


**Kano, Koichi, ed. 2022. *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos*.
チヨ一サー巡礼:古典の遺産と中世の新しい息吹きに導かれて. Tokyo:
Yushokan. Pp. xvi + 548. ISBN 9784865820478.**

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A receiver of the Order of the Sacred Treasure, Gold Rays with Neck Ribbon awarded by the Japan Cabinet Office, the late Tadahiro Ikegami (1932–2018) for a long period led the scholarship on medieval English literature in Japan. Among his many other scholarly achievements, he is especially known for translating William Langland's *A Vision of Piers Plowman* into Japanese for the first time (Ikegami 1975). More recently, *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos*, which is a bulky volume, well exceeding five hundred pages, wrapped in a beautiful paper cover that reproduces a sixteenth-century portrait of Chaucer and uses an image of a folio from London, British Library, Harley MS 1758, names Ikegami as its planner, followed by Koichi Kano as its editor.

This book consists of thirteen chapters, each written by one or two different authors, followed by “A Chronology of Events Related to Chaucer” and a bibliography. The thirteen chapters are grouped into three parts, beginning with accounts of Chaucer's life, the manuscripts and early printed books of his masterpiece, *The Canterbury Tales*, and his Middle English (Part I: Chapters 1–3); proceeding with an exposition of the broader context, including the traditions of European literature (Part II: Chapters 4–10); and exploring English society and culture in the age of Chaucer (Part III: Chapters 11–13).

The preface sets out that this volume is a companion to Chaucer and his works, especially *The Canterbury Tales*, along with their historical contexts (i). To appraise *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos* appropriately in the context of its making, however, attention should also be paid to the way this volume was initially planned and the way it took shape. According to a postscript by Kano, the essays were intended to constitute the notes section of the Japanese translation of the *Canterbury Tales*, which was at the time being planned by Ikegami (511). When the essay drafts were collected, however, their total length exceeded that suitable for their inclusion as notes accompanying the translation in one volume (511). After Ikegami passed, Kano and other stakeholders ultimately decided to publish the Japanese translation (Ikegami 2021) separately from the essays, which then took shape as a sister volume, namely *An Invitation to Chaucer's*

Cosmos (511). This at least partly explains the reason for the latter volume's peculiar organization as a companion to Chaucer: Unlike similar companions to Chaucer or his *Canterbury Tales* in English, no chapter concentrates on reading one or a few of his texts; instead, the volume as a whole explores the literary, cultural, and social backgrounds of Chaucer. Somewhat addressing this, Kano suggests in the postscript that Ikegami may have intended to produce a kind of encyclopedia on Chaucer (511). Despite the peculiarity of its contents, I found reading this volume quite useful and exciting, as I will discuss. It would have been too lengthy to give my detailed opinions on all its chapters, but particular comments are offered on a couple of selected chapters in what follows.

Chapter 1, "Chaucer's Life," by Masatoshi Kawasaki and Koichi Kano, is a well-investigated account of the life of Chaucer both as a poet and a court clerk. We may have a Japanese translation of the poet's biography in English (Brewer 2010), but this is one of the most detailed scholarly biographies of Chaucer originally written in Japanese that have ever been published to date, with notable exceptions by Okuda (2003, 2024). It makes for profitable reading not only for beginners but also for the experts of Chaucer studies, providing a precise account with many important details of his life, which are known from the historical records compiled by Crow and Olson (1966) and the established English biographies, especially that by Pearsall (1992). In particular, concise accounts of some public offices and certain roles in the medieval household are useful; for example, I learned much from its account of what a page was responsible for at the time, which follows a reference to Chaucer's service to Elizabeth, Countess of Ulster, as her page (10). This chapter also makes an ambitious attempt to identify Chaucer's prudence and what it calls his "detached attitude" toward the world as essential constituents of his personality (4), and it discusses how such personality is reflected in his works (33, 43). As Kawasaki and Kano recognize, public records rarely reveal a person's character (44), and yet they make a good effort to articulate the poet's personality in connecting his literary achievements with his public life.

Moreover, this chapter often explains what likely details about Chaucer can be gleaned from known sources, rather than merely listing the established facts *per se*. For instance, it explains that we can assume Chaucer was born before 1345 based on a document concerning a lawsuit known as the Scrope-Grosvenor controversy (5). These are not only useful references but also a good invitation for readers to consider the biography of Chaucer based on the primary materials. Indeed, the final section (44–47), with an effective quotation from Evans (2005, 23) on the future possibilities for Chaucer's biography (46–47), frames this biography as a creative field that is still developing in multiple ways. The reference in the preceding section to the possibility that Chaucer may have had daughters adds to this effect (41–42). The dynamism of Chaucer's biography as a

field of research is also illustrated by the discovery of new documents concerning Chaucer's *raptus*—published in a special issue of *The Chaucer Review* just after the publication of *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos* (Roger and Sobecki 2022)—which shed new light on the matter, discussed in a section of this chapter (25–27).

