

"CHAUCERIAN REALISM":
A STUDY OF MIMESIS IN
THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE

Thesis for the Degree of Ph. D.
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Carol Lee Shilkett
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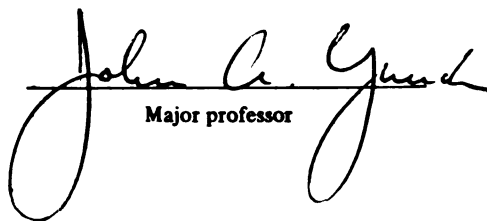
"CHAUCERIAN REALISM":
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ABSTRACT

"CHAUCERIAN REALISM": A STUDY OF MIMESIS IN THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE

By

Carol Lee Shilkett

For generations scholars and critics, classroom teachers and casual readers of Chaucer have talked about "Chaucer's realism," presumably denoting thereby certain qualities of vividness and liveliness which seem to the reader to have been drawn from observation of real life. These qualities are known to contrast with those of other medieval works such as the French courtly poets by whom Chaucer's art was nurtured, Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and large portions of Piers Plowman. The differences are evident in narrative management, description, and characterization, but the constituent parts have never been systematically analyzed and evaluated with a view to understanding exactly what makes readers describe Chaucer as a "realist." Indeed, writings such as those of Curtius, Schlauch, and others, have made clear that many qualities formerly described as realistic are not so at all, but are rather formulaic or conventional. The result of these scholarly references, frequently casual and imprecise, is a confusion of denials and affirmations, rarely documented, about Chaucer's realism. The aim of this study is to determine with some precision what this realism is, what its limits are, how it is artistically achieved, and how it is relevant to Chaucer's central artistic vision.

Seeking to define Chaucerian realism inductively, through a close

reading of the text, the study examines Chaucer's techniques in the General Prologue, end-links, and confessional monologues--those parts of the Canterbury Tales which are ostensibly "real." The realism of the "frame" portion of the Canterbury Tales is seen to consist of several major elements: vivid concrete descriptive detail creates characters and surroundings which seem lifelike and plausible to the reader; conventions are freely used and habitually varied to present the personalities and values of the figures depicted; lifelike interaction of the pilgrims accompanied by natural dialogue, seemingly unstilted and unprogramed by literary or scholarly precepts, produces an informal you-are-there atmosphere in which characterization is substantiated and developed; consistent use of haphazard organization and juxtaposition adds to the chronicled-from-life topos; irony and humor, based in the naive narrator persona, contribute an implicit level of characterization and moral judgment which serves to set pilgrims and pilgrimage in the context of the medieval world--in a world in which all actions are, in a figural way, part of the divine plan.

Chaucer's work encompasses the changing aesthetic currents of the Middle Ages. He offers, through the sensations of this earthly life, a spiritual lesson concerning the individual pilgrimage of every soul to the Celestial Jerusalem. The eternal verities are vivified by exacting and artistic choice of particulars and lifelike actions and dialogue. The fabric of the work is composed of carefully interwoven stylized and mimetic materials. Chaucer's realism is not of the "common-or-garden" variety which produces a faithful copy of life around him; his art selects, combines, and transforms the materials of both life and literature, convention and individuality.

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By

Carol Lee Shilkett

A THESIS

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CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

The illusionistic "realism" of a Byzantine mosaic seen in the rosy glow of alabaster windows or of flickering candlelight is in many respects similar to the vividness of Chaucer's art. In the Byzantine churches of Greece or those of Ravenna and Monreale loom the stern Pantocrator, the mellow Christ--Man of Sorrows--the lifelike apostles, surrounded by veritable gardens of flowers, animals, and the star-studded expanse of heaven. The stern, dignified, and stylized Pantocrator, the all-powerful and perfect Creator, admits of no individualization, encompassing all of creation as He does. But the apostles are portraits, modelled not on men of the artist's choosing, but on tradition and pattern book. The huge dark eyes and the articulated waviness of hair and beard are the same for each figure. But the individual emerges in a variety of hair styles, beards, wrinkles, and facial expressions. The world in the dome seems almost to move and shimmer in the dim light, the incoherence of its angular bits of stone and glass come to life. The common animals of the fields--birds, lambs, rabbits--are depicted with photographic care and placed against ornamental backgrounds. The foliage boasts lifelike leaves arranged on geometric branches. From afar the dual impact of human and spiritual life is complete. Within and sometimes transcending the framework of the type breathes the individual.

While the comparison with Byzantium may seem bizarre, Chaucer's

literary world likewise manages to balance individual and type, ideal and earthly. He does not, like Dante or the visual artist, attempt to picture the experience of Godhead, but is content to show the way to that experience. Although Chaucer celebrates life, both the human and the spiritual, it is in the earthier portions of that life that so many of Chaucer's claims to greatness have been rooted. His portrayal of the pilgrimage with its less savory characters--Miller, Reeve, Pardoner, Summoner--has gained him the epithet "Medieval Realist." Yet in many ways the pilgrims, their tales, and the Canterbury pilgrimage are as stylized as the Byzantine Apostles' neatly waved hair. The Canterbury Tales produce in us an aesthetic joy in perceiving the inanimate made "real." The pilgrims call out to us through the ages, even prompting searches in the musty records of time for their "real" identities to somehow justify their magic by explaining it away.

In an attempt to illuminate and understand that magic while neither explaining it away nor tarnishing its glow, this paper will seek to examine and define a medieval "realism." For generations scholars and critics, classroom teachers and casual readers of Chaucer have talked about "Chaucer's realism," presumably denoting thereby certain qualities of vividness and liveliness which seem to the reader to have been drawn from observation of life. These qualities are known to contrast with those of other medieval works such as the French courtly poets by whom Chaucer's art was nurtured, Gawain and the Green Knight, Pearl, and large portions of Piers Plowman. The differences are evident in narrative management, description, and characterization, but the constituent parts have never been systematically analyzed and evaluated with a view to understanding exactly what makes readers describe

Chaucer as a "realist." Indeed writings such as those of Curtius, Schlauch, and others, have made clear that many qualities formerly described as realistic are not so at all, but are rather formulaic or conventional. The result of these scholarly references, frequently rather casual, is a confusion of denials and affirmations, rarely documented, about Chaucer's realism. It is my belief that there is some significant content in the term "Chaucerian Realism." The aim of this study is to determine with some precision what this realism is, what its limits are, how it is artistically achieved, and how it is relevant to Chaucer's central artistic vision.

A survey of the scholarship touching upon Chaucer's representation of reality in the Canterbury Tales will illustrate the surprisingly small amount of attention the problem has received. By far the majority of this attention is peripheral to other concerns. Critics refer to Chaucer's "realism" in almost every context, but rarely make the term explicit. Or we find realism undistinguished from naturalism, often borrowed from art historians' terminology and used as a literary synonym, as indeed it is not. Aestheticians and some literary genre-theoreticians have on occasion made penetrating observations on the nature of reality in the art forms which will be helpful in evaluating medieval "realism." Unfortunately it seems to be the literary medievalists who are least discriminating in their use of the term.

George Lyman Kittredge was the first to crusade for Chaucer's "modernity" and "realism":

[Chaucer] is the most modern of English poets, and one of the most popular. This is not a paradox; it is the sober, unrhettorical statement of a truism. For he knew life and loved it, and his specialty was mankind as it was, and is. Besides, his age was vastly like our own, in everything but costume and 'the outward habit of encounter.' The fourteenth century seems less

remote than the eighteenth; Geoffrey Chaucer is nearer to us than Alexander Pope.

It was an age of intense activity,--a singularly 'modern' time. One is tempted to assert that all problems which vex the world today, either sprang into existence or made themselves especially troublesome in the sixty years of Chaucer's life. For there is scarcely a political or social catchword of the present . . . which does not fit the fourteenth century.

Kittredge goes on to enumerate those social and political problems, concluding that Chaucer's modernity and popularity grow from his careful depiction of the fourteenth--and apparently the nineteenth--centuries. Although he later admits that realism is only a portion of life and of poetry, "Chaucer the realist stands unmasked before us" (p. 105) from the first page of modern Chaucer criticism onwards.

Similarly Stuart Robertson in his "Elements of Realism in the 'Knight's Tale'"² sees Chaucer's battles and tournaments as drawn from life because they are similar to descriptions in Froissart's Chronicle. The conventionality of those courtly elements is completely overlooked. The illusion of Chaucer as chronicler of fourteenth society was continued by John Livingstone Lowes in Geoffrey Chaucer.³

The non-courtly tales came to be interpreted as vehicles of "bourgeois realism," primarily under the influence of Joseph Bédier.⁴ But the conventional elements of the fabliau and satire have since been exposed by Per Nykrog in Les Fabliaux⁵ and by Lionel J. Friedman in "'Jean de Meung,' Antifeminism, and 'Bourgeois Realism.'"⁶ Both have shown "bourgeois realism" to be burlesque and satire belonging not to the bourgeoisie but to the courtly class. Much of the reality of these "bourgeois" tales is actually the age-old manipulation of plot and character typical of the stock figures of the classical comedy of Terence, classical satire, and the commedia dell' arte.

