



The Rap Canterbury Tales

Baba Brinkman

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The ambition that inspired rapper and MC Baba Brinkman to transpose his performance piece “The Rap Canterbury Tales” to the printed page was his desire to resurrect Chaucer’s brilliant stories from their vellum mausoleum into visible and audible contemporary forms that would once again delight and edify both live listening audiences and readers—a rebirth of what poetry should be in its essence, and once was. Since Chaucer has become an unassailable icon of print culture, and hip-hop is an unassailable icon of contemporary digital cool, he saw this radical new fusion of content and style as the perfect medium to deliver Chaucer’s astonishingly timeless message to a younger generation growing indifferent to the delights of “archaic” literary forms.

This fusion has produced, with both texts reproduced here on facing pages, one of the most exciting and extraordinarily fertile literary documents of our age.

The raps are presented here—along with Chaucer’s original Middle English, Brinkman’s explanatory introductions, and his brother and stage manager Erik’s illustrations—as the best possible way of telling the story of how these stories came about, and what they were meant to do.

A hugely successful hit at the Edinburgh Festival, Brinkman has worked with the London and Cambridge school systems, rekindling an interest among both performance-poetry fans and students in the work of “the father of the English language.”

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