Chapter 2, “The Manuscripts and Early Printed Books of *The Canterbury Tales*” by Yoshiyuki Nakao and Tadahiro Ikegami then discusses the production of manuscripts in the late Middle Ages, the history of textual criticism of *The Canterbury Tales* up to the Riverside edition (Benson 1987), and variant readings and different orders of the tales in important manuscripts, early printed books, and scholarly editions of the work. With a broad scope to its discussion, this chapter contains a great deal of useful information for scholars attentive to these issues; although, in my view, it may generally seem inaccessible to students given the use of insufficiently explained technical terminologies and swift shifts between topics.¹ Yet, in particular, Nakao and Ikegami make an important argument concerning the text of *The Canterbury Tales*, partly based on Moore (2011). They point out that neither quotation marks nor other forms of grammatical punctuation were employed in medieval manuscripts (58–59, 62), and because of this, the distinctions that could be made between direct and indirect speech, as well as phrase and sentence divisions, would originally have been ambiguous and flexible (62–64, 85). This goes against the modern interpretive practice in which critics prefer to decide which reading is correct. Nakao and Ikegami thus persuasively argue that, as they summarize in the final section of this chapter, recognizing such ambiguity and flexibility inherent in the manuscripts of *The Canterbury Tales* is crucial to gaining a better understanding of Chaucer's masterpiece. Therefore, they propose that literary critics should set aside their practice of solely depending on a modern edition for their interpretive studies (85). In addition, they rightly point out that any variation within a text could have occurred as a result of one of many factors or a complex array of factors (57). With this in mind, the future publication of a “multi-layered parallel text” to *The Canterbury Tales* (59)—an electronic text being developed by researchers including Nakao, which compiles readings of the Hengwrt manuscript, the Ellesmere manuscript, William Caxton's two editions, and two modern editions (Blake 1980; Benson 1987)—should mark a highly important advancement in textual and literary criticism of the work.

It is also notable that Nakao and Ikegami consider the nature of Chaucer's lost original. They refer to the studies, such as those by Stubbs (2007) and Da Rold (2011), that assert that Adam Pinkhurst, Scribe D—thus named by Doyle and Parks (1978)—and perhaps Chaucer himself, worked together closely in

¹ For students who wish to further study the issues covered by Chapter 2 in Japanese, in addition to the works listed at the end of the chapter (91), I also recommend reading Matsuda (2015).

producing early copies of *The Canterbury Tales*, and that production of the two related manuscripts—Aberystwyth, National Library of Wales, Peniarth 392 D, Hengwrt MS 154 and Oxford, Corpus Christi College, MS 198—was supervised by the poet (81). Nakao and Ikegami go on to pose a question: Given that it seems copies supervised by the author himself have survived, why has his autograph not survived? (81). Nakao and Ikegami propose that Chaucer's original may have been a "foul copy" filled with numerous revisions, additions, and notes from which each of his scribes was to make choices to produce their "fair copy" (81–82). Here, Nakao and Ikegami seem to claim that Chaucer's language may originally have afforded copyists a range of choices. It must be noted that Nakao and Ikegami's theory concerning Chaucer's lost original remains speculation because it is not supported by any solid evidence. Still, their theory is noteworthy as it is a significant alternative view to the conventional critical assumption that the authorial text was a single, unambiguous version. Indeed, the fact that the Hengwrt and Ellesmere manuscripts each present a distinct version even though both were copied by Adam Pinkhurst, a scribe likely to have been in a close contact with the author, not only implies the difference in the scribe's editorial attitude between these productions, as they point out (60), but also potentially questions such assumption concerning Chaucer's original. Along with Stubb's analysis regarding the process of producing early copies of *The Canterbury Tales* (2007), Nakao and Ikegami's argument encourages new thinking about the nature of the author's original.

I have dedicated much space here to commenting on the first two chapters because they discuss Chaucer and topical issues concerning his masterpiece most directly. While I cannot review the other chapters in detail at present, I would like to briefly give two additional comments: Of the chapters in Part II, I am particularly impressed by Yoshihiro Wajimoto's comprehensive account of Anglo-Norman literature (Chapter 8). Students studying Chaucer will also find it useful to read Koichi Kano's concise account of the influence of the three medieval Italian poets (i.e., Dante, Petrarch, and Boccaccio) on Chaucer (Chapter 9, 261–71).

