the poor was yet another institution, one greatly respected by everyone concerned, a public grammar school called Westminster School.<sup>6</sup> Introducing the school to which young Jonson would be sent, Miss Chute makes a forecast about Jonson which will link his early schooling with his subsequent success in his career:

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., pp. 13-14.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 15.

When he [Jonson] died he was buried next door in Westminster Abbey, as one of England's greatest poets and dramatists and the dean of English letters, but he could never have forced his life into this pattern of triumph if he had not, as a small boy, gone to Westminster School.<sup>7</sup>

This introductory chapter thus sets the scene for Jonson's birth and career.

Documentation about Jonson's early years is scarce and Miss Chute declares that "Ben Jonson is a hard man to trace back to his beginnings."<sup>8</sup> Noting that the date of birth is unknown, that the place of birth is unknown, that no record of his baptism exists in Westminster parishes, and that there is no record of his ancestry, Miss Chute nevertheless describes Jonson's own claims about his distinguished Scottish ancestry.<sup>9</sup> She qualifies inclusion of these claims on the grounds that

. . . if it pleased Jonson to feel that his family belonged to the gentry there is no reason why a biographer should try to take the distinction away from him, as long as there is no proof to the contrary.<sup>10</sup>

On the matter of Jonson's parentage, Miss Chute states

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., p. 17.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid., pp. 17-18.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 18.



that Jonson's father, a minister, died before Jonson's birth, and then referring to information supplied by Jonson's first biographer, Thomas Fuller, she explains that Jonson's mother remarried a bricklayer.<sup>11</sup>

Since there is little evidence to indicate how or why Jonson managed to attend Westminster School, Miss Chute makes a series of conjectures. She first suggests that Jonson's mother probably saw that Jonson attended the parish church school to learn his letters, "for she had been the wife of a minister and she would have valued education."<sup>12</sup> Additional conjectures are then made about Jonson's entry into Westminster School:

Westminster School was a church school, and perhaps Jonson's mother had some useful ecclesiastical connections through her late husband. Or perhaps someone noticed the small boy learning his letters in the little parish schoolhouse and became interested in Benjamin himself.<sup>13</sup>

Finally, on the basis of questionable documenting, Miss Chute establishes that Jonson was "put to school by a

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 18-20.

<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

friend,"<sup>14</sup> but she can shed no further light on the reasons behind the choice of Westminster School for Jonson. Nonetheless, Miss Chute states, Jonson became one of a "hundred and twenty boys who made up Westminster School."<sup>15</sup>

At Westminster School, under the guidance of William Camden, Ben Jonson was introduced to the world of classicism. Using historical data on schools, Miss Chute develops a chapter in the biography to suggest the kind of education he probably received at Westminster School.<sup>16</sup> Miss Chute states that the aim of the Tudor school system was generally "to turn out little Roman-Christian gentlemen who could write exactly like Cicero."<sup>17</sup> The average Elizabethan writer "agreed in theory that the classics were very valuable and important, but in practice . . . used . . . classical education chiefly as a way of showing off."<sup>18</sup> Miss Chute specifies texts and writers who helped establish the probable curriculum which Jonson followed.<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., pp. 26-34.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>19</sup>Miss Chute mentions these works: the Disticha; writings of Horace, Cicero, and Terrence; Quintilian's The Training of an Orator, and Lily's Latin Grammar. See ibid., pp. 26-30, passim.

Camden's name is used throughout the chapter, since it was he "who received Ben Jonson when he came to grammar school each morning and who opened the world of letters to the small boy from a Westminster alley."<sup>20</sup> Quoting lines from Jonson's later poetry, Miss Chute indicates that Jonson "wrote a tribute to his old teacher in which he thanked him for everything he himself had attained."<sup>21</sup> The chapter on Jonson's education is emphasized by Miss Chute; her work projects a picture of Jonson's world view, describing the times as Jonson would see them and commenting on the development of his personality:

Jonson's humanist vision of the man of reason, the moral being who inhabited a calm, stable and reasonable world, was probably incapable of being realized at any time in the world's history. It could certainly not have been realized in Elizabethan England, whose special literary virtues were its liveliness, its emotionalism and its irrepressible, youthful bounce. But the more hopeless it became, the more fiercely Jonson longed for it. Stubborn, vigorous and strong-willed, he was determined to make Elizabethan England see his vision; and Elizabethan England, with equal stubbornness, refused.<sup>22</sup>

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid., pp. 33-34.

Describing Jonson's personality further and forecasting the stormy career which she will develop for him, Miss Chute states:

In an age full of touchy writers, there was not one who managed to get into as many fights as Ben Jonson. He leaped from feud to feud with such intensity that occasionally he was involved in several at once.<sup>23</sup>

Before Jonson entered a writing career, Miss Chute describes Jonson's other early careers as a bricklayer and as a soldier. To make the transition from Jonson's educational training to the description of his apprenticeship as a bricklayer, Miss Chute describes the system of scholarships offered by Oxford and Cambridge. Although Jonson competed for a scholarship, Miss Chute comments, "the most ardent scholar that Westminster School ever produced was not given a scholarship."<sup>14</sup> Only conjectures can be made about the reasons behind Jonson's failure to receive the scholarship, Miss Chute states, but nevertheless Jonson's dream was destroyed, and he "was apprenticed to a bricklayer."<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 37.

Since little information exists about Jonson's careers as a bricklayer and as soldier, Miss Chute begins by briefly describing the bricklaying trade to suggest Jonson's possible development:

In return for working seven years in another man's household, the apprentice eventually reaped his reward. He became a member of the guild and could take apprentices in his turn, and, in the London area, he became a citizen of London.<sup>26</sup>

After relating further legends about Jonson's bricklaying career, Miss Chute determines that Jonson's short career in the army occurred sometime in his late teens or his early twenties, for it is most likely "that Jonson, like most of his fellow Elizabethans, was drafted."<sup>27</sup> Expanding a description of Queen Elizabeth's political wars abroad at this point, Miss Chute describes army life and Jonson's probable involvement in various feuds, since he attained the reputation of being an excellent swordsman.<sup>28</sup>

After Jonson returned from the war, Miss Chute briefly describes his marriage, before she elaborates on

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<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>28</sup>Ibid., pp. 39-43.

his new career in the theatre. Interestingly, Miss Chute explains about the lack of information and the difficulty of finding information about Jonson's private life:

The lives of most Elizabethan writers are shadowy enough, since the age of biography had not yet dawned, but Jonson is especially hard to trace since his name was so common. Still, there was apparently only one "Benjamin Johnson" in London at the time; and a parish record, discovered by Mark Eccles, shows that Benjamin Johnson and one Anne Lewis were married on the 14th of November, 1594, in the parish church of St. Magnus the Martyr near London Bridge.<sup>29</sup>

