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## Synopses

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## SYNOPSIS

## “MEDE” AND “MERCEDE”

— On the Character of Lady Mede in *Piers the Plowman* —

*Isamu Saito*

Passus II, III and IV of the B-text of *Piers the Plowman* is generally known as “the episode of Lady Mede.”

Throughout the episode her characterization is presented by three persons: Lady Holy Church, Theology and Conscience. Of the three, Conscience is most elaborate and convincing in his characterization of Lady Mede, following mainly the same line as Holy Church. Conscience says that she is a personification of bribery, a materialization of cupidity. In spite of Conscience's characterization of Mede there is another one done by Theology, which describes her as born of “Amend” (Reward) and as one to be granted “Treuthe” by God. The name “Mede” is thus introduced in both its good and bad aspects in a single episode. Conscience introduces her abusively, while Theology does so favourably. Hence the difficulties in satisfactorily characterizing Lady Mede.

The character of Lady Mede, though it seems, to the casual readers, to be so inconsistent and ambiguous, does not lack consistency. It becomes clearer when Conscience, at the end of the episode, makes comments on the meaning of the term “mede.” Conscience says that there are two things that can rightly be called by the name of “mede.” One is the heavenly reward of God, and the other, the reward given to the wrongdoer, which is emphatically called “mede mesureless,” and properly applied to the character of Lady Mede. “Mede” (*i. e.*

“mede mesureles”) in this sense is in keeping with Mede’s actions as we have observed.

The examination of the use of the term “mede” in the C-text will make Conscience’s intention even clearer. In the B-text, reward, both heavenly and earthly, is expressed by one and the same term “mede”, so we are apt to think that Lady Mede has dual character. In the C-text, however, a new term “mercede” is introduced as distinguishable from “mede.” By the term “mercede” is designated the proportionate and legitimate payment or reward based on “love.” Thus it follows that Lady Mede, as an allegorical character, plays her allegorical part as properly as her name “mede” denotes. Lady Mede is literally Lady “Mede,” but not Lady “Mercede.”

CHAUCER: *THE MERCHANT'S TALE*

— An Exegetical Interpretation —

*Seiki Kinjo*

The poetic genius of Chaucer has been felt to lie in his portrayal and presentation of human nature in individualized men and women from most corners of medieval British society. This view of Chaucer as the realist has been recently challenged by those who adhere to the allegorical approach to medieval literature. They argue that medieval literary theory is closely connected with the allegorical method of Biblical exegesis and that all serious poetry is always dependent upon Christian doctrine, often hidden as *sententia*.

Relying on the principle of approach and some derivative materials given by Professor D. W. Robertson, Jr., this brief paper tries to read *The Merchant's Tale* as an allegorical tale with medieval Christian teaching.

The Merchant's long encomium of marriage sets the moral tone of *The Tale*. January's sudden desire to terminate his long cherished bachelorhood springs from essentially the same motivation which governed all of his long life: carnal desire. His "paradyse terrestre" is in physical indulgence. The wife, described in the images of material wealth and food, is no more than a formally sanctified prostitute. This attitude toward marriage, devoid of any spiritual love, is, in the Augustinian conception, an abuse of marriage. The Christian Fathers regarded it as a grave sin, a crime even. January shows every symptom of an "up-so-down" man. His reference to the man-wife relationship in terms of the Christ-church relationship, together with the soul-body contrast shown, suggests the basic medieval conception of hierarchical

order and its destruction in himself. He is to "werke after his wyves reed," abandoning the man's duty as superior in intellect and wisdom to wife. His invitation to profane love, made in the language of the *Song of Solomon*, strictly keeping to the physical level of meaning, suggests the existence of the world of divine love and his complete blindness to it. January's fall follows the commonly believed process of the Fall of man. His vow to Venus at the wedding further suggests that his marriage is no more than the abuse of the sacred institution. His later excessive jealousy is a form of passion regarded as an adjunct of carnal love. The catastrophic ending of the tale is illustrative of the consequences of "men who desire evil things." January is under illusion and deception as the consequences of his evil desires when he happily sends May up in the pear tree and when he proves most pliable in swallowing her unbelievable explanation of her unmentionable behavior in the tree.

The Augustinian concept of the charity-cupidity dichotomy embodies the heart of medieval Christian doctrine. Christian theologians also traditionally regarded woman as a figure of flesh and sense which tempts man (reason and soul). Surrender of soul to sense results in the fall. The unfortunate fall of January is a natural consequence of a man who succumbs to idolatrous adultery, a topological form of cupidity.

WHAT IS TRAGIC IN *OTHELLO* ?

“Not Wisely, But Too Well”

*Yasuko Shiojiri*

The phrase “one that lov'd not wisely, but too well” (V. ii. 418) provides an excellent key to the question: “What is tragic in *Othello*?” Close psychological scrutiny of this line reveals the ultimate cause of Othello's tragedy, the universal human limitation in him. The Bradleyan view and the modern ironical interpretations put forward by such critics as F. R. Leavis, Heilman and Leo Kirschbaum, seem unsatisfactory. Iago's plot which is his “character in action,” Cassio's petty sense of honor, Roderigo's feeble will-power, Emilia's stupidity, Desdemona's naiveté—all these are manifestations of the same universal human limitation and collaborate to bring about the catastrophe.

Inspired by aspiration for the ideal, Othello challenges human limitation in himself and in others. This challenge, which is the source of his tragic dignity, constitutes the driving force of the play. The main conflict of the play is a conflict between aspiration for the ideal and human limitation. It takes two forms, outer and inner. The inner conflict becomes remarkable as the collapse of the ideal image of Desdemona touches off the outer conflict. It reaches its climax in the marble soliloquy of V, ii, 3-25, where Othello usurps the role of heavenly justice.

Othello tries to transcend human limitation. But the limitation frustrates the realization of his aspiration, reducing his self-idealization to self-deception. However high he may soar in his consciousness he can never free himself from the shackles of earth. This is Othello's tragic pattern of existence. Man aspires to perfection because he is

imperfect, only to be frustrated by his own limitation. And because he is frustrated he tries again to attain perfection, but in vain. This vicious circle is the universal human tragedy and is most vividly dramatized in the murder scene of V, ii, where human limitation and aspiration for the ideal clash in full force with the inevitable defeat of the latter.

Thus *Othello* is a dramatization of the universal human tragedy. The ultimate cause of the tragedy lies in the fact that Othello is a man bound within human limitation. And the ineluctability of this limitation, the inevitable failure of any effort to transcend it, is what is tragic in *Othello*. Shakespeare made this archetype of human tragedy the framework of the play.

ON WILLIAM GOLDING'S *LORD OF THE FLIES*:  
AN ALLEGORY

*Bin Miyai*

William Golding's *Lord of the Flies* is a purely allegorical novel. As a political novel, it represents a significant prototype of all the fundamental political phenomena which man may show. And it explains to us how the fundamental relations would be between an individual person and his society. As a religious novel, it clearly describes how man would become under an environment where God is absent. These two aspects mingle together artistically in one whole, and we admire the author's brilliant talent in showing us the basic meaning of life in this classical type of story.

Ralph, the chief of a group of small boys landed on a deserted and isolated island in an unknown Southern Sea, represents common sense, and rules this small community by a kind of democratic way of thinking. Jack, headboy of a certain chorus group, represents violence, and resists Ralph and his group. Simon, the apostle, prays and tries to let the boys know their Godless situation, and is killed by Jack. Ralph, finally defeated by Jack and his group, is hunted down throughout the island, and is almost burned to death by the fire. All are eventually rescued by a British cruiser.

The allegory of the story stands for the conflict between two powers, one is democratic and red-tapery, and the other is fascistic and strong. The chaotic situation brought about by this conflict is the allegory of the fate of the human being who has lost his God.