In considering the volume as a whole, room for possible improvement lies in the organization of chapters. Chapter 4, "Chaucer and the Medieval European Literary Tradition," by Tadahiro Ikegami and Hisashi Sugito, explains how the poet encountered French, Latin, and Italian literature either in England or during his journeys to the Continent and incorporated those in creating his original works over the course of his life. This chapter is an interesting read, but the information it provides significantly overlaps with that in Chapter 1, despite each painting a distinct portrait of the poet. On the one hand, reading and comparing two accounts of the life of Chaucer and his European literary influences in a single volume, each with a different articulation, is enjoyable and even helpful for

deepening our understanding of these topics. On the other hand, including such similar chapters unnecessarily adds pages to this already voluminous research companion. Perhaps the editor should have considered that Chapter 4 is a revised version of Ikegami (2004), as it declares (146).

The range of subject matter covered by this volume may also have been refined by considering its relationship to the title, *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos*. While the volume's tripartite organization, as summarized above, gives a fair entry into this cosmos, I propose that there is still much of the cosmos to be explored. The final two chapters of Part III expound on the styles of fine art in fourteenth-century Europe (Chapter 12, by Yoriko Sato) and on music in medieval Europe (Chapter 13, by Masao Ishita). These chapters represent the farthest reach in this volume's scope of discussion. They are not specifically about the works of art and musical pieces that Chaucer would have seen or listened to, but more generally about the arts and music of his time. I think these chapters are of interest to many readers and certainly worth including in this volume. However, it seems to me that they should have been accompanied by ones expounding on subjects that are more transparently related to the works of Chaucer, such as medieval astronomy and physiology. Chapters on such subjects in Japanese would be quite useful for various readers, even if they may appear all too classical to some Chaucerian specialists.

This critique of mine partly stems from the gap between the range of the subject matter covered and that which the volume's title implies. With its English title, *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos*, one may well expect a fuller range of intellectual subjects that Chaucer knew and drew on, including those categorized under the natural sciences today. One reason for this discrepancy may be that the English title is not a literal translation of the Japanese title of this volume, the phrasing of which bears a somewhat literary flavor. *Chōsā junrei: Koten no isan to chūsei no atarashii ibuki ni michibikarete* can be literally translated as "A Pilgrimage to Chaucer: Led by the Heritage of the Classics and a Breath of Fresh Air of the Middle Ages," or with the first part of the title translated as "Chaucer the Pilgrim" or "Chaucer's Pilgrimage." In the phrase "the Heritage of the Classics" from this Japanese title, one can find a hint of the volume's main focus on the poet's European literary heritage. Still, one will only learn that the book, in particular, takes *The Canterbury Tales* into account in its substantial discussion, instead of including all known works of Chaucer, when reading the preface.

Despite such structural issues, this is a very useful volume for Japanese scholars, students, and general readers interested in Chaucer and late medieval English literature and culture. In praising it, I wish to highlight the great importance of continuing to publish readable companions to medieval English literature in Japanese. The scholarly trend over the past thirty years has been a

shrinkage in the number of Japanese academics specializing in medieval English literature, alongside a decrease in the opportunities for college students to study medieval English language and literature in the country. To counter this trend, action should now be taken to nurture young researchers in medieval English literature in Japan and to increase this field's appeal to the general public. While there are multiple recent publications in English that introduce Chaucer and/or late medieval English literature and culture, and one may think reading them would suffice, that would only be the case if college students in Japan could discuss what they have read in such English companion volumes with classmates and instructors, to check their comprehension and deepen their thinking in a taught module. Currently, however, these opportunities are not available for many students, and studying the subject by reading such English volumes independently is quite challenging. In this context, a more accessible companion, at least in terms of language, is needed to reach a wider readership at various levels of English proficiency and preliminary knowledge. Published materials in Japanese authored by experts in late medieval English literature and related fields will help to improve this situation. For one, *An Invitation to Chaucer's Cosmos* will certainly offer a helpful aid to students who wish to study late medieval English literature and culture, while also satisfying the interests of general readers and encouraging their further exploration of the subject.

Its editor, Koichi Kano, and fourteen other contributors—including Tadahiro Ikegami, the planner himself—have succeeded in seeing through the ambitious project initiated by this late, great scholar. In my opinion, this volume makes for valuable reading, and it will continue to do so for generations to come.

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