The only evidence about Anne other than this record comes from a remark Miss Chute attributes to Jonson stating that she "was a shrew, yet honest."<sup>30</sup> Fragments of information cited by Miss Chute from Jonson's epitaphs and from christening records suggest the births of several children to the couple, but after naming four of the children, Miss Chute concludes with this statement: "Whatever the number of his children, it is clear that Jonson emerged from his seven years of apprenticeship with a family to support."<sup>31</sup>

Jonson's career as a playwright was long and colorful. Describing the theatre, its companies, and its

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<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 44. Jonson himself dropped the "h" from his name, but was unable to get even his printers to do likewise.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

plays, Miss Chute creates the background for Jonson's entire writing career. Using Jonson's desire to be a classicist as a thematic device, she charts the success and failure of his goal throughout the biography:

It seemed possible to Jonson that he could bring back, single-handed, the original function of the poet and dramatist . . . and that he could transform the contemporary theatre by raising it to the level of Greece and Rome.<sup>32</sup>

To place Jonson in proper perspective, Miss Chute describes his career as a playwright in the London theatre and at court. Explaining Jonson's play Every Man in his Humour, she includes information about early classical comedies, classical plays being written in England, and Jonson's playwriting ability.<sup>33</sup> Additional descriptions are given about the performance of this play by "the Chamberlain's company and Jonson had the satisfaction of knowing that his first excursion into classical comedy was a complete success."<sup>34</sup> Jonson's second production, Every Man out of his Humour, is also described, and it, too, is shown

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 60.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., pp. 61-70.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 74.

by Miss Chute to be successful.<sup>35</sup> Miss Chute continues by explaining Jonson's methods of playwrighting and other playwright's reactions to his works.<sup>36</sup> Jonson's satirical comedies, however, were not acceptable to his fellow playwrights, who immediately began a series of colorful retorts in plays they had written. In recording the battle of wits between John Marston and Jonson, Miss Chute expresses Jonson's personality. She tells the reader that "he lost his temper"<sup>37</sup> and that the authorities "muzzled him."<sup>38</sup> However, many of Jonson's subsequent endeavors in playwriting (he switched to writing tragedy) and in producing masques (short allegorical dramatic works) were a success. Miss Chute goes into great detail to describe each play and masque<sup>39</sup> as she had done in early chapters. In this way she is able to show Jonson's development as a playwright and to pin down and continue the chronological development of her life-sized portrait.

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<sup>35</sup>Ibid., pp. 84-91.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., pp. 94-103.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 101.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Descriptions include Sejanus, pp. 114-17; a Christmas masque (1604), pp. 132-40; Volpone, pp. 142-48; a wedding masque, pp. 162-63; and the Masque of Queens, pp. 170-72. This is a sampling of Miss Chute's technique of using events to create the illusion of passing time.



While describing many of Jonson's plays, Miss Chute also traces Jonson's career as a poet. With this subject as a motif, Miss Chute shows Jonson's steady success in this venture as a poet throughout the biography by juxtaposing these discussions to his efforts in the theatre.<sup>40</sup> Focusing on Jonson's poems, as well as his plays, Miss Chute describes Jonson's continual attempt to impose a classical restraint on himself and on the literary world around him.

More than half of Jonson's biography is devoted to the development of Jonson's career as a playwright and as a poet associated closely with the Jacobean court. For example, describing one of Jonson's masques, Miss Chute puts before her readers a vivid view of Queen Anne and her ladies who performed in the production:

Then, at last, the curtain was drawn . . . . In front of the sea were Tritons and sea-maids, while the actors who played Ocean and Niger were carried by sea horses "as big as the life." Behind them came the twelve lady masquers [Queen Anne was one], seated in a great shell of simulated mother-of-pearl set

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<sup>40</sup>Some examples presented by Miss Chute of Jonson's ability to compose verses are found on the following pages: Jonson's verse to Lady Bedford, p. 106; a song in the masque, p. 174; a song in a play, p. 228; and his epigrams, pp. 235-38—to name just a few.

about with lights. To illuminate their azure costumes still further, they were attended by twelve light-bearers standing on sea monsters and holding torches made of shell.<sup>41</sup>

Illustrating the spectacle and splendor of the gaudy court productions, Miss Chute describes Jonson's perpetual attempt to retain the scholarship of the masque while at the same time giving pleasure to the court.

Since Jonson never retired, Miss Chute continued to show his mature works, his infirmities caused by old age, and then his death. In the final chapter of the biography, Miss Chute notes the failure of Jonson's life-time desire to revive classicism as she shows the reader excerpts from his unfinished manuscripts and comments:

It may be that the vigor with which he championed classicism came in part from his determination not to succumb to a romanticism that was as much a part of him as of the most lyrical Elizabethan.

In any case, Mortimer was never completed. Jonson's attempt to graft the technique of Roman tragedy on to English history remains an experimental fragment, with the editor's note at the end: "He died and left it unfinished."<sup>42</sup>

Miss Chute records that Jonson died on August 6, 1637, and that "apart from the manuscripts that were

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<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 139.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 346.

found in his desk he left very little behind him."<sup>43</sup> His works remain his legacy. Miss Chute concludes with several legends about his burial and grave in Westminster Abbey,<sup>44</sup> and her final words are anecdotal:

A brief inscription was carved on the small square of marble that marked his grave, and the story goes that a passer-by ordered it done on impulse . . . . If so, the impulse served Jonson better than long meditation . . . , for the natural thing would have been to give so distinguished a classicist an ornate description in Latin. Instead he got four words in English which are brief, admiring and truthful, and they constitute the perfect epitaph for that lively and incomparable Englishman:

O RARE BEN JONSON<sup>45</sup>

Throughout the biography on Jonson, Miss Chute has shown numerous and detailed views of Jonson's artistic works. She has also skillfully introduced descriptions of Jonson's literary efforts to reveal his personality and to increase the materials needed to create a life-sized portrait. Using vivid descriptions of the times, especially those of the English courts with their intrigues and pageantry, Miss Chute has once again shown her skill

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<sup>43</sup>Ibid.

<sup>44</sup>Ibid., pp. 346-49.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., pp. 348-49.

in shaping and integrating interesting pictures of the times with the biographical materials of her subject. The times again become the focal point in Miss Chute's next biographical offering as the seventeenth century becomes the vivid backdrop for two English poets, George Herbert and Robert Herrick.