"Chaucerian realism" was neither illuminated nor explained away by

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these discoveries. The term continues to be used to characterize Chaucer's vivid charm by critics who are careful to leave it impressionistically undefined. Haldeen Braddy writes, "Chaucer's greatest art was realistic . . . This transcendent realism at times utilized secondary elements of the obscene when true-to-life portraiture, or verisimilitude, demanded."⁷ His comments would seem to identify, or at least causally link, realism with the obscene. Others, like Michael West in "Dramatic Time, Setting, and Motivation in Chaucer,"⁸ recognize only the problematic but still undefined "psychological realism" of the Canterbury Tales. Edmund Reiss in "The Symbolic Surface of the Canterbury Tales: The Monk's Portrait"⁹ speaks of realistic detail as symbolic, but fails to come to grips with the conventional aspects of symbolism.

Those critics who are either careful to qualify the subject or who are highly visible in their reluctance to define it, are typified by S. S. Hussey:

Realism is a large subject, and for us who set high store by realism (or at least verisimilitude) in literature a potentially dangerous one when we read the literature of the distant past.¹⁰

Such is the dilemma of the Chaucerian unwilling to commit himself on this "large subject"; he quivers on the edge of the abyss, hedging on any term which might easily push him over the edge.

Of these scholars who have plunged into the dangerous morass, D. W. Robertson and Erich Auerbach may be said to represent opposite poles. Robertson's A Preface to Chaucer¹¹ constitutes the strongest argument against admitting any kind of realism in medieval literature. His case for exegetical interpretation is based on the medieval tendency to view the world in terms of macro- and microcosm, a system of proportionate hierarchies, each of which mirrors in its own imperfect way

the Divine order. The love of God for His wayward children and man's duty to return that love become the all-embracing sentence of medieval literature, according to Robertson. While caritas can be made the doctrinal message of all literature, the exegetical process which does so tends to plane away the individual differences of the literal levels of all poetry, insisting that for all practical purposes the Wife of Bath and January are one and the same, exemplars in a sermon against the seven deadly sins.

Such an interpretation cannot be made to square with the original patristic bases of exegesis as outlined by Augustine in On Christian Doctrine (III, v. 9). Man must understand both the literal and the figural in their places. All texts should be read three ways: (1) for grammatical and syntactical construction; (2) for surface meaning; (3) for doctrinal content. The man who mistakes the sign (surface meaning) for the thing (doctrinal content) falls into as deep an error as he who mistakes the thing for the sign. Each must be studied in its place. Robertson falls into the trap; seeking the figural in the literal, he comes to disregard the literal level as unimportant or even nonexistent.

The mimetic surface of literature and art falls as a casualty before Robertson's approach. He does not disprove its existence; he refuses even to consider it. This may be seen in numerous unsupported remarks such as the following: "[Jean de Meun's use of earthy words] has nothing to do with 'realism.' The fabliaux are not actually 'realistic'" (206); "[Chaucer's] interest was not in the 'surface reality' but in the reality of the idea" (248). Robertson assumes that because an interest in ideas did exist, there was no other concern in the minds of medieval

poets. On occasion he will admit descriptive detail, but denies it any autonomous existence:

But to speak of instances of this kind [Jean de Meun's descriptions of the friars] as 'realistic' is not quite accurate, since no realistic detail is included for its own sake. It is used rather to make the principles involved more immediate and striking. Like the 'realism' of Gothic art, it is subsumed within a framework of abstract ideas, which form, as it were, the medium of the poem. (204)

Realism for Robertson must be realism "for its own sake," a modern l'art pour l'art view which, following his own dicta against applying the Romantic sensibility in our interpretations of things medieval, Robertson avoids completely. The realism which he is at such pains to avoid, is, after all, not medieval and not technically realism. It is more akin to a naturalistic Weltanschauung which utilizes realism as a technique to present a world independent and unloved of a higher power. Such a world is of course not medieval. Robertson moves far to the other extreme, regarding "abstract ideas" as the "medium of the poem," a not-too-sound critical approach which is amplified by his concern to avoid finding modern realism in medieval art. That perfectly valid concern, when coupled with his doctrinal-level exegesis, has prevented his acknowledging the possibility of a medieval realism which exists neither for its own sake nor for the sake of doctrine, but to "make the principles involved more immediate and striking" for the artistic work as a whole. It is the work of art which subsumes both the realistic detail and abstract ideas, not the other way around, as Robertson argues.

Erich Auerbach's collection of essays in Mimesis¹² approaches the subject from a different and more rewarding, if also more complicated, point of view. His original premises are taken from Plato's discussion in Book Ten of the Republic. He accepts imitation as a basis for the

interpretation of reality through literary representation, and thus from the beginning embraces a much larger subject than does Robertson, who limits himself rather artificially to doctrinal exegesis. Auerbach avoids the problem of modern realism, not, like Robertson, by refusing to see any realism in medieval works, but by eliminating today's naturalistic realism from consideration: "The view of reality expressed in the Christian works of late antiquity and the Middle Ages differs completely from that of modern realism" (555). Auerbach does not move to the extreme of considering only this-worldly reality, as Robertson does other-worldly doctrine, however. He rather identifies the medieval conception of reality as figural.

In this conception, an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections. (555)

The crucial difference between Auerbach and Robertson in dealing with figuration is reflected in Auerbach's phrase, ". . . without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now." Without the literal level the figural cannot exist.

Auerbach attempts in his essays to illustrate the imitation of everyday practical reality in literature of all kinds and times, exploding, as he does so, the "doctrine of the ancients" which stipulates that realistic subject matter be treated only in the "low style."

. . . both during the Middle Ages and on through the Renaissance, a serious realism had existed. It had been possible in literature as well as in the visual arts to represent the most everyday phenomena of reality in a serious and significant context. The doctrine of the levels of style had no absolute validity. (554-555)

Hence he undertakes an inductive search for ways in which "realistic

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subjects were treated seriously, problematically, or tragically." Auerbach stops short of a history of realism and draws no theoretical conclusions. His textual commentary speaks for itself and indeed shows the existence of a serious realism in medieval literature. Auerbach writes nothing of Chaucer.

Charles Muscatine has drawn on both Auerbach and early works of Robertson for inspiration in his examination of Chaucer's debt to the French in Chaucer and the French Tradition.¹³ His treatment of realism is incidental to his exploration of Chaucer's use of stylistic conventions drawn from French literature, particularly from Jean de Meun, the romancers, and fabulistes. He laudably attempts to balance traditional scholarly concern for Chaucer's "content" by a treatment of form and style, thus determining "Chaucer's 'meaning' as a complex whole," but frequently falls into vague impressionism and imprecise critical terminology. He justly sees realism as a technique, not an end in itself as viewed by Robertson; but he muddies his picture by continually identifying realism and naturalism without ever defining either. Furthermore, he tends, as the book progresses, to use the term naturalism not in its technical sense, but as a synonym for realism.

This confusion is illustrated by the following passages. At the end of the book Muscatine approaches a definition which is close to a modern explanation of realism:

. . . naturalism involves a technical discipline which must be learned in the same way that the technique of composing ballades and invocations must be learned. The recording eye and ear are essential to the practice of the naturalistic style, but they are by no means all. The artist never, except for very special purposes, attempts merely to record every grunt and irrelevance of phenomenal experience. What he sees and hears, the selections and combinations he makes, are partly the result of training, much of it literary training. Tradition guides observation. (198)

This clear and perceptive observation is valid enough, although to my strict definition it constitutes realism, not naturalism. Unfortunately Muscatine does not adhere to this definition of realism/naturalism as a "technical discipline." He speaks in other places of Chaucer's "boldest naturalization of learning . . . in the adoption of the exemplary 'sample' monologue" (210), a statement which is completely meaningless. Or, " . . . for the special versions of realism represented by the views of the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, and the Canon's Yeoman he uses the special naturalism of their dramatic monologues" (172). Such loose use of terminology undermines the integrity of his critiques of Chaucer's work.

Muscatine also sets up an opposition between the "conventional" and "realistic" works, finding a group of mixed poems in between. The distinction is artificial, as he seems to recognize on two occasions when he hints at a conventional realism, but throughout the book he treats the two as opposites, identifying courtly elements as conventional, bourgeois as realistic. The inaccuracies of these classifications and the looseness of critical terminology to which they lead will become evident in the course of this study.

Margaret Schlauch in her perspicacious "Realism and Convention in Medieval Literature"¹⁴ surveys in a cautionary tone some of the general assumptions erroneously made about medieval realism. Her most valuable observations concern the major role of convention in literature, particularly in fabliaux and satire. She cautions us against identifying the depiction of realia with genuine realism, but declines to venture further to distinguish a realistic mode from mere description based on realistic detail. Schlauch would like to see a "neutral"

term such as "anti-romance" adopted to characterize this realia-oriented literature, which she sees as midway between romance and realism.

Like Muscatine she accepts conventional and realistic works as somehow opposite, although she recognizes the existence of realistic setting and unrealistic action in the same work. She accepts his loose use of realism and naturalism as somehow related to the realia-realism problem, but makes no attempt to make the relationship clear. The short article is intended primarily as a survey which formulates rather than solves the problem:

Genuine realism as understood in modern times--classically exemplified, shall we say, in the works of writers like Balzac and Tolstoi--was less widely represented in medieval literature than many critics have hitherto assumed; certainly less widely than the usual handbooks of medieval literature would suggest to our students. The examples I have cited . . . indicate the need for more precise formulation of the literary terms so frequently used. (12)

It is the aim of this study to achieve that more precise formulation insofar as it applies to the mature work of Chaucer. Before preceeding to an examination of the Canterbury Tales, however, I shall attempt to outline, not a definition of Chaucerian realism--that will hopefully be an inductive result of this study--but some theoretical reflections on the representation of reality in the Middle Ages which will serve as guidelines in the examination of the Canterbury Tales.

