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## A Scholarly Edition for Mobile Devices

**Peter Robinson**

peter.robinson@usask.ca

University of Saskatchewan, Canada

**Barbara Bordalejo**

barbara.bordalejo@kuleuven.be

University of Leuven, Belgium

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It has frequently been asserted that the digital turn may make it possible to bring scholarly materials, and specifically literary texts, to new and larger audiences than ever before possible (e.g. Jewell 2009). The new breed of mobile device (tablets and smartphones), combining ease of use and powerful interfaces, present an extraordinary opportunity, to make new kinds of books to reach new readers. However, almost all digital books so far made conform to the Erin McKean's characterization of them as "paper thrown on a computer screen": thus eReaders and .pdf files (2007). It is clear that as producers of eBooks, we are achieving less than we could. In this paper, we survey attempts to produce digital works which both reach new audiences and which offer new perspectives on reading.

A few publishers have produced exemplary digital representations of literary texts which have shown, decisively, that digital books can be far more than eReaders and pdfs. The TouchPress publications of T. S. Eliot's *The Waste Land* and Shakespeare's *Sonnets*, among others, show how reading in the digital medium can be embedded in rich structures of image and sound, extending far beyond the printed page. TouchPress has been extraordinarily successful in reaching huge audiences, reporting in 2012 over 290,000 purchases of its "The Elements" app, and over half a million sales of all its apps (*The Guardian* 2012). The Barcelona-based "Play Creativad" team has shown too with their iClassics publications how much can be achieved with imagination and rather minimal resources. The original release of iPoe has been downloaded more than 500,000 times. These publishers have proved that classic texts may be given new life within the App environment.

These publications have, however, been the exception rather than the rule. Between them, TouchPress and the Play Creativad team have published fewer than ten literary texts. Further, the resources (in the case of TouchPress) and creative ingenuity (in the case of Play Creativad) underpinning these books are in short supply. In this paper, we report on our own attempts to follow the path blazed by these two in our own work on Geoffrey Chaucer and the *Canterbury Tales*. We are acutely aware that we lack both the resources and creative force of our models. On the other hand, we know our text very well, and have scholarly resources to deploy. This paper will describe the CantApp: a new way of presenting Chaucer's *Canterbury Tales*, beginning with the "General Prologue." The CantApp breaks new ground in several respects. It is the first App (an application specifically designed for tablet computers and other mobile devices) to present an authoritative edition of the *Canterbury Tales*, or indeed, to our knowledge, any medieval English text. Second, it will target an audience usually not specifically addressed by scholarly publications: students and other readers encountering Chaucer for the first time. Third, it will present a new reader's text of the *Tales*, based on the work of the Canterbury Tales Project and designed to allow new readers to discover for themselves the *Tales* in the most original form now available. Fourth, while designed primarily for beginning readers of Chaucer, it will be created to the highest scholarly standards, and will incorporate materials usually found only in advanced research-oriented publications, notably Richard North's annotations and explanations. Fifth, and most important: our aim is to use this chance not just to allow students to read Chaucer as they might read him in existing print editions, but to read him in a new way.

We aim not just to bridge the gap between digital editions containing little, but read by many, and those containing much, but read by a few. Our aim is to enable a new way of reading Chaucer. We contend (as have many before us) that the *Canterbury Tales* is a multimedia object containing both visual and aural elements. Visual: in that the poem comes to us from a manuscript culture in which the marks on the page – the ornamentation, the use of emphatic devices, the paratext, the forms of writing – are indicators of meaning. Aural: in that the poem comes alive from the page when it is read aloud and heard, in performance. Accordingly, the central axis of the CantApp is the simultaneous presentation of the key Hengwrt manuscript of the *Tales*, in high-resolution full-colour digital images, synchronized to the sound text, itself very close

to the Hengwrt manuscript. Thus, the reader will hear the words, spoken in our best effort at the original pronunciation, with poetic and dramatic expression, with each corresponding line of the manuscript scrolled and highlighted in sync, and with glosses, explanations and notes always one click away. All we want to offer is already available on the internet of course: but always at a distance, so that the reader is distracted away from the text. By centring the reader's experience on the sound of the text and the appearance of the manuscript, supplemented as needed, we can bring Chaucer to beginning readers with a rich immediacy hitherto available only after years of study.

As well as presenting our own new reader's text, the manuscript, and performance in sound, the CantApp includes Terry Jones' "minimal translation" of the General Prologue, with his annotations. Jones is uniquely qualified as a reader of the *Tales*: not only by his own formal academic writings, but through the transmutation of Chaucer which has fed his own creative work for nearly half a century. How Terry Jones reads Chaucer, word by word and line by line, is revelatory. Hence, the reader of the CantApp can compare his or her own developing sense of Chaucer with that of Terry Jones. In addition, the creators of the CantApp will provide all the materials the beginning reader will need: annotations, textual notes (with further manuscript images), glosses of difficult words.

It is a conventional wisdom, that – several decades into the digital revolution --traditional print books still remain the best way to read the *Canterbury Tales*, and indeed for any major work of literature. The new generation of digital books, as those mentioned from TouchPress and Play Creatividad, is challenging that wisdom. A key factor is the App environment. Unlike a PDF reader, or the Kindle or similar paper-on-screen systems, a well-made App is not a surrogate for a print book or anything else: it is a new kind of experience. Unlike reading in internet browsers, where any number of factors (unpredictable screen sizes, network failures) may disrupt the reading experience, the App environment permits complete control over exactly what the reader sees, and instantaneous response to reader actions. The key word is immediacy: within an App, the reader may move as surely and rapidly from one part of the publication to any other as easily as one may turn the page in a printed book.

Furthermore, the multimedia possibilities of an App provide opportunities for reader engagement no book can match. The performative aspect of the *Tales* may be directly expressed through the reading we offer, and the line-by-line synchronization of the reading

with the manuscript, the edited text and translation, offer an immersive reading experience fed by image and sound as well as words on the page. Our hope is that readers will find themselves as completely engaged with the *Tales*, though in a different key, as could be achieved by any printed book. Indeed, the judicious matching of text and sound with notes and glosses (prepared by Richard North) designed to inform without distracting might offer beginning readers a fast and accessible way into the *Tales*.

The resources needed for Apps constructed according to this template -- images of the original source, a sound edited text, a reading of the text, translation and annotations -- may reasonably be gathered by many scholarly projects. For making the App, we used the well-known, robust and (importantly!) free PhoneGap system, and making the whole required only a few weeks of programmer time (including learning how the PhoneGap worked). Because of these low marginal costs, we are able to make the App available at low cost (not more than 1 euro) or free. We are considering following the Play Creativad model, of selling at low cost most of the time, but with significant periods of free distribution. The measure of our success will be not just how many readers we get for this publication, but the number of other projects which follow this model.

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