## C H A P T E R   V I

### GENTLE MEN:   HERBERT AND HERRICK

George Herbert and Robert Herrick, two seventeenth century contemporaries, became the fourth and fifth biographic subjects of Marchette Chute in her book, Two Gentle Men: The Lives of George Herbert and Robert Herrick.

Originally, the accounts of the men's lives were intended to be "two brief, unlinked sketches"<sup>1</sup> according to Miss Chute, but later the shape of the book was designed to show both poets "against a moving panorama, . . . the background material in straight chronological order . . . lighting up Herbert and Herrick against it."<sup>2</sup> Although the lives of both men are presented separately, Miss Chute observes similarities of their careers--their both choosing to enter Church service and to express themselves as poets--to provide a format which allows her to also emphasize the differences in their outlook on life as reflected in each man's single book of poetry.

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<sup>1</sup>Chute, "How a Book Grows," p. 2432.

<sup>2</sup>Ibid.

Since evidence of neither man's personal life is bountiful, Miss Chute uses lengthy descriptions to provide enough information to round out the biographic treatment of her subjects. She begins with a description of each man's ancestry, then continues with a vivid description of the history and life of Cambridge University which both men attended, an historical description of the religious and political conflicts under seventeenth century English Kings (for both poets made royal contacts) and, finally, descriptions and examples of each man's poetry.

Initially, Miss Chute describes the ancestry of George Herbert to show her readers the magnificence of his genealogical inheritance. The Herberts' descent can be traced "from a French family that could trace its lineage back to the Emperor Charlemagne,"<sup>3</sup> the English branch of the family "was a friend of William the Conqueror,"<sup>4</sup> "the Welsh side of the family...produced George Herbert," and one of George's most famous ancestors was Sir Richard Herbert, great-great-grandfather to George, who "passed into renown

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<sup>3</sup>Marchette Chute, Two Gentle Men: The Lives of George Herbert and Robert Herrick (New York: E. P. Dutton & Co., Inc., 1959), p. 11. (Hereinafter referred to as Chute, Two Gentle Men.)

<sup>4</sup>Ibid.

and Hall's Chronicles by fighting his way through a whole army and back again."<sup>5</sup> Elaborating on these Herberts and other members of the Herbert family, Miss Chute describes a long line of respected, vigorous ancestors before she introduces George Herbert, fifth son of Richard and Magdalen Herbert.<sup>6</sup>

The description of Robert Herrick's ancestors, on the other hand, is used by Miss Chute to establish the equally sturdy middle class genealogy which is Robert Herrick's birthright. Revealing a family which traces its community involvement and strength in Leicester, England, back to the reign of Henry the Eighth, Miss Chute introduces Robert Herrick's great-grandfather who "established a family whose vigor and industry made them a real power in the community."<sup>7</sup> John Herrick, Robert's grandfather, held the position of town mayor twice and established the "family business of ironmongery which flourished in the hands of the Herricks for a hundred years."<sup>8</sup> Nicholas Herrick, Robert's father, was the first of his family to go to London, where he finished his apprenticeship and established

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., pp. 11-21.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 156.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

his own business, becoming "one of the most prosperous goldsmiths in London."<sup>9</sup> Robert Herrick, born to Nicolas and Julian Herrick, reflects his heritage, for "his best poems reflect the flowers and fields and country ways that his ancestors knew, and they echo the old, innocent delight that the Puritans were destroying in England."<sup>10</sup>

The only evidence available about George Herbert's youth comes from Izaak Walton, a biographer who wrote of Herbert forty years after his death in his series of Lives. On the whole, Miss Chute casts doubt on the validity of most of Walton's information, for in "Walton's biography . . . it is difficult to know how much is George Herbert and how much is Izaak Walton."<sup>11</sup> Although Walton may have admired Herbert, Miss Chute writes that "he . . . achieved the graceful unity of his lovely book by not telling the truth at a vital moment in Herbert's life."<sup>12</sup> Not much truth is established either when Walton neglects to mention "Herbert's hot Welsh

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 158.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 160.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>12</sup>Chute, "How a Book Grows," p. 2432.



temper."<sup>13</sup> To validate her claim, Miss Chute cites Herbert's own admission of his temper in two of his poems, both indicating the "fierceness" of his youth.<sup>14</sup> Furthermore, Miss Chute later states in the Appendix to this book, where she treats Walton's biographical interpretations of Herbert, that Walton even "omits the fact that Herbert . . . studied divinity at Cambridge."<sup>15</sup>

To compensate for the lack of further information on Herbert's youth, Miss Chute goes on to concentrate on a description of the relationship between George Herbert and his mother, a relationship which strongly exists until her death. The closeness of this mother-son relationship is suggested by Miss Chute in several statements about Magdalen Herbert: "Her mind was alien to Edward's [her eldest son's] but it was very close to that of George."<sup>16</sup> Additionally, after Herbert decides to make his career in the Church of England, Miss Chute says of his career-choice, it "was

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<sup>13</sup>Chute, Two Gentle Men, p. 23.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 279.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

something that he wanted with his whole heart, and his mother wanted it also."<sup>17</sup> At the age of twelve, therefore, George was enrolled in Westminster School by his mother, who saw it as "an ideal school . . . since it was conducted along the same lines as her own household."<sup>18</sup> Later, Herbert would be chosen from among his classmates to be the recipient of a Cambridge scholarship which would further his interest in a religious career.

Information about Robert Herrick's youth is even more scarce than evidence about Herbert. In order to provide some background for this period in Herrick's life, Miss Chute tells of Herrick's baptism in 1591 and his father's apparent suicide when Robert was fourteen months old, but further information about Herrick's activities is not available until he becomes his uncle's apprentice in London's Goldsmith Hall at the age of sixteen. This abrupt jump in the time frame is broken only by Miss Chute's suggestion that perhaps Herrick's godfather, Robert Herrick, "may have assumed a special responsibility for the future poet."<sup>19</sup> Limited information also causes gaps during

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<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 26.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 27.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 164.

Herrick's apprenticeship, which covers a ten-year period of his life; again Miss Chute uses general information, here, about the nature of an apprenticeship, to fill in the spaces and to suggest how he lived:

Young Robert Herrick made the usual promises that were required of an apprentice, not to marry or play cards or haunt taverns or "commit fornication." He was expected to work twelve hours a day in summer and as long as the light held in winter, and he was not supposed to wear silks or jewels or go to dancing school. His life was to be sober, virtuous and hard-working.<sup>20</sup>

Miss Chute also uses the apparent gap in the life story to link the physical craft of metals to Herrick's future preferred craft as a poet by stating: "But love of a craft is born, not made, and the affection for metals that made his uncle Robert rejoice was omitted from the make-up of his godson."<sup>21</sup> "His tool was the pen and his love was poetry."<sup>22</sup>

Information about Cambridge University in the seventeenth century provides Miss Chute with bountiful descriptions from which she builds the illusion of the kind of education both Herbert and Herrick probably received

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<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 166.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., p. 167.