Exploration of even a small portion of the criticism touching on Chaucerian realism turns up numerous assumptions of which we are wise to disburden ourselves. The dangers of looking for a preconceived, modern realism are obvious, but have nonetheless been stumbling blocks to many scholars. The definition of modern realism has itself proved a problem, perhaps because we find ourselves stretching the term to

describe a modern Weltanschauung. J. P. Stern describes this state of affairs perceptively in his "Reflections on Realism":¹⁵

Realism is thus not a single style and has no specific vocabulary of its own, except in contrast to styles and vocabularies employed by other modes of writing in any given age. It is not a genre, nor a Weltanschauung, but rather a disposition of mind and pen, something like a humour--in brief, a mode of writing. As a mode it makes its appearance in all kinds of cultural situations yet is identical with none. (4)

It is the shifting vocabulary of realism "in contrast to styles and vocabularies employed by other modes of writing in any given age" which causes many of our initial difficulties, including the problems of terminology pointed out above. In this paper the word "realism" will refer to an artistic technique which through concrete or vivid detail describes a lifelike character, an environment, or action. The term "naturalistic," used so loosely by Muscatine and others, will be used only in its strict philosophical sense to describe an autonomous world which exists, independent of divine guidance, according to the immutable laws of nature. Naturalism as we see it today utilizes realistic techniques, but the techniques can be independent of the philosophy. This is not to say that medieval realism does not have its own related philosophy; I hope to show that it does, and that it encompasses considerably more than Robertson's typological theorizing allows for. But to somewhat improve on the generally vague use of the term, we must first limit "realism" to a technique, a mode of writing. Naturalism is a philosophical attitude which often employs realistic techniques. The broader implications--the representation of reality in literature--are perhaps best denoted by Auerbach's term "mimesis." Modern naturalism represents a closed system. Medieval realism contributes to a mimetic art which is part of the open-ended cosmos extending beyond the sensory

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world to the spiritual universe--Auerbach's figural concept of reality.

Concomitant to the necessity of avoiding modern conceptions of realism/naturalism is the need to put aside the modern norm of unity and the expectations of continuity in style to which it leads us. While the medieval period is noted for its consistent belief in the orderliness of creation, we must occasionally remind ourselves that multiplicity and irregularity hold important places in medieval aesthetic theory. According to Mroczkowski, Hugh of St. Victor stresses the importance of "variegating the aesthetic perception by . . . deviation from the standard."¹⁶ In the study of realism, we must constantly remind ourselves that we will not find whole "realistic" works. A story with realistic environs may not encompass realistic characters or actions. Totally unreal, magical figures may participate in very real actions. Thus medieval realism is fragmentary.

Finally, we come to the basic assumptions of this study. With Plato we assume that art is mimetic. Secondly--and on this point medieval aesthetics both diverges from Plato and differs from views of the nineteenth century--we assume that at no point does art claim to be or to create life. That is the province of God the Creator. Man creates only in imitation. His creation is true or beautiful insofar as it fulfills the norms of truth, not actuality. The artist must somehow bridge the gulf between the ordinary and the exceptional by finding the middle distance at which his work is exceptional enough to be regarded as creation, but familiar enough to be plausible. Realism aims at giving plausibility to something which we know is artistic, imaginative.

Isolated examples of Chaucerian realism may be found throughout Chaucer's work, in both fabliaux and in such romanticized and idealized pieces as the Knight's Tale. It pervades other portions of the Canterbury Tales to such an extent that it dominates their technique, leading readers to describe the portrayal of the Wife of Bath or Merchant, for instance, as "realistic," "drawn from life." Close examination shows, however, that those characters (Wife of Bath) and situations (scenario of the Miller's Tale) which we most frequently label realistic, often remain quite impossible in the context of everyday life. The "realism" which we seem to find inheres not so much in Chaucer's simple description of life around him as in his artistic use of narrative, descriptive, and characterizational detail to create pieces strong in mimetic quality, different from both the idealizations and caricatures found in the respective modes of romance and fabliau.

It is not feasible to treat the whole of the Canterbury Tales in a study of this length. I have chosen to concentrate on those portions of the Tales dealing with the pilgrims and their pilgrimage, specifically the General Prologue, the end-links, and the long monologues spoken by three pilgrims in prologue to their tales. This will provide only a beginning for dealing with Chaucer's mimetic art; the tales themselves hold much of the key to medieval realism. But the pilgrims and their pilgrimage mark the obvious starting point; they are the nominally "real" parts of the Canterbury pilgrimage, and the incidents along the road are presented as ostensibly "real" occurrences. A close analysis of Chaucer's handling of the apparently "real" will provide many clues to the nature of the reality which each of the pilgrims stages for the others in his tale.

We have seen that critical language is notoriously impressionistic and its terminology vague in dealing with literary style and artistic vision, and especially in relating these aspects of literature to much used and frequently redefined terms like "realism." The development of an adequate analytical methodology and a critically acceptable definition of Chaucerian realism which is not a simplification are primary concerns of the study. Beginning with close reading of the texts, I will analyze them stylistically, placing Chaucer's varying modes of description in the traditions of the genres which they represent. Conventional topoi--inherited or traditional mannerisms of the genre being examined, or consciously used artistic clichés--will be identified within the Chaucerian idiom and compared with similar conventional material from romance, fabliau, and satire. The ways in which juxtaposed material of different genres or modes interacts will be examined, as will the manner in which significant descriptive material is changed by context and setting. The contributions of dialogue and other dramatic techniques to mimesis will also be explored.

Every Chaucer exegete, like the Biblical exegetes of the Middle Ages, finds himself confronted with a disconcerting surfeit of maps, charts, guidebooks, trails, and roadsigns (often wildly contradictory) left by his predecessors. His area is no longer new--it has not been for centuries--and he will be unable to ignore those who have explored it before him. My examination of Chaucer's mimetic techniques is deeply--no doubt sometimes unconsciously--indebted to generations of scholars, and many of my pages are inescapably old and familiar ground. It is often impossible to avoid dealing at some length with what has long since become the Obvious. The aim of this study is not to

develop new interpretations of the "meaning" or "sens" or thematic content of the Canterbury Tales, but to shed new light on Chaucer's mimetic processes in the Tales. Frequently, nevertheless, the examination of narrative and characterizational techniques results in interpretations which, if not revolutionary, at least modify accepted meanings. I believe that my analysis of the Canterbury pilgrims and pilgrimage does, in this manner, clarify certain perennial problems concerning characterization, conventionality, and "dramatic" aspects of the work. Moreover, through these sometimes extended examinations, that elusive term "Chaucerian realism" begins to assume specific, and sometimes surprising, meanings.

In Chapter Two the study will examine the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales in an attempt to isolate the artistic techniques which produce the spectrum of personages ranging from entirely non-mimetic and idealized to highly individualized figures. Chapter Three will treat the pilgrimage proper, dealing with the many short end-links which, though fragmented, relate a surprisingly well-crafted account of the trip to Canterbury. An examination of the three long confessional monologues of the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, and the Canon's Yeoman (the latter forming the first part of his tale), will be undertaken in Chapter Four in an effort to discover the composition of the "psychological realism" which they are purported to contain. Lastly, Chapter Five will survey the uses and limitations of Chaucer's techniques and attempt to set this "Chaucerian realism" in the context of the Canterbury Tales as a whole and, more broadly, of medieval literature and aesthetics, aiming to arrive at an acceptable descriptive definition of medieval realism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER I

- ¹George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and His Poetry, (Cambridge: 1915), 2.
- ²Stuart Robertson, "Elements of Realism in the 'Knight's Tale,'" Journal of English and Germanic Philology, 14 (1915), 226-255.
- ³John Livingstone Lowes, Geoffrey Chaucer, (Oxford: 1932).
- ⁴Joseph Bédier, Les Fabliaux, (Paris: 1925), Chapter 13.
- ⁵Per Nykrog, Les Fabliaux, (Copenhagen: 1957).
- ⁶Lionel J. Friedman, "'Jean de Meung,' Antifeminism, and 'Bourgeois Realism,'" Modern Philology, 59 (1959), 13-23.
- ⁷Haldeen Braddy, "Chaucer--Realism or Obscenity?" Arlington Quarterly, 2 (1969), 121-138.
- ⁸Michael West, "Dramatic Time, Setting, and Motivation in Chaucer," Chaucer Review, 2 (1968), 172-187.
- ⁹Edmund Reiss, "The Symbolic Surface of the Canterbury Tales: The Monk's Portrait," Chaucer Review, 2 (1968), 254-272 and 3 (1969), 12-28.
- ¹⁰S. S. Hussey, Chaucer: An Introduction, (London: 1971), 207.
- ¹¹D. W. Robertson, A Preface to Chaucer: Studies in Medieval Perspectives, (Princeton: 1982).
- ¹²Erich Auerbach, Mimesis: The Representation of Reality in Western Literature, trans. Willard R. Trask, (Princeton: 1953).
- ¹³Charles Muscatine, Chaucer and the French Tradition: A Study in Style and Meaning, (Berkeley: 1960).
- ¹⁴Margaret Schlauch, "Realism and Convention in Medieval Literature," Kwartalnik Neofilologiczny, 11 (1964), 3-12.
- ¹⁵J. P. Stern, "Reflections on Realism," Journal of European Studies, 1 (1971), 1-31.
- ¹⁶Przemyslaw Mroczkowski, "Medieval Art and Aesthetics in the Canterbury Tales," Speculum, 33 (1958), 220.

