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Rob Pope. *How to Study Chaucer*. 2nd edition. New York: St. Martin's, 2001. 223p.

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Rob Pope wants his book to help readers of Chaucer do two things: read Chaucer in the original Middle English, and develop their own critical judgment about his poetry and how it works. Pope's two basic goals are particularly ambitious when one considers the heterogeneity of Chaucer studies, but I have no doubt that his book does everything it claims. Recently, I read the 2nd edition of Pope's text while teaching my biannual Chaucer class. Although the book is written to be especially valuable for beginning readers of Chaucer, it reminds any reader of a wealth of information concerning Chaucer the Man, the Work, and the Exam. This book is helpful to beginning students, graduate students, and all readers who want to remember what their problems were (or might have been) upon first encountering Chaucer.

Pope's section on "How to Read Five Lines of Chaucer" is a no-nonsense approach to teaching students that they can extract meaning from any Chaucerian text using just a few simple strategies. Pope's appendix, "The 'Top 100' Most Commonly Misunderstood Words in Chaucer," enables students to feel confident that they can make sense of what, at the start of their reading, often seems like a foreign language. The background provided on Chaucer and his world and the reception of Chaucer's work is also useful for students developing an understanding of historical context. After the initial chapters on how to start reading Chaucer and the General Prologue, Pope launches into an extended analysis of how to read the *Knight's Tale*, intended to show students a reliable method of interpreting any of the *Canterbury Tales*. His seven steps to understanding a tale ("What kind of work am I studying?"; "What is it about?"; "Looking at Characterization"; "Developing the Argument"; "Relating the Tale to its Teller"; "Seeing the Text in Context"; and "Analyzing the Style") provide the reader with different ways to search for meaning within any of the tales. In a subsequent chapter, Pope provides the same questions with abbreviated answers for each of the *Canterbury Tales*, encouraging students to generate their own extended answers to the questions which most interest them.

Pope's book makes clear that there are still many engaging questions in Chaucer criticism and gives the students a means to appreciate the importance of the different controversies, while helping them develop basic comprehension skills and introducing them to some of the principal arguments surrounding each tale. The

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book is almost entirely focused on the *Canterbury Tales*, although the information would be easily transferable to other Chaucerian works. The text provides some help with Chaucer's *Parliament of Fowls* and other dream poems, and *Troilus and Criseyde*, but the emphasis of this student-friendly text is on understanding the most important pieces of Chaucer's work (in terms of a traditional University setting).

Pope's chapter on preparing for an exam on Chaucer takes students through a step-by-step argument to answer some typical exam questions (at the undergraduate or graduate level). His advice would certainly aid students concerned about passing a Chaucer final or comprehensive exam. In fact, his brief outlining of responses to possible questions would do much to improve students' logical argumentation on any literature exam question. Additionally Pope's chapter on "Common Topics and Debates" introduces students to some of the traditionally important critical discussions of recurrent issues in the Chaucerian canon across different tales and works.

Students who read Pope's work will find an organized and thoughtful way to develop their own reading of the *Canterbury Tales* and will have a good idea of how to work with Chaucer's other texts. Pope's style is clear and instructive while allowing students to experience for themselves the joy of understanding Chaucer. Students who use this text are well on their way to developing the skills necessary to engage in intelligent scholarly discussion and research. One area where Pope's book may seem a little weak is its bibliography, containing fewer than 50 secondary sources, but the exemplary texts he includes would undoubtedly be of use to beginning students. The few students to whom I lent this text all found very positive things to say about its clarity, level of coverage, and commitment to issues important to students. You can't ask for much more from a text written for readers new to Middle English. ✱