<sup>22</sup>Ibid.

at this institution. Evidence supplied by Walton and quoted by Miss Chute reveals that George Herbert entered Trinity College at Cambridge and was placed under the care of Dr. Neville, master of that college, who would provide him a tutor;<sup>23</sup> Herbert was sixteen at the time.<sup>24</sup> Herrick, on the other hand, delayed by his long, unfruitful goldsmith apprenticeship, entered St. John's College at age twenty-two.<sup>25</sup> In accord with the strict statutes of the college which Miss Chute uses for further evidence, Miss Chute goes on to describe the possible routine which would provide a religious setting for her students:

Their purpose was the same, to create learned and obedient Englishmen, and they provided for the same supervision of the religious life of each student. Every morning and evening he recited in his chamber the prayer that the statutes provided. He reported to the chapel each morning at five . . . . Twice each day when the students assembled in the great halls for meals, they listened to a Bible-reading from someone appointed by the deans.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 35.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 170.

<sup>25</sup>Ibid.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 36.

Needless to say, Herbert and Herrick would live among many men who would influence their beliefs, for this was the atmosphere that bred men who "were at the heart of the Reformation in England, and it was in large measure through their ardor that England became a Protestant country."<sup>27</sup> Records indicate that both men received B.A. and M.A. degrees from Cambridge,<sup>28</sup> and Miss Chute also describes Herbert's jobs as teacher and Public Orator for the college as well as describing Herrick's decision to abandon the training in law he eventually completed at the college before entering the Church of England as a deacon.

Although Herbert had intended to enter the Church in holy orders, he decided instead to enter government service after leaving Cambridge and to seek the office of Secretary of State. In this office, Miss Chute indicates, Herbert could work for international peace which he ardently desired and still serve God. "But he now believed that this could be done not only in the Church but also in the world outside."<sup>29</sup> To expand the information on Herbert's

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>28</sup>George Herbert received his B.A. in 1613, M.A. in 1616; Robert Herrick received his B.A. in 1617, M.A. in 1619.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 77.

career which led him through two Parliaments, Miss Chute draws on information about Parliamentary procedures, speeches made in Parliament, and King James' apparent inability to control Parliament.<sup>30</sup> The description of Herbert's second Parliament ends abruptly, however, as Miss Chute states that for some unexplained reason Herbert suddenly left politics and became a deacon in the church. "It is not known," she writes, "when or where the ceremony occurred or what bishop officiated."<sup>31</sup> "It is not possible to know why George Herbert became a deacon."<sup>32</sup> Nevertheless, Miss Chute writes, like Herrick, George Herbert became a country parson.

After leaving Cambridge, Herrick became both a deacon and a priest in the same year, 1623. Miss Chute now, in order to develop his lengthy chosen career in the Church of England, describes aspects of his rather unorthodox life. She describes his warm relationship with Ben Johnson and his drinking fellow clerics, his contacts with the court of King Charles, his friendly and relaxed relationship with people in his country parish, and his

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<sup>30</sup>Ibid., pp. 85-92.

<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 98.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 99.

concerns over his declared vocation--writing verse. Thus Miss Chute intends to focus on her portrait of this subject by placing him in a respected career. Then by arranging the times around him she will highlight his personality and career development. Vividly describing Herrick's relationship with Jonson and other poets, Miss Chute writes that "it was apparently some time during the twenties that he became an informal member of that hard-drinking, scribbling, reverential crew of disciples known as the Tribe of Ben."<sup>33</sup> Describing other friends of Herrick, Miss Chute writes: "He belonged to a happy little band of hard-drinking clerics."<sup>34</sup> "Most of them became vicars without ceasing to frolic . . . , drinking wine and giving 'applause to verse' when their thoughts should doubtless have been on holier things."<sup>35</sup> Continuing, Miss Chute describes King Charles' court and Herrick's position as one of the Duke of Buckingham's chaplains. After he held this position, his "court songs were written for use in the Chapel Royal and were therefore devotional in nature."<sup>36</sup> Miss Chute adds

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 184.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 182.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid.

<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 200.

that, since Herrick was not primarily a "religious poet," some of the songs were not successful. Next, Miss Chute describes the countryside in which Herrick had his parish. Of Herrick's relationship with the people of the parish, Miss Chute observes that the relationship might occasionally have been "unorthodox," but it "was evidently not dull."<sup>37</sup> Herrick in one of his poems tells of happy rustics "drencht in ale or drowned in beer."<sup>38</sup> Evidently Herrick lived a long full life, for he lived to see the religious upheaval following the execution of King Charles and the ensuing Commonwealth under Cromwell. Miss Chute uses descriptions of England's second civil war to fill out the years in Herrick's religious career before quoting from the parish register of Dean Prior: "Robert Herrick, vicar, was buried the 15th day of October, 1674."<sup>39</sup>

Like Herrick, George Herbert wrote poetry during his career as a cleric. Again Miss Chute uses the poetry and the times to expand her record of Herbert's short religious career. Describing Herbert's poetry, Miss Chute reconstructs Herbert's inner feelings as well, for the

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<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 207.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid.

<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 267.



poetry "describes his loss of health, his loss of friends, and his sense that his gifts were not put to their best use."<sup>40</sup> Of Herbert's marriage in 1629, Miss Chute says: "His personal life was much happier, thanks to Jane Danvers and the love she brought him."<sup>41</sup> The two churches given to Herbert's care provide Miss Chute with additional information about the country life and about Herbert's relationship to his parishioners: "Herbert was a realist, and he knew that his congregation was likely to be more interested in weather and crops than in its relationship to God."<sup>42</sup> Herbert's career was not like the lengthy career of Herrick, for Herbert died "only one month short of his fortieth birthday, and was buried the following Sunday."<sup>43</sup>

Miss Chute makes an early comparison of the two men's lives:

George Herbert and Robert Herrick were born less than two years apart and they had several things in common. Both of them graduated from the University

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<sup>40</sup>Ibid., p. 107.

<sup>41</sup>Ibid., p. 119.

<sup>42</sup>Ibid., p. 127.