CHAPTER II: THE PILGRIMS

Gothic art, explains Max Dvořák, is based on a concept of union, not antithesis, and encloses a section of the infinite universe which is transformed into the artistic medium.

The task of representation--similitudo, not imago,--is to substitute the imperfectum of sense perception by the perfectum of the divine ideas. Not a uniform degree of nature observation is the aim, but rather a maximum of inner discipline in an abstract structure. Gothic figure art is organized as a hierarchy: 1) the higher the concept that a figure is meant to embody, the more simplified is its form; 2) only minor or secondary persons are characterized in their transitoriness, i.e., naturalistically. But even the figures of the higher order should not lack what is intrinsic to their physical nature; in the words of St. Thomas, claritas must be joined to integritas. Idealism and naturalism appear here not as irreconcilable opposites but as an illustration of St. Thomas's notion of consonantia--a valid criterion for the world of Gothic figures.

The naturalism of which Dvořák speaks is that of the art historians. It corresponds to literary "realism" and is no doubt the cause of the unfortunate use by literary critics of the word "naturalism" in describing realistic techniques. Dvořák makes several points, based on the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas, which should remain uppermost in mind as we examine Chaucer's poetry. Art aims to move from imperfectum to perfectum through similitudo--the process of mimesis. The closer a figure approaches the perfect, the more simplified, and less individualized, its form will be, a state admirably illustrated by Dante's Commedia; the souls in hell are considerably more individualized than those glowing lights of heaven who care not for individuality but for

divine unity. The ideal figures must not, however, lack "what is intrinsic to their physical nature," a need which is determined in Chaucer by considerations of mode or genre and purpose. Lastly, Dvořák cautions us once more against thinking of the ideal and naturalistic/realistic as opposites, for in doing so we set up artificial distinctions contrary to the figural mode of thought so prevalent in the Middle Ages.

The focus of this chapter, the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, will illustrate Dvořák's artistic pronouncement. The portrait gallery at the Tabard Inn contains a variety of classes and varying levels of imperfectum and perfectum. Those figures embodying higher concepts--the Parson and Plowman, for example--are the least differentiated and individualized; they take their being from the concept itself and retain individual characteristics only insofar as they are "intrinsic to their physical nature[s]." The various representatives of this transitory world are indeed "characterized in their transitoriness, i.e. naturalistically." But even within this broad category of transitory figures, we find Chaucer's amazing breadth. All the portraits are characterized by detail--distinct, individual, and vivid. Much of the detail which vivifies the portraits is described by Margaret Schlauch's "realia," discussed in Chapter I. We shall see that the depiction of realia is just one method of the realistic technique, although it has been the most striking ingredient remarked on thus far by the examiners of "Chaucerian realism." Many of the portraits consist of conventions of various genres--romance, fabliau, satire. The use of convention is, perhaps surprisingly, another major method by which Chaucer establishes expectations and plausibility in both courtly and non-courtly contexts.

The portraits embrace the descriptive, the evaluative, the functional. Some consist of, or are dominated by, descriptive detail. We know, for instance, exactly the appearance and social talents of the Squire, but know little of the actual inner man. The Parson and Plowman, on the other hand, are described primarily in terms of their moral worth, and we have clear ideas as to their opinions on many subjects as a result. Others, notably the Physician and Man of Law, are described in terms of their occupations or functions in society. The majority of the pilgrims are combinations of various types of details, however, and none of the types is exclusively realistic. We also find what might be called a "plausibility topos" (to be discussed in the following chapter), in which the poet expresses his concern for telling it "like it is." Thus the methods employed are numerous; together they constitute the realistic technique. Throughout the General Prologue Chaucer utilizes primarily descriptive techniques, and in the following pages we shall examine each portrait with a view towards the ways in which reality--the pilgrims--is represented and made explicit.

The frame of the Canterbury Tales--the General Prologue and end-links--is to the body of the Tales as the decorative borders in the psalters are to the medallions of saints and scripture, the subjects of meditation. In these borders one finds everyday medieval life caught up in the twists of stylized tendrils and monster-spawning branches. In one we see the scribe and his dog caught in a hopeless tangle; in another, scenes from the hunt or rustic occupations. There are fantastic monsters and illustrations of well-known stories, such as the Roman de Renart. Ideal figures dwell in the central position of the

medallion and are but little individualized. The marginal figures are depicted with great attention to detail, however stylized that detail might be.

Such is the portrait gallery of the General Prologue. The pilgrims range from the Wife of Bath and the Pardoner to the uniquely perfect Parson, and Chaucer sketches most in detail. He seeks, after all, to make his subjects plausible. The frame portion of the General Prologue is concerned with the establishment of the dramatic reality of the pilgrims and of the pilgrimage. A jovial travelers' comitatus is established among the pilgrims, and the narrator conveys that spirit to the reader through the happy spring opening. The mise-en-scène is realized through dramatic presentation, the use of selected realistic detail, and careful manipulation and variation of literary convention.

The conventional opening is nonetheless real for its conventionality. Every convention, in order to exist, must have referents in reality. The use of convention establishes a pseudo-reality by evoking set responses and expectations in the reader. Its function is figurative. The convention is antithetical to realism only insofar as it may utilize topoi, or artistic clichés, instead of detailed descriptions of the real world. Many conventions do rely on detailed descriptions, however, and since at least one aim of convention is the same as that of realism--establishing plausibility through the familiar--only an artificial analysis places convention and realism in opposition. Convention is a method used by both "realism" and "idealism"; it can be effective or catastrophic artistically depending on whether the poet wishes to accept the convention as he finds it in other literature, creating a stale "art" dependent entirely upon older writings, or to

incorporate it fully into his work with an originality which transforms it to his own ends. This is Chaucer's utilization of the conventional spring opening. Beautiful in its own right, it transforms the locus amoenus which it traditionally describes into the unexpected locale of pilgrimage. The Canterbury Tales setting acquires an immediacy and beauty which are borrowed from another world of love. And the shift in mode prepares the reader all the more for something creative and original on the part of Chaucer the poet.

From the evocation of spring Chaucer moves to exposition of his story and its participants, and he speaks first of the pilgrims. He proposes

To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And whiche they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne. (38-41)²

Chaucer steps early into the bland innocence of his narrator's persona, outlining his purpose as though physical descriptions tell all. The vignettes which follow are indeed primarily based on the appearance of the pilgrim. Over half of the portraits consist overwhelmingly of such details. The remaining sketches are dominated by details concerning the "condicioun . . . which they weren," or the occupational function of the pilgrim in society. Chaucer is less concerned with "degree" (though this is never wholly separable from function in medieval society) than any of his other criteria, emphasizing it for only two of the personages.

The "verray, parfit gentil knyght" is portrayed from a shifting point of view which contrasts concern for biographic detail with romantic conventionalism. His character is indicated by the conventional phrases: ". . . he loved chivalrie, / Trouthe and honour, fredom and

curteisie" (45-46); ". . . evere honoured for his worthiness" (50); "He nevere yet no vileynye ne sayde / In al his lyf unto no manner wight" (70-71). These are the words of romancers going back to Marie de France, Chrétien de Troyes, and even the Song of Roland. The qualities of the perfect knight were well known and always included a love of chivalry, "gentillesse," honor, and largess. The knight of romance proves his worth in battle against the numerous felon Red Knights in magic forests of the Other World. Yet, as with all perfect types, the qualities distinguishing him are abstract and do little to individualize the figure. And Chaucer's Knight is by no means just a romantic type.

The "parfit, gentil knyght" has proved his worth in the actual world known to Chaucer's readers. The battles of Alisaundre, Algezir, Lyeys, Satalye, Tranyssene, and campaigns in Puce, Lettow, and Ruce all lend a historical air to the biography and establish the warrior's honorable participation in the few battles in which the Christian effort was able to vanquish the pagans, if only temporarily.³ Though it would have been physically possible, it is extremely unlikely that any knight would have fought in all the battles mentioned. The campaigns and decerations of this professional soldier are no doubt exaggerated to enhance his abilities and worthiness. This in turn increases the idealized elements of the portrait at the expense of realism. Detail which is in itself realistic contributes to a contrasting effect.

Chaucer further shifts his focus when he describes the "bismotered" clothing and generally sedate attire of this middle-aged knight. The heroes of romance are young and dressed like the Squire--"Embrouded

. . . as it were a neede." John Manly estimates that the Knight must be sixty or sixty-five years old,⁴ hardly fit to grace a romance!

While realistic descriptive detail is not dominant in the Knight's portrait, Chaucer has provided sufficient historical ties and non-romance details to keep this character from ideal conventionalized knighthood. The resultant figure is neither realistic nor typed. Enough description of his appearance is given to create a visual picture, but the Knight has no personality. He is described in terms of what he has done and of abstracts in which he believes: chivalry, truth, honor, generosity. The Knight is more an ideal than an individual personage. Enough detail is given to make him human, to make his existence possible, to verify his knighthood. But he is not an individual who possesses faults or even opinions. Abstraction disallows individuality and opinion in this portrait. Later in the course of the pilgrimage the Knight develops more personality as he interacts with pilgrims more human than himself. But in the General Prologue he is an idealized figure, devoid of individuality, despite the fact that Chaucer has carefully anchored his exploits in the real world. He exists neither on the Canterbury Road nor in the magic stretches of Broceliande, but somewhere in between, in a handbook of chivalry.

The Squire and Yeoman are presented as attributes of the Knight, and each exemplifies an aspect of chivalry not accounted for in the Knight's portrait. The Squire is the standard lover of many medieval romances, "A lovyere and a lusty bachelor" (80). He has seen service in Flanders, Artois, and Picardy, but his motive, "to stonden in his lady grace" (88), is different from his father's. Stressed throughout is the "lusty bachelor" motif, and all specific description is drawn

from romance similes:

Lokkes crulle as they were leyd in presse. (81)

Embrouded was he, as it were a need
Al ful of fresshe floures, whyte and reede. (89-90)

So hoots he lovede that by nyghtertale
He sleep namore than dooth a nyghtyngale. (97-98)

The many skills attributed to this young lover are those expected of the young nobleman: singing, playing the flute, riding, jousting, dancing, drawing, writing, and even composing songs. Some exaggeration may be involved here; this young man has fought in Flanders, Artois, and Picardy and is only twenty years old, although even that is possible. Unlike his father he dresses in the height of style: "Short was his gowne, with sleeves long and wyde" (93); the Parson later pronounces a general indictment of such clothes, but on the Squire, the short gown is merely typical.

The mention of the cavalry expeditions is the only detail which places the Squire in actual life, and this is overshadowed by the abundant description borrowed from courtly romance. The Squire is presented as a romance figure transplanted, or, at the very least, as an amusing case of life trying to imitate art. This slightly comic effect is in fact the closest we come to realism in the portrait. The Squire is the perfect exemplar of those aspects of chivalry which come more from books than from reality. Like the Knight, he is a pastiche of romance conventions, but he lacks the variation on those conventions which places the Knight in a half-way-real world. In terms of realistic description, the many vivid descriptive details--five times as many as in the Knight's portrait--do nothing to create a personage; they merely establish and reinforce the convention. This young lover lives

in a world of song and flowers--very much apart from the world of his fellow pilgrims--and is a vivid figure there, but his portrait indicates no depth of character, indeed no character at all, to grant him a place among the living pilgrims.

The Yeoman, second attribute of the Knight, reflects a more business-like side of the soldier's profession, in opposition to the Squire who embodies the literary aura of romance. Though he appears only in the General Prologue and there but briefly, there is no dearth of descriptive detail. In seventeen lines we learn of his dress, physiognomy, skills in woodcraft, hunting, and warfare, and his relationship to the Knight. As in the Squire's portrait, Chaucer concentrates on the visual:

And he was clad in cote and hood of grene.
 A sheef of pecok arwes, bright and kene,
 Under his belt he bar ful thriftily, . . .
 And in his hand he baar a myghty bowe.
 A not heed hadde he, with a broun visage. . . .
 Upon his arm he baar a gay bracer,
 And by his syde a swerd and a bokeler,
 And on that oother syde a gay daggere
 Harneised wel and sharp as point of spere;
 A Cristopher on his brest of silver sheene.
 An horn he bar, the bawdryk was of grene. (103-105; 108-109;
 111-116)

This pile-up of vivid detail constitutes the realia which Margaret Schlauch warns us not to mistake for realism.⁵ While it produces a vivid visual picture, as indeed the conventions of the Squire's portrait do also, it constitutes merely an external realism. The vividness of the portrait does not of itself produce personation. The Yeoman and the Squire do not exist in any mimetic sense beyond the visual one. If anything, the abundant descriptive detail is an idealizing factor. The Yeoman is shown to possess all those external attributes carried by sculpted saints on the façades of Gothic

cathedrals, the Yeoman and Squire are not interesting in themselves except insofar as they add interest to the Knight, who is all the more proper and ideal for having them at his side.

All three of the opening portraits occupy the non-mimetic end of a spectrum which stretches from imperfectum to perfectum, to borrow Dvořák's words (see page 18 above), from mimetic to non-mimetic portrayal. Realistic figures are detailed in their transitoriness, idealized ones in the simplicity of abstractions. The Knight is thus pictured in terms of truth, honor, "courtesie," the Squire as the ideal lover, the Yeoman as the perfect, accomplished woodsman. Non-essentials, especially those tending towards the transitory, are omitted. Details are supplied only to establish the ideals--catalogues of battles for the Knight, social talents for the Squire, abilities to maintain and use military and hunting gear for the Yeoman. The role in society of each figure is deemed especially important, and consequently his temporal thoughts, concerns, and faults--his personality--are ignored for more ideal characteristics.

The Prioress is the first pilgrim who shows promise of taking on personality and a life of her own. It is one disappointment of the unfinished Canterbury Tales that she is not developed further as are some of the other pilgrims. In her portrait Chaucer plays a delightful game, weaving ambiguously among the reader's set expectations of the nun and the "symple and coy" romance heroine. The portrait consists of a studiedly haphazard misapplication of conventional detail which produces a gently satiric picture, interesting for its variation and refusal to be typical of any of the conventions from which it borrows.

The misapplication of conventions begins with the first lines of

the portrait:

Ther was also a Nonne, a Prioressse,
That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy;
And she was cleped madame Eglentyne. (118-121)

Lowes has studied the words "symple" and "coy" and cites their use in the descriptions of romance heroines in Watriquet de Couvin, Deschamps, Froissart, Machaut, and Gower.⁶ The phrase is well-established in its romantic context. Similarly the choice of Eglentyne (Sweet-briar) is charming, but hardly felicitous in a nun. The fourteenth century knew of many romantic Eglentynes, however.⁷

The table manners, related with so much attention to detail, are likewise conventional. They are those of the desirable woman as described by La Vielle of the Roman de la rose, but they date back much further to Ovid's Ars amatoria.

Et bien se gart qu'ele na mueille
ses doiz es broez jusqu'au jointes
Ne qu'el n'ait pas ses lievres ointes
de soupes, d'auz ne de char grasse,
ne que trop gros nes mete en sa bouche;
du bout des doiz le morsel touche
qu'el devra moillier en la sausse,
soit vert ou kameline ou jausse,
et sagement port sa bouchiee,
que seur son piz goute n'en chiee
de soupe, de saveur, de poevre.
Et si sagement redoit boevre
que seur sei n'en espande goute,
car trop rude ou por trop gloute
l'en porroit bien aucuns tenir
qui ce li verret avenir,
et gart que ja hanap ne touche
tant con el ait morsel en bouche.
Si doit si bien sa bouche terdre
qu'el n'i lest nule gresse aherdre,
au mains en la levre deseure,
car quant gresse en cele deseure,
ou vin en perent les mailletes,
qui ne sunt ne beles ne netes. (13378-13402)⁷

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Let her guard against getting her fingers wet up to the joint in the sauce, against smearing her lips with soup, garlic, or fat meat, against piling up too large morsels and stuffing her mouth. When she has to moisten a piece in any sauce, either sauce verte, cameline, or jaunce, she should hold the morsel [Dahlberg: bit] with her fingertips and bring it carefully up to her mouth, so that no drop of soup, sauce, or pepper falls on her breast. She must drink so neatly that she doesn't spill anything on herself, for anyone who happened to see her spill would think her either very clumsy or very greedy. Again, she must take care not to touch her drinking cup when she has food on her mouth. She should wipe her mouth so clean that grease will not stick to the cup, and should be particularly careful about her upper lip, for, when there is grease on it, untidy drops of it will show in her wine. (231)⁶

Chaucer adapts this text to his context by compressing and elevating the tone through removal of details concerning the sauces, the mention of garlic, fat meat, pepper, and the spilled wine. The Duenna's woman is, after all, the coquette. The Prioress is a gracious woman who "peyned hire to countrefete cheere / Of court":

At mete wel ytaught was she with alle:
 She leet no morsel from hir lippes falle,
 Ne wette hir fyngres in hir sauce depe;
 Wel koude she carie a morsel and wel kepe
 That no drope ne fille upon hire brest.
 In curteisie was set ful muchel hir lest.
 Hir over-lippe wyped she so clene
 That in hir coppe ther was no ferthyng sene
 Of grece, whan she dronken hadde hir draughte. (127-135)

Chaucer modifies his borrowing, but the allusion is clear. The function of this allusion, and also the more general allusions to romance convention, is figurative. Characterization is accomplished through reference to another context known to the reader. Here, the table manners, the physical description, and the ambiguous rosary with its legend, "Amor vincit omnia," originally from Virgil, place the Prioress in the context of courtly love. She does not fit precisely, of course, but the reader is forced to evaluate her personal worth in that light.

Similarly, the "charitable and pitous" conscience evidenced
in the

. . . smalle houndes . . . that she fedde
With rosted flessch, or milk and wastel-breed (146-147)

and her concern for the trapped mouse is touching in romance but
misplaced in a religious. The allusion is more immediate than those
to romance, however. Even ladies of the court were reproved for
keeping pets, and nuns were forbidden to do so. The Knight of La Tour-
Landry tells of a woman damned for fawning over her pets,¹⁰ and John
Bromyard likewise preaches against the wealthy who

. . . provide for their dogs more readily than for the poor,
more abundantly and more delicately too; so that, where the
poor are so famished that they would greedily devour bran-bread,
dogs are squeamish at the sight of wafer-bread, and spurn what
is offered them, trampling it under their feet. They must be
offered the daintiest flesh, the firstling and the choicest
produce of every dish. If, glutted, they refuse it, then, as
though they were infirm, there is a wailing over them on the
part of those whose bowels yearn with pity for the afflicted.¹¹

In the same cold light we must view the rosary--nuns were forbidden
Jewelry many, many times in the fourteenth century. And the Prioress
should not be on a pilgrimage at all; bishops repeatedly forbade the
religious journey, even in fulfillment of a vow.¹² Madam Eglentyne's
pleated wimple, fashionable broad forehead, grey eyes, and soft red
mouth likewise indicate a woman of the romances and of the world. The
crowning touch of secular-cloistered ambiguity is the finely-wrought
rosary, its motto as ambiguously suited to the beads as is the pleated
wimple to Madam Eglentyne.

The details of the sketch are not of great vividness. They are
concrete but conventional. The Prioress comes alive not through the
Roman de la rose or medieval romance figures, but through the shifting
tone which describes a nun who eats like a fine lady, who pities small

dogs and has convinced the simple-minded narrator that this is charity, and who believes that love conquers all. Because she is not a romance figure, the details are packed with ulterior meanings. When we read of the Squire or Yeoman in terms of the convention which each represents, we find nothing illuminating in the expected, even though it is vividly handled. When we read of a nun in terms of romance we find telling comments on the personality of that nun. Her character gains a depth which is exposed, not through any psychological realism or analysis of thoughts or words, but through juxtaposition of unexpected conventions, each of which carries its own connotations. Without once venturing into the Prioress' mind, Chaucer has exposed the dominating ethos of her personality, and he has done it through that old "enemy" of realism, convention. The substance and literary technique of the description--the catalogue--are both conventional. The figure produced by this studied misapplication of convention and seemingly haphazard remembrance of a past acquaintance, is singularly mimetic.

The Monk is portrayed as a compilation of conventional criticisms of the medieval monk. Chaucer has selected three of the most commonly criticized foibles: the Monk is outside his cloister, he hunts, and he dresses extravagantly. In the Prioress' portrait Chaucer has utilized convention for a uniquely vivid end by mismatching his conventions and the subject described. In the Monk's portrait no such mismatching occurs, but a similar variation on the effect of the convention is achieved by relating the Monk's scorn for the monastic rule at least in part in his own words through indirect quotation. The effect is similar to that achieved in the confessional monologues of the Wife of Bath and Pardoner, where the damning material is put in the subjects'

mouths. The net result is that the damning, conventional, satiric material cannot be read in the same light as medieval satire in which judgment is offered by an uncharacterized personage usually identical with the author. The case is viewed from an external vantage point. The object is usually caricatured, but lacks "character" or "personality," and satire as a whole consists of only impartial, if sometimes humorous, denunciation of the object in question. In the Monk's portrait the point of view of the presentation is shifted, and the shift brings with it a novel situation which requires the reader to view the character as somehow different from the typical object of conventional satire. The views presented are not those of the narrator, but those of the Monk; they must be interpreted in the light of satire and allusion, and the result is that the Monk indicts himself, an interesting and effective switch from the usual situation. Chaucer recognizes its effectiveness and uses variations on this technique in the confessional monologues of the Wife of Bath, Pardoner, and Canon's Yeoman.

Chaucer is also quite capable of utilizing variation in the narrator's point of view to achieve much the same effect. His persona listens wide-eyed to the worldly Monk's pontifications concerning cloistered life:

What sholde he studie and make hymselfe wood,
 Upon a beek in cloystre alwey to poure,
 Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,
 As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?
 Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved! (184-188)

And I seyde his opinion was good. (183)

The naive pilgrim nods his head in agreement with the impressive, loquacious Monk. But the reader sees through the worldly display which so obviously blinds the narrator. The Monk is clearly in

violation of many of the rules of his order, but Chaucer's persona does not see this. In perceiving the deception the reader is required to look at the Monk again, more closely, to see how he dupes his listener. The result is a portrait which is seemingly more lifelike than simple convention would admit. We view this personage as though he were real, and as soon as Chaucer forces us to examine him as a human being, "Chaucerian realism" has conquered.

Chaucer's haphazard arrangement of details in the portrait contributes to the impression that the Monk is an actual person, present in appearance, beliefs, and personal tastes. Much as he did with the Prioress, Chaucer lists details concerning the Monk in a manner which completely lacks apparent organization. He speaks first of his love of hunting, then his apparent virility, then jumps to his horse, his opinions on religious rules, his hunting again, his dress, his physiognomy, his dress again, his culinary tastes, his horse once more. This is no head-to-toe catalogue of the appearance of a type. Its very haphazardness is like life; the observational pattern may not be quite the same as psychology would dictate, but the haphazardness definitely implies casual observation and casual recall of details. It also keeps the naive narrator in our minds, for we see with his eyes.

The Monk is described with great abundance of detail. In number of conventional details his portrait ranks high among the pilgrims.¹³ The poet plays with conventional satire and double entendre to imply a sensual, worldly, virile cleric:

A Monk ther was, a fair for the maistrie,
An outridere, that loved venerie,
A manly man, to been an abbot able. (165-167)

This ilke Monk leet olde thynges pace,
And heeld after the newe world the space,

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,
 That seith that hunters been nat hooly men,
 Ne that a monk, when he is reccheles,
 Is likned til a fissh that is waterlees,--
 This is to seyn, a monk out of his cloystre.
 But thilke text heeld he nat worth an oystre. (175-182)

The homely, proverbial expressions, "nat worth an oystre," ". . . a fissh," ". . . a pulled hen" brilliantly contrast with the suave monk and add a sort of common-sense element to the conventional satire. Part of its effectiveness lies in the naive narrator's tendencies to grasp at commonplaces, but even in these, Chaucer is conventional. Gower, Wyclif, and Langland all use the likeness of the fish out of water in speaking of wandering monks. Langland writes:

Gregorie the grete clerk gart write in bokes
 The ruele of alle religious ryghtful and obedient.
 Right as fishes in flod whenne hem failleth water,
 Deyen for drouthe whenne thei drye ligen,
 Ryght so religion roteth and sterveth,
 That out of covent and cloistre coveyteth to dwelle.¹⁴

Chaucer's narrator, ostensibly reporting the Monk's belief--"This ilke Monk . . . heeld . . ."--abandons the didactic satiric mode of these other writers. He elaborates the fish out of water motif to include other homely notions of worthlessness, further departing from didacticism. He even further un-dignifies the point by colloquially offering explanations of what he has already said: "This is to seyn . . ."

The Monk similarly disregards the precepts of Augustine, Benedict, and Maurus in avoiding the monastic life of labor. Benedict writes, "Idleness is an enemy of the soul. Because this is so brethren ought to be occupied at specified times in manual labor."¹⁵ Augustine writes that no monk may excuse himself for prayer, songs, or study, for he is free to pray, sing, and meditate as he works.¹⁶ But the Monk's rationale is based not even on the usual holy excuses:

What sholde he studie and make hymselfen wood,
 Upon a booke in cloystre alwey to poure,
 Or swynken with his handes, and laboure,
 As Austyn bit? How shal the world be served?
 Lat Austyn have his swynk to hym reserved!
 Therefore he was a prikasour aright. (184-189)

The Monk will serve the world through his hunting and his pilgrimages, both activities roundly condemned by the church. The generous numbers of satiric and regulatory documents concerning the hunting monk indicates the seriousness of the abuse. Even Gower writes:

That monk who is made keeper or seneschal of an outside office is not a good cloisterer, for to run about he must have horse and saddle and money to spend. He lives like a lord and becomes silly and vain. 'All is ours,' says such a monk in his luxurious living. . . . For their pleasure, these wealthy monks keep falcons and hawks for river fowl, and dogs and great, fresh horses for hunting and chasing the hare.

The facts supported this literary criticism. Bowden states:

If we turn to actual records, we find that only a generation or so before Chaucer's time fifteen hundred horses for hunting were stabled at Leicester Abbey. Although the Chapter of the Augustinian Order which met at Leicester in 1346 decreed that hunting dogs were not to be kept by the monks, defeat of such a measure was immediately admitted by the addition of a provisory clause which stated that if hounds should be kept, they were at least to be excluded from the refectory!¹⁸

It is at once clear that Chaucer's Monk fits the convention. But Chaucer makes surprisingly little use of the convention itself, preferring to allude to it, thus leaving the reader himself to characterize the Monk from his knowledge of the typical hunting monk. Chaucer mentions the Monk's love of the hunt four times, all but one reference extremely brief. Moreover, the references are separated, in keeping with Chaucer's "haphazard," so that the facts are restated, or rather re-alluded to, several times. The details themselves are:

A Monk ther was, . . .
 . . . that lovede venerie. (165-166)

Ful many a deyntee hors hadde he in stable. (168)

He yaf nat of that text a pulled hen,
That seith that hunters ben nat hooly men. (177-178)

Therefore he was a prikasour aright:
Grehoundes he hadde as swift as fowel in flight;
Of prikyng and of humtyng for the hare
Was al his lust, for no cost wolde he spare. (189-192)

Little in the substance of these remarks individualizes the Monk in any way. But the haphazard appearance of the lines, coupled with the narrative persona's wide-eyed credulousness, makes them simple facts, almost admirable skills of the worldly Monk, rather than sinful faults deserving of satiric condemnation.

The Monk's fine clothes are likewise innocently mentioned in connection with his physiognomy and dinner-table preferences. Extravagance in dress and at table are of course condemned by both Church Authorities and satirists, but Chaucer lists specific items without disapproval:

I seigh his sleeves purfiled at the hend
With grys, and that the fynest of a lond;
And, for to festne his hood under his chyn,
He hadde of gold ywroght a ful curious pyn;
A love-knotte in the gretter ende ther was.
His heed was balled, that shoon as any glas,
And eek his face, as he hadde been enoynt.
He was a lord ful fat and in good poynt;
His eyen stepe, and rollynge in his heed,
That stemed as a forneys of a leed;
His bootes souple, his hors in greet estaat.
Now certainly he was a fair prelaat;
He was nat pale as a forpyned goost.
A fat swan loved he best of any roost.
His palfrey was as broun as is a berye. (193-207)

This piling up of detail without comment or apparent organization contributes to the effect that the description is the result of the narrator's observation. No matter that no detail of itself individualizes the Monk; the cumulative effect is highly individual simply by virtue of its many aspects and apparent completeness.

The resulting portrait occupies the curious position of a satiric sketch which makes no direct contacts with the satiric mode. The narrator, who "seyde [the Monk's] opinion was good," is obviously taken in by the Monk's worldliness and suavity. Satire here arises entirely out of allusions to traditionally satiric material. The reader is left to reconcile the satiric details with the non-satiric attitude of Chaucer's persona. Thus the satire acquires two objects: the Monk, who is portrayed through allusions to satiric conventions, and in a mirror-effect, the narrator, who innocently believes all that glitters is gold. The narrator, like Harry Bailly who later displays his coarseness in a familiar and tasteless prodding of the cleric whom he addresses as immoral and lascivious, stresses the suave worldliness and manifest virility of the Monk. But both views are subject to ironic development in the prologue to the Monk's Tale where this questionable cleric effectually has the last word, a turn discussed in the following chapter.

As we shall see, variation of the conventional figure is typical of Chaucer's characterizations, and forms the core of the mimetic personage who is a familiar member of society, but more than a type. The Monk consists of typical conventions, but he "seems" real because the conventions have not been related in the typical way. The narrator who in satire represents the norm and occupies the judgment seat is here taken in by a slick personality. Details are thick and by their specificity obscure their typicality. The narrative is haphazard and very different from the didactic and expository tone of satire. The Monk is a paradox—a "living" convention. We see too many sides of him to believe him an abstraction, yet the things we see are far from individualized.

Muriel Bowden opens her discussion of the "Worthy Friar" with the observation that, "The Friar is one of the most strongly individualized figures Chaucer introduces to us; he is also one of the most typical."¹⁹ The conventions from which Chaucer's portrait is drawn are indeed typical of a strong movement which flourished in the fourteenth century, whose aim was to discredit the mendicants.²⁰ The question of Huberd's individualization is not often touched upon, however, and indeed, Bowden seems to base her remark on the fact that Huberd, because he possesses an unusual name, must have had topical, contemporary significance. But such significance does not constitute either realism of individualization, and the essence of Chaucer's realism in the depiction of the Friar must be sought in the conventional aspects of the portrait.

The mendicant orders arose early in the thirteenth century but their reputation had fallen sadly by Chaucer's day. Founded with inspired humility, they were at first highly praised for their simplicity and spirituality:

At about this time [1206], the preachers who are called Minors . . . suddenly emerged and filled the earth. Dwelling by tens or by sevens in cities and in towns, owning nothing whatever, living according to the Gospel, preferring the utmost poverty in food and clothing, walking unshod, they showed the greatest example of humility to all men. . . . The Minors were discovered to be as much the more clear-sighted in their contemplation of heavenly matters as they were alien to earthly matters and to carnal pleasures. They keep no kind of food in reserve for themselves, in order that the spiritual poverty which thrives in their minds may be made known to all through their deeds and their way of life.²¹

Decay set in with the second generation, and by Chaucer's time, the battles between the mendicants and the secular and regular clergy, and among the four orders, had raged for nearly 150 years.

According to Professor Williams, the principal roots of the hostilities were three-fold: the basic rule of "evangelical poverty" obliged the friars to own nothing and to beg their livings; parochial work of preaching and hearing confessions encroached on the domain of local clergymen; the pursuit of studies in the universities soon brought the friars into disputes with the secular clergy who had hitherto monopolized those institutions.²² While attacks on the mendicants were more or less constant, they centered around three periods and three men whose works became the sustaining arguments in all the attacks. The earliest disputes of the 1240's produced William of St. Amour's De periculis novissimorum temporum, which argued that the friars preached without a calling, cultivated friends among the rich and powerful, and captivated weak women. A century later Richard FitzRalph, Archbishop of Armagh and the friars' most formidable opponent, preached a series of sermons against the mendicants and presented his Defensio curatorum to the Papal curia. His attack concentrates on the usurping of the rights of the parish clergy by the friars, who through their easy penances weakened both the clergy and the Church hierarchy. In the 1380's the Wycliffite attack joined that of FitzRalph, linking the friars with heretics who persecute the Gospels, with attacks on transubstantiation, and with the worship of images. Williams sees little evidence that these Wycliffite attacks are related to Chaucer's satire of the friars, however.²³

When we set Chaucer's Huberd against this background, we find practically nothing about him which distinguishes him from the typical friar pictured by the mendicants' enemies. The portrait of the General Prologue is a compendium of the typical charges. Ten lines

include them all:

In alle the ordres foure is noon that kan
 So much of daliaunce and fair langage.
 He hadde maad ful many a mariage
 Of yonge women at his owene cost.
 Unto him ordre he was a noble post.
 Ful wel biloved and famulier was he
 With frankleyns over al in his countree,
 And eek with worthy women of the toun;
 For he hadde power of confessioun,
 As seyde hymself, moore than a curat,
 For of his ordre he was licenciad. (210-220)

Educated, a talented speaker, Huberd is popular with women and known among the "better people." He claims, like Friar John of the Summoner's Tale, to be a better confessor than the parish priest, and Chaucer proceeds to elaborate on his talented hearing of confessions, which is "ful swete" and brings "plesaunt" absolution:

He was an easy man to yeve penaunce,
 Ther as he wiste to have a good pitaunce.
 For unto a povre ordre for to yive
 Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;
 For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
 He wiste that a man was repentaunt;
 For many a man so hard is of his herte,
 He may nat wepe, although hym soore smerte.
 Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyes
 Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres. (223-232)

The abuse is common and is condemned by Langland in Piers Plowman, by Gower in the Mirour de l'homme, and many others. The general indignation is perhaps best expressed by the "Song Against the Friars":

Thai say that thai distroye synne,
 And thai mayntene men moste therinne;
 For hadde a man slayn al his kynne,
 Go shryve him at a frere,
 And for lesse then a payre of shone
 He wyl assoil him clene and sone,
 And say the synne that he has done
 His saule shal never dere.
 It semes sothe that men sayne of hayne
 in many dyvers londe,
 That that caytyfe cursed Cayne
 first this order fonde.²⁴

Chaucer's characterization of Huberd is, without doubt, in this vein, but he does not, like the satirists, gravely assert the wrongs of the friars. The "Song Against the Friars" utilizes the standard satiric technique of exaggeration: a man may slay all his kin, and for the price of a pair of shoes, be forgiven all. Gower, in the Mirour de l'ome, uses abstract personifications, Friar Hypocrisy and Friar Flattery.²⁵ Langland does much the same; the confession of Wrath exposes the mendicants.²⁶

Chaucer, however, at no point condemns Huberd outright. The satiric material is left to work on its own, almost outside satire, and is salted with remarks like, "Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous." Chaucer works through indirection and subtle irony. His naive narrator, impressed by the Friar's efficient begging, can indeed call him virtuous. The reader, faced with a mass of satiric material presented innocently and without comment by the narrator, must react to both the satiric conventions and the narrator's ironic innocence. Chaucer's narrator persona is consistently and ironically loyal to his companions throughout the Canterbury Tales. His descriptions boast an ostentatious objectivity; he refuses to condemn or criticize, even when the fault is obvious. Meanwhile, the less attractive pilgrims indict themselves. Huberd's attitudes towards easy confession are presented from a double, or perhaps triple, point of view. First, relying on allusion, is the view of the satirist; confession to a friar is no confession, only a financial matter of buying oneself out of one's sins. Secondly, we ostensibly see the Friar's point of view. Huberd knew, Chaucer tells us, that a man was repentant if he would offer silver or gold. The narrator himself offers no criticism of the Friar's rationale,

apparently accepting the word of this man of the cloth. The reader must, of course, view this ironically; the narrator himself thus becomes an object of his own ironic satire. The usual satiric invective is circumvented by Chaucer's overlapping of these views of the Friar's actions; the satire which results is gentler, highly ironic, and considerably more effective than didactic castigation.

From Huberd's religious practices Chaucer moves to his physical appearance and worldly talents:

His typet was ay farsed ful of knyves
 And pynnes for to yeven faire wyves.
 And certainly he hadde a murye note:
 Wel koude he synge and pleyen on a rote;
 Of yeddynges he baar outrely the pris.
 His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys;
 Therto he strong was as a champioun.
 He knew the tavernes wel in every toun
 And everich hostiler and tappestere. (233-242)

Like those of the Monk's portrait, the details here are haphazard. The good voice, white neck, musical talents, and physical strength are not in themselves unusual, but are worldly concerns in a friar. While the attributes they would indicate--pride, lecherousness, vanity--are not unknown to standard satire of the friars, the appearance of the indicative details without the satiric rationale adds concrete descriptive detail to the portrait, cutting its heavy conventionality. Huberd thus acquires traits which broaden the typical picture and contribute to the over-all effect of the portrait as a mimetic portrayal of a friar who happens to be much like the satiric type.

In keeping with his worldly tastes, Huberd is careful of the company he keeps:

For unto swich a worthy man as he
 Accorded nat, as by his facultee,
 To have with sike lazars aqueyntaunce.

It is nat honest, it may nat avaunce,
 For to deelen with no swich poraille,
 But al with riche and selleres of vitaille.
 And over al, ther as profit sholde arise,
 Curteis he was and lowely of servyse. (243-250)

In this he follows faithfully in the footsteps of Faus Semblant of
 the Roman de la rose:

J'ameroie mieuz l'a cointance
 .c. mile tanz du roi de France
 que d'un povre, par Nostre Dame,
 Tout eust il ausinc bone ame!
 Quant je voi touz nus ces truanz
 trembler sus ces fumiers puanz
 de froit, de fain crier et brere,
 ne m'entremet de leur affere. (11211-11218)

I would a hundred thousand times prefer the acquaintance of
 the King of France to that of a poor man, by our lady, even
 though he had as good a soul. When I see those poor devils
 all naked, shivering with cold on those stinking dunghills,
 crying and howling with hunger, I don't meddle in their
 business. (197)

Both are sorry representatives of the image set by St. Francis:

Thence that lover of utterest humility betook himself unto
 the lepers, and abode among them, with all diligence
 serving them all for the love of God. He would bathe their
 feet, and bind up their sores, drawing forth the corrupt²⁷
 matter from their wounds, and wiping away the blood.

Chaucer's passage is deliberately softened, its satire relatively
 gentle when compared to Jean de Meun. Huberd is content with the
 company of the rich bourgeoisie, while Faus Semblant wants that of
 the King of France. Moreover, Chaucer does not vividly point out the
 horrors of the life which Huberd avoids, as do Jean and St. Bona-
 ventura. Stinking dunghills and bloody sores do not mix with Huberd's
 sleek gentility; Chaucer's picture is both less vivid and less satiric
 than that of Jean. Chaucer will not allow his figure to become
 entirely the victim of satiric convention; he does not push the
 convention as far as it will go. The portrait he draws is indeed

satiric, but it stops short of making Huberd a monster.

A similar process is at work in the lines describing Huberd's adept begging:

For thogh a wydwe hadde noght a sho,
So plesaunt was his "In principio,"
Yet wolde he have a ferthyng, er he wente. (253-255)

"In Principio," the opening words of the Gospel according to John, were regarded as almost magical in the Middle Ages, and were considered to be almost the "property" of the friars.²⁸ But Chaucer indicates nothing which would make Huberd a cheat or extortionist on this account. He is the "beste beggere" in his house because of his pleasant charm; Huberd is a slick salesman, but we are given no reason to see in him the vicious friar of the Summoner's Tale. Again, Chaucer alludes to the satiric commonplace without following it to its logical end.

The brief mention of Huberd's talents at lovedays is yet another indication of his worldliness. The loveday, originally designed to enable litigants to settle cases out of court, presumably insuring amicability among the parties involved, had degenerated to unjust settlements forced by those who possessed power. The clergy originally arbitrated, but were forbidden to participate after degeneracy set in, except in cases of the poor. In the fourteenth century prohibitions were many, and the institution was condemned by both Wyclif and Langland.²⁹ Thus the association of Huberd with the loveday contributes to the general questionableness of his morals, but at the same time varies the usual satire of the mendicant, for lovedays appear not to have been among the typical topics.

Lastly, and typically, Chaucer closes the portrait with more

vivid descriptive detail, calculated to leave a distinct impression on the reader of the "wantowne," "merye" limiter:

For ther he was nat lyk a cloysterer
 With a thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler,
 But he was lyk a maister or a pope.
 Of double worstede was his semycope,
 That rounded as a belle out of the presse.
 Somwhat he lipped, for his wantownesse,
 To make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge;
 And in his harpyng, when that he hadde songe,
 His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
 As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght. (259-268)

Like the few lines concerning the Friar's physical appearance and unusual talents discussed above, these final details are rooted in satire but add to the concrete immediacy of the vignette. The elegant cope reiterates the discrepancy between the friars' avowed life of poverty and the actualities of fourteenth-century England. It too, is derived from contemporary accounts of the friars.³⁰ But, as in the lines on Huberd's avoidance of beggars and lazars, Chaucer does not carry through with bitter satire. Huberd is "nat lyk a cloysterer / With thredbare cope, as is a povre scoler." Chaucer might have said that he was not like St. Francis, who gave up all his clothes that he might marry poverty; Giotto shows him receiving the embarrassed ministrations of bystanders, concerned to cover his nakedness. Chaucer does not speak scornfully of the worsted cope, though that detail is without doubt intended to be satiric. Similarly, the Friar lisps, "to make his Englissh sweete upon his tonge." The ambiguity of his purpose is let stand; a vicious satirist would point out that sweet English seduces helpless women all the sooner. And the final lines,

And in his harpyng, whan that he hadde songe,
 His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
 As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght,

serve more to recapitulate the conventions already touched upon, with added detail, than to deliver the final satiric coup de grace. Huberd may indeed be one of the worst, but Chaucer emphasizes the twinkling eyes more than the black soul. His satire is mellow and humorous, seasoned with salt, perhaps, but not gall.

Thus the question of the Friar's typicality and individuality is considerably more complicated than Bowden's reasoning (see page 38 above) would indicate. Huberd is indeed a typical figure, and his portrayal reflects many of the satiric weapons of the anti-mendicant forces of the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries. But, as Arnold Williams has warned us,³¹ we should not be too eager to accept the satiric portraits, products of a singularly biased authorship, as the gospel-truth of mendicancy in the Middle Ages. Similarly, we must not be too quick to accept Huberd as a friar of anti-mendicant satire. Though Chaucer includes most aspects of the satirists' charges, he does not, as we have seen, allow his satire to become Juvenalian. He rather establishes a gentle Horatian tone through the omission of some details, the dilution of others, the careful, detailed description which makes the Friar a "person" rather than a caricature, and the narrator's seemingly objective presentation. This is not to say that the Friar must not be taken as typical; the sheer wealth of conventional detail establishes his typicality. But he is described with a breadth and depth which establishes him as a personage, not a caricature.

It is enlightening to compare the sketch of the Friar with those which precede it, particularly the portraits of Knight, Yeoman, Prioress, and Monk. Like the Prioress and Monk, the Friar is a

religious who leaves much to be desired in the performance of his church-oriented duties. Like the Prioress and Monk and Knight he is described primarily in terms of conventions. The Prioress, however, is not described in the "typical" way, since the details of her portrait are not drawn from religious life. The Monk's description utilizes both conventional and non-conventional materials, and it is the shifting between the two, together with the Monk's assertiveness and the narrator's approbation, which provide the "all-around" characterization--the depth which saves character from caricature. There is little to vary the conventional detail in the Friar's portrait, however. Chaucer avoids caricature not so much through variation of convention as through mellowing of it and through the overwhelming amount of detail which portrays him in so many situations that its sheer many-sidedness prevents him from becoming a caricature. Thus convention works in curious ways to produce both mimetic and non-mimetic personations. The Knight, embodiment of the idealized, conventionalized aspects of chivalry, has no "character" at all. The Yeoman, described in inordinate detail, has no more personality than his master. Like the Knight and his chivalry, he is the embodiment of "yeomanliness." Concrete details give him no character. But the clerical figures described thus far are as conventional as the Knight, lacking on the whole the concreteness of the Yeoman, yet they are more vivid and more mimetic than any of the chivalric figures. Each of the mimetic figures is described in terms of conventions which imply attitudes; the conventions are themselves concrete. Lacking the idealization of the chivalric characters, they are free to exist in Middle Earth. Each is portrayed in several situations--situations which bring out both the

good and the bad. The Prioress, Monk, and Friar have, as we would call it today, "personality." The conventions through which each is portrayed contribute to that personality by indicating ways in which the character views certain problems in the world. Moreover, and most important, those viewpoints are plausible. Plausibility is rooted in both the variety which we find in these pilgrims and in the "humanness," or mimetic qualities evidenced in them. The Knight has no such "humanness," at least not in the General Prologue, because our own norms of judgment tell us that no person exists entirely on the level of idealized abstractions--truth, honor, courtesy, etc. Thus, in direct contradiction to many accepted critical conclusions, the conventions, the clichés of medieval literature, become means to concrete characterization. Through the cliché we enter the minds and souls of ostensibly "undeveloped" medieