THE CRITICS DEBATE

General Editor Michael Scott

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***THE
CANTERBURY TALES***

Alcuin Blamires

M
MACMILLAN

For my parents, and for Carl, Rob and John, my Chaucer colleagues

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General Editor's Preface

OVER THE last few years the practice of literary criticism has become hotly debated. Methods developed earlier in the century and before have been attacked and the word 'crisis' has been drawn upon to describe the present condition of English Studies. That such a debate is taking place is a sign of the subject discipline's health. Some would hold that the situation necessitates a radical alternative approach which naturally implies a 'crisis situation'. Others would respond that to employ such terms is to precipitate or construct a false position. The debate continues but it is not the first. 'New Criticism' acquired its title because it attempted something fresh calling into question certain practices of the past. Yet the practices it attacked were not entirely lost or negated by the new critics. One factor becomes clear: English Studies is a pluralistic discipline.

What are students coming to advanced work in English for the first time to make of all this debate and controversy? They are in danger of being overwhelmed by the cross currents of critical approaches as they take up their study of literature. The purpose of this series is to help delineate various critical approaches to specific literary texts. Its authors are from a variety of critical schools and have approached their task in a flexible manner. Their aim is to help the reader come to terms with the variety of criticism and to introduce him or her to further reading on the subject and to a fuller evaluation of a particular text by illustrating the way it has been approached in a number of contexts. In the first part of the book a critical survey is given of some of the major ways the text has been appraised. This is done sometimes in a thematic manner, sometimes according to various 'schools' or 'approaches'. In the second part the authors provide their own appraisals of the text from their stated critical standpoint, allowing the reader the knowledge of their own particular approaches from which their views may in turn be evaluated. The series therein hopes

to introduce and to elucidate criticism of authors and texts being studied and to encourage participation as the critics debate.

Michael Scott

A Note on Text and References

THE TEXT used here derives from *The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer*, edited by F. N. Robinson, second edition (London, 1957). Line-numbering in the *Tales* is as allocated by Robinson within his division of the poem's fragments according to Roman numerals. The reader working from an individual edition of a tale (e.g. one of those published by Cambridge University Press) should note that there will possibly be unavoidable discrepancies between the line-numbering in that edition, and the numbering adopted from Robinson in this book. Line references appear in square brackets.

Other references are given in round brackets. Critical works discussed are cited by author and date of publication, with page references as appropriate. From the name and date, the reader can locate the relevant publication in the References at the end. In cases where the critic named in a given section does not appear in the corresponding section of the References, consult the Index. It is quite in order for those using this volume as a handbook on the general picture of *Tales* criticism, to develop an immunity against secondary references.

For quotations from medieval sources other than Chaucer, the editions used are as specified in the last section of the References.