<sup>43</sup>Ibid., p. 147.

of Cambridge, both of them became country clergymen in the same year of 1630, and both of them produced a single book of poems. But the Church of England needed a wide roof to accommodate two men as unlike as the saintly rector of Bemerton and the somewhat pagan vicar of Dean Prior.<sup>44</sup>

In concluding the dual biographies, Miss Chute again makes another comparison which includes the times in which Herbert and Herrick lived, for it is the times which have provided Miss Chute enough information to write life-sized biographies of each man under one biographic title. She concludes:

George Herbert and Robert Herrick were both somewhat alien to their own century. They were gentle men in an age that was not gentle, and they refused to interfere with their neighbors at a time when interference was almost a duty. They did not try to change the world, but only to write well.

Therefore their two books endured while they themselves lay in unmarked graves.<sup>45</sup>

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<sup>44</sup>Ibid., p. 155.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 275.

## C H A P T E R     V I I

### KING OF THE JEWS: JESUS

Jesus of Israel, the last of Marchette Chute's biographies to date, follows the same format as that used for Shakespeare. Using the same approach utilized in the Shakespeare biography, Miss Chute tells her readers that the source material for this biography is strictly limited to contemporary materials.<sup>1</sup> This limits the amount of information that will be available about Jesus, but it allows the biographer to present the subject as reported and commented on by his contemporaries, and it also allows the biographer to reestablish the background and times from information coming directly from the subject's time frame. In the biography of Jesus, the major contemporary material comes from the gospels of Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John. However, as Miss Chute points out, the facts and the chronology about Jesus in the gospels may differ,

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<sup>1</sup>Marchette Chute, Jesus of Israel (New York: E. P. Dutton & Company, Inc., 1961), p. 7. This information is in the Author's Note.

yet the major outlines they offer describing the pivotal events in Jesus' life are almost the same.<sup>2</sup>

The biography of Jesus as written by Miss Chute is divided into three major life-periods. These life-periods take a narrative form and become the sequences in which she organizes and illustrates her life of Jesus. The first life-period, that of ancestry and youth, is used by Miss Chute to establish Jesus' parental heritage and the birth of Jesus as described by Matthew and Luke. The period also comprehends the activities of Jesus through age twelve. As little or no information is available in the gospels to document the period of time from Jesus' youth to that of his ministry at age thirty, Miss Chute uses the times in this section to link the first and second life-periods. The second life-period is used by Miss Chute to describe the ministry of Jesus from the time he is thirty to his death and resurrection. This period comprises Jesus' career as a teacher. The third and final life-period is used by Miss Chute to describe the death and resurrection of Jesus. Once again Miss Chute uses the narrative method to recount her subject's life and to carry

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<sup>2</sup>Ibid., p. 9.

him from birth to death. However, again because of the lack of the evidence about much of Jesus' life, interesting information about the times is substituted to facilitate transitions to and from the chronological life-pattern established for the subject. Thus Miss Chute intends to put before her readers a life-sized portrait of Jesus in the familiar surroundings of the Israel he knew and loved by dramatizing the few biographical materials available and by including the descriptions of the background and religious beliefs of the Jews with whom Jesus lived and worked.

To begin, since there is so little evidence of Jesus' life available, Miss Chute uses a description of the Jewish people and their religious beliefs to set the scene for Jesus and to prepare the reader for the kind of man that she will show Jesus to be. She starts the biography with a definition and description of the Jewish people to show how they lived at the time of Jesus. According to Miss Chute, the Jews were "a race that had always loved God."<sup>3</sup> Led by the teaching of Moses, Jews of the first century living in Palestine remained "convinced

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<sup>3</sup>Ibid., p. 19.

that they possessed a covenant with God and that they were His chosen people."<sup>4</sup> However, other nations of the world, Miss Chute shows, viewed the Jews with skepticism for this reason:

Anything alien and single-minded is always frightening, and in the practical, opportunistic world of the first century, with its many beliefs and its many gods, the Jews seemed very alien and very strange.<sup>5</sup>

By establishing now a world filled with fear about the Jews, Miss Chute can more readily suggest reasons for the historical events concerning the crucifixion of Jesus which occurred later. The Jews, however, were not deterred by the reactions of other people; indeed many Jews gave their lives to retain their religious faith, and Miss Chute gives this example:

When an alien conqueror tried to force the Jews from their religion, seven brothers died under torture in a single day, and their mother with them, because they would not consent to eat the flesh of swine.<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>Ibid., p. 20.

<sup>5</sup>Ibid.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 21.

Miss Chute establishes that from this religious fervor learned under the prophets, the Jews would soon begin to develop "a sense of world mission."<sup>7</sup> Most Jews would hope for a Savior from God to "make the whole world realize the truth of their religion."<sup>8</sup> Miss Chute now begins to prepare her readers with the logical reasons for the career and the ministry of Jesus to a nation which had great expectations about what they needed from God. Miss Chute then goes on to tell about the political forces in Judea which reinforced the Jewish desire for a Messiah and which further revealed the political climate into which Jesus was born. Since Judea at the time of Jesus' birth was under the rule of an Arab King named Herod who was responsible to Rome for his leadership, some Jews hoped the "Messiah would be a political savior,"<sup>9</sup> while other Jews expected a "supernatural being who would act under the direct authority of God."<sup>10</sup> Therefore, Miss Chute asserts, from the Jewish point of view which she has shown, a Savior

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<sup>7</sup>Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid.

<sup>9</sup>Ibid.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

was badly needed and expected "to be born of David's line."<sup>11</sup> This indeed is the land of the Jews, and these are the expectations and beliefs of the Jewish people as Miss Chute sees and describes them to her readers in order to prepare them for her description of the birth of Jesus.

Let us continue by examining Miss Chute's treatment of Jesus' parentage and the story of his birth which make up the first life-period of this biography. While evidence to document the birth of Jesus is available in the gospels, Miss Chute indicates that the accounts of the birth conflict; therefore she will use a different approach in the treatment of the biographic narrative. Instead of presenting an impartial narrative which she has followed in her other biographies, Miss Chute presents two or more of the conflicting stories from the gospels and then follows the stories with personal interpretive comments which often indicate her preference for one version of the story over the other along with the reasons for her preference. For example, both Matthew and Luke agree that the Messiah would be born of a woman called Mary and that the child would come from the house of David, although the genealogies

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<sup>11</sup>Ibid., p. 28.



the men present are different. This is not initially important, for both men tend to agree that "Joseph, the husband of Mary, is the direct descendant of King David."<sup>12</sup> The matter of Jesus' parentage is not settled, however, since both Matthew and Luke go on to state that Jesus himself stated that "the Christ was not the descendant of King David."<sup>13</sup> Furthermore, another "destructive piece of evidence ... makes the genealogical tables worthless": "The genealogical tables are based on Joseph; and both Matthew and Luke report that Jesus was born of a virgin."<sup>14</sup> Miss Chute then explores various reasons for Matthew and Luke's inclusion of the report of the virgin birth. She explains that "the story is not only contrary to all human experience but is alien to Jewish training and culture."<sup>15</sup> Since Matthew and Luke chose not to omit a story which contradicted the idea of the Messiah, Miss Chute writes:

It must have come to them backed by an authority so unshakable that it could not be ignored, and the only

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 29.

<sup>13</sup>Ibid.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 30.

human being who could have exerted this kind of authority was Mary herself. If she said that the child was born of "the holy spirit," . . . and not of any physical law, they had no choice but to believe her.<sup>16</sup>

The two accounts of the virgin birth, one given by Matthew and the other by Luke, differ, however, indicates Miss Chute. The account given by Matthew "is so brief as to seem almost reluctant."<sup>17</sup> Matthew's version shows Joseph as the main character, and Mary remains in the background. Additionally, Miss Chute states, "Matthew concerns himself with the kind of information that a man would consider important."<sup>18</sup> Luke's version of the same story contains many details "so precise . . . they would normally have come from an eyewitness."<sup>19</sup> Luke's version also "tells the story of the birth of Jesus from a woman's point of view,"<sup>20</sup> and again Miss Chute asserts that "the most obvious source for information about the birth of Jesus was Mary herself."<sup>21</sup> Therefore, by citing several other examples which

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<sup>16</sup>Ibid. Miss Chute quotes Matthew 1:18 and Luke 1:35.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>18</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid., p. 32.

<sup>20</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

<sup>21</sup>Ibid., pp. 32-33.

also show Luke's indication of recognizing Mary as the guiding force, Miss Chute indicates her preference for Luke's version of the story even though Luke's information regarding the birth of Jesus may seem inaccurate. Luke's inaccuracy, Miss Chute argues, "is the kind of inaccuracy that would be natural for a woman like Mary."<sup>22</sup> To strengthen her argument, Miss Chute has quoted Luke's own statement about the manner in which he conducts research, stating that he "investigated from their source all things accurately."<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, Miss Chute states: "Luke would certainly have consulted her [Mary] if he could, and there was apparently nothing to prevent him from having done so."<sup>24</sup>

After presenting the stories of the birth of Jesus in Bethlehem, Matthew and Luke again give conflicting stories of future events concerning Jesus, Mary, and Joseph. Luke's story relates the circumcision of Jesus at eight days of age, his presentation by Mary in the Temple at Jerusalem after her purification, and the family's

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<sup>22</sup>Ibid., p. 34.

<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 32. Miss Chute quotes Luke 1:3.

<sup>24</sup>Ibid., p. 33.

subsequent return to Nazareth. Miss Chute again shows a decided preference for Luke's story since Matthew's version of the story, which she describes telling of a flight to Egypt, is "more complicated," and also, Miss Chute stresses, Matthew "is a little inconsistent."<sup>25</sup> Thus Miss Chute states that Luke's version seems "more probable." Since little more evidence can be found at this point to describe the youth of Jesus, Miss Chute concludes this part of the life-period with quotations from several passages of Matthew to suggest what Jesus might have been doing during these early years:

Whence hath this man this wisdom, and these mighty works? Is not this the carpenter's son? Is not his mother called Mary? And his brethren, James, and Joses, and Simon, and Judas? And his sisters, are they not all with us? Whence then hath this man all these things?<sup>26</sup>

These passages reveal to the reader, Miss Chute explains, that Jesus was probably starting his ministry. Using the quotation in this way also allows Miss Chute to suggest

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<sup>25</sup>Ibid., p. 38.

<sup>26</sup>Ibid., p. 39. Miss Chute quotes this passage from Matthew 13: 54-56. Since her quotations follow the King James Version, the quotation cites "Joses" for the commonly known name of Joseph.

the movement of time without seeming to omit the activities of her subject. The only evidence of Jesus' activities she presents, other than these remarks recorded by Matthew, is a short description of Luke's passage on Jesus' ability to speak to his elders at twelve when he neglected to return home with his parents after the annual trip to Jerusalem for the feast of the Passover and was found in the temple talking and questioning the doctors.

Since so little evidence can be found about the life of Jesus from age twelve until the years of his ministry which begin when he is about thirty, Miss Chute in her characteristic way fills in the missing years with a description of the family life of Jews who were living around Galilee. The generalized descriptions of life in small rural villages of the first century suggest what life for Jesus might have been like since Jesus lived in Galilee during this period and traveled in this area during his later ministry. Miss Chute begins this section by describing rural Jews as "an agricultural people, still moving to the ancient rhythms of seedtime and harvest that Jesus used as the basis of so many of his parables."<sup>27</sup> Within the Jewish family unit, as Miss Chute describes it,

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<sup>27</sup>Ibid., p. 43.

the mother would maintain "from generation to generation the continuity of domestic ritual that surrounded a Jewish child as soon as it was born."<sup>28</sup> The children in the family would participate in all its ceremonies, for "their whole way of life was based on the word of God, and since it was a written word, the education of their children was deeply important to the Jews."<sup>29</sup> These Jews would place great emphasis on learning and studying the Jewish Law, according to Miss Chute, and the chief place to study the Law "was the synagogue."<sup>30</sup> The synagogue, as now established by Miss Chute, becomes the visible link to the second life-period of Jesus, since it would be the place where he would do most of his teaching.

Indeed, the description of the teachings of Jesus, both in and out of the synagogue, make up Miss Chute's second life-period of Jesus in this biography. However, before focusing completely on the anecdotes which are used to present the career and character of Jesus, Miss Chute digresses through a limited discussion of the

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<sup>28</sup>Ibid., p. 45.

<sup>29</sup>Ibid., p. 46.

<sup>30</sup>Ibid.

four gospels, which, she believes, hint strongly of future misunderstandings between Jesus and the Jews and thus foreshadow the eventual death of Jesus. Pointing at the seriousness of the unorthodoxy of Jesus as seen by his friends, Miss Chute writes:

In the Fourth Gospel . . . his position is both so unorthodox and so clear that it appalled the Jews who were talking to him . . . . They were men . . . who were ready to become his followers. But they disagreed with him so completely about the nature of God that in the end they tried to stone him for blasphemy.<sup>31</sup>

While the Jewish people awaited a Savior, Jesus was not the man they expected, Miss Chute shows. Using quotations from the gospels built into clever anecdotes and conversations from here on in the biography, Miss Chute designs the final picture of her subject by showing the last stage of his career, his ministry. He went throughout Galilee, she tells us, claiming nothing for himself, but healing and teaching others. Jesus was asked if he was the promised Messiah: "Art thou he that should come, or do we look for another?"<sup>32</sup> Miss Chute phrases the reply of

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<sup>31</sup>Ibid., p. 58.

<sup>32</sup>Ibid., p. 72. Miss Chute quotes Matthew 11:3.

Jesus in yet another quotation: "Go and show John again those things which ye do hear and see: the blind receive their sight, and the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, and the deaf hear, the dead are raised up."<sup>33</sup> Through further quotations, Miss Chute offers statements which show the Jews' divided opinions about Jesus. "Many of them said, 'He hath a devil, and is mad; why hear ye him?' Others said, 'These are not the words of him that hath a devil. Can a devil open the eyes of the blind?'"<sup>34</sup> Yet, Miss Chute shows that the Jews failed to understand the teachings of Jesus, as she tells her readers:

It was not because they failed in their love of God that the Jews persecuted their greatest prophets; it was because they clung too narrowly to their own sense of truth . . . . They were convinced that they already possessed the full truth about God, to which nothing could be added; and when Jesus presented his own discovery to the people, they could not see that this was the illumination that had been promised.<sup>35</sup>

Strong religious beliefs of this kind cause the death of Jesus, Miss Chute suggests.

Some biographers in the past dwelt on the death scene or in their accounts of it moralized about their

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<sup>33</sup>Ibid. Miss Chute quotes Matthew 11:4-5.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 86. Miss Chute quotes John 10:20-21.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 88.



subject, but Miss Chute in the third and final life-period describes the crucifixion and death of Jesus to her readers simply. She has already described the Jewish council's dilemma about Jesus. Only one sentence more is used to reveal and describe the punishment set by Pontius Pilate for Jesus after Jesus' examination by the council: "Jesus underwent the usual punishment for all convicted malefactors of this type--the scourging, the carrying of the cross and the actual crucifixion."<sup>36</sup> The death scene is presented briefly and Miss Chute cites the quotation of Jesus as recorded by John: "It is finished,"<sup>37</sup> Jesus says and dies. Historical documentation about Jesus gives Miss Chute little evidence with which to make final definitive statements about the resurrection of Jesus, and she adds: "There have been many attempts to explain away the resurrection of Jesus."<sup>38</sup> Testimonial evidence, however, does come from the Acts, which tell of the reactions of the disciples after the resurrection. One of the most poignant quotations used by Miss Chute to draw this biography to

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 108.

<sup>37</sup>Ibid., p. 110. Miss Chute quotes John 19:30.

<sup>38</sup>Ibid., p. 113.

a close is Peter's message about Jesus of Nazareth which shows that Peter believed that Jesus "had not been destroyed by the crucifixion."<sup>39</sup> The quotation cited is that Jesus was "a man approved of God . . . whom God hath raised up, having loosed the pains of death; because it was not possible that he should be held by it."<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>39</sup>Ibid., p. 114. Miss Chute quotes Acts 2:22-24.

<sup>40</sup>Ibid.

## C H A P T E R     V I I I

### CONCLUSION

This study of Marchette Chute's works concludes with some reflections about her methodology. Both new and old methods of biographical writing are evident in Miss Chute's writings. Encouraged by Lytton Strachey et al. to break away from traditional styles and methods and to experiment with new forms and techniques,<sup>1</sup> many biographers tried new paths in the art of life-writing. Strachey stated that quality of material rather than quantity should be the criteria which guides the biographer in his artistic studies. This criteria suggests that since a quantity of information about the biographical subject is not a necessity, a biographer with limited evidence, like Marchette Chute, should feel free to explore new methods to supplement and support the life material. Strachey observed this license in his full length biography of Elizabeth and Essex, since limited evidence caused him to experiment with fiction and Freudian psychology to create a life-sized portrait.

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<sup>1</sup>Supra, pp. 17-18.

Let us first consider some of the new methods of biographical writing which are evident in Miss Chute's works. Although Miss Chute employs traditional methods, she too has been encouraged to find and exhibit her own manner of dealing with biographical evidence. Seeking her own version of the truth about each of her subjects, Miss Chute of course uses the "facts" about her subjects to make her subjects come alive, but she also experiments with using nonbiographical facts--the times, for example--to expand and fill out those areas in the subject's life where little or no evidence exists. The times--that is, historical evidence about institutions, traditions, and values of the biographical subject's world--as used by Miss Chute serve as artistic arrangements which shape the biographical life-sized portraits she desires. In the Chaucer biography with the help of a series of pictures of life in fourteenth century England, Miss Chute has helped to make the reader see Chaucer, a man of medieval heritage, growing up in a "controlled" environment, and going about his daily routine in government service, challenging in his literary career the traditional institutions that gripped him. Focusing on the rich life of the Elizabethan theatre in the Shakespearean biography, she has captured the vitality and thinking of men who spent their lives on the stage

entertaining others. Within this well constructed atmosphere, Miss Chute introduces as her subject an author-actor-gentleman who is pleasantly regarded and well liked by his fellow actors, as the best evidence shows Shakespeare was. Using sketches of political and religious structures of the seventeenth century to expand the material needed for the Herbert and Herrick biographies, Miss Chute shows her subjects as silhouettes against a turbulent historical background, yet her subjects are soon moved to the countryside, far removed from busy city life when they both retired to rustic country parishes. Jonson's biography highlights the most lively of Miss Chute's subjects, but the magnificent background furnished by the Jacobean court allows her to capture artistically the spirit of the times. Perhaps Jonson's life materials lent themselves better to the biographical method used to present his life, for he comes alive with greater vigor than any of the other subjects. By carefully researching the historical period in which each of her subjects lived and by skillfully shaping and integrating this background material with the biographical life material, Miss Chute recreates the world in which her subjects have their being, and thereby the probable individual past is captured in the light of circumambient actuality.

Another new method offered to modern biographers is the thematic technique described by Altick.<sup>2</sup> Use of the thematic device as used by novelists is demonstrated by Miss Chute in several of her biographies. In the Chaucer biography, the medieval church becomes the vehicle which exerts influence on man's inner and outward behavior patterns from his birth to his death. Throughout Chaucer's life story, Miss Chute artistically weaves the theme of religious influence which is shown in Chaucer's literary career as he struggles toward the development of his poetic art. Thus information revealing the church and religion not only fleshes out the biography (as background material) but also serves to create literary interest through Miss Chute's thematic use of it in character interpretation. The religious theme is also evident in the Herbert and Herrick biographies. Citing evidence of Herbert's strong religious inclinations which culminate in his religious career, Miss Chute details the religious theme found in his poetry. Herrick also heeds a religious calling, but Miss Chute uses the religious theme to contrast the traditional religious behavior expected by the Church of England

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<sup>2</sup>Supra, pp. 29-30.

with Herrick's own unorthodox interpretation of what that religious expectation entailed, much of which is also evident in his poetical works. In the biography of Jesus, the religious theme of the Jewish religion is reflected in the anticipation of the Jewish people and in the effect of Jesus' teachings. Classicism as learned by Jonson in his early educational experiences and training at Westminster School becomes the theme developed throughout Jonson's life story. His unquenchable desire to revive classicism in his plays and in his poetry is evident in his lifelong literary career. Ambition to rise in the world and attain the status of gentleman is the theme established in the Shakespearean biography. William Shakespeare inherits this ambition from his father and develops it successfully in his acting and writing career in London.

Yet another new method available to modern biographers is the integration of the subject's works with the life material as suggested by Edel.<sup>3</sup> Marchette Chute makes very limited use of the literary works for psychological

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<sup>3</sup>Supra, pp. 27-28.

analysis. Yet her literary analyses do serve to fill in the gaps in the life where biographical material about the subject is scarce or unavailable. On a more superficial level the analysis relates the man to his family, the Church, the court, the university, the theatre, etc. Since evidence about Chaucer was so scarce, Miss Chute paraphrased, summarized, and made a limited critical analysis of many of his literary works, but the works were introduced mainly to act as filler material which was juxtaposed to the scanty evidence about Chaucer's life and were not used as the means with which to develop an insight into Chaucer's personality. But they serve the literary purpose of extending and connecting Chaucer to the Church. The works are omitted as a literary device in the Shakespeare biography, but are again used in the Jonson biography where Miss Chute uses verses and lines from Jonson's plays and poetry throughout the work. However, once again as in the Chaucer biography, the works cited in the Jonson biography as well as those cited in the Herbert and Herrick biographies serve the primary purpose of filling out the material needed to establish a life-sized portrait of the subject, rather than serving the new method of psychological interpretation which is



intended to show new insights into the subject and which many modern biographers favor.

Some modern biographers stress the importance of research.<sup>4</sup> It is not a new method--Plutarch did extensive research--but Strachey and all modern biographers emphasize its importance. Research is one of Miss Chute's strong points even if we limit our examination to her (nine page average) bibliographies which suggest extensive use of the times (mainly chronicles). Additionally, all of her biographies carry lengthy indexes, as well as the bibliographies, with the exception of the biography on Jesus which carries neither. Further information about the Sonnets, the legends surrounding Shakespeare, and information about the folios can be found in appendixes to the Shakespeare volume; information about Izaak Walton's biography of Herbert can be found in the Appendix to the Herbert and Herrick volume. Several of the biographies present a few content footnotes, but for the most part footnotes are visibly absent, a fact which may deter the scholar. However, it should be noted that the text itself makes many references which provide names of documents

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<sup>4</sup>Supra, p. 26.

and records and other pertinent evidence which may have been used in the life story.

Other modern biographers suggest that the biographer needs a point of view.<sup>5</sup> Miss Chute also uses a new perspective or point of view in the Shakespeare and Jesus biographies, for in these volumes she has limited the evidence to contemporary documents, which she feels will present the best view of her subjects. Another modern biographer suggests the use of testimony by friends and enemies of the subject.<sup>6</sup> Much of the evidence found in the Gospels (Matthew, Mark, Luke, and John) and used by Miss Chute in the biography of Jesus is the reflective testimony of men who knew Jesus personally. Limited testimonials are evident in the other biographies with the exception of the Jonson volume, which uses many testimonials. Perhaps, since more evidence was available about Jonson's life, this accounts for the fact that more testimonials were used.

Now, let us consider some of the more definitely traditional methods of biographical writing which are

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<sup>5</sup>Supra, pp. 29-30.

<sup>6</sup>Supra, p. 22.

evident in Miss Chute's works. The basic traditional method Miss Chute has chosen for all six of her biographic studies is that of "life and times." Traditional biographies known as "life and time" biographies combined descriptions of the times with the life material, but often the biography's shape became more of a "times" than life with the evidence about the times superseding and often overshadowing the evidence about the life. Modern biographers have pointed to this imbalance,<sup>7</sup> noting that the times were often used as padding rather than as integrated background material. While Miss Chute has used a good deal of "times" evidence within her biographies, she has made a concentrated effort to artistically link and integrate the evidence with the life material as she saw fit, while "trying" at the same time to present the truth as she saw it. Early biographers like Plutarch often used a traditional form in presenting the life materials: ancestry, birth, youth, character, and career. Miss Chute basically uses the same form in treating each of her biographical subjects, as has been shown in the several analyses of her books. Early biographers also traditionally selected heroes as their biographical candidates. Five of

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<sup>7</sup>Supra, p. 30.

Miss Chute's biographical studies have been literary heroes, but she has used "new methods" of biographical writing to show them as common men. The "times" approach as she uses it practically assumes a positive relation of the individual subject to the common shaping forces and mores.

Finally, let us consider some of the traditional methods of biographical writing used in the ancient world which still exist today<sup>8</sup> which are evident in Miss Chute's works. Biographers, old and new, have often written about their friends. In the biography of Jesus, Miss Chute has cited the Gospels written by friends who knew Jesus well. So in a sense this biography reflects the views of Jesus' contemporaries as they recorded their feelings and observations about him. Biographers, old and new, have written biographies for their own satisfaction. Miss Chute too has expressed satisfaction in writing her biographies and a "sense of excitement" while she is writing that "lasts through all the years of research."<sup>9</sup> Biographers, old and new, have also written biographies to satisfy demands of the reading public. Miss Chute has

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<sup>8</sup>Supra, pp. 30-31.

<sup>9</sup>Chute, "Shakespeare of London," p. 35.

written the biographies about literary subjects for adult readers and the biography of Jesus for young people and adults. All of these works can be considered "popular" biography since they are aimed primarily at the literate reader. The biography on Shakespeare was and continues to be a recognized success with the reading public, justifiably so, since it made the best seller list. Miss Chute's nonspecialist approaches to her subjects in these biographies point to her aiming at general nonspecialist readers.

Therefore, Marchette Chute has basically used the traditional "life and times" method of writing biography, following the traditional narrative form, to create the illusion of life-sized portraits of each of her subjects. But using the license of a new biographer, she has also shown her skill as an artist in carefully shaping and arranging the traditional "times" material to create biographies which the reader will find interesting and enjoyable.

## B I B L I O G R A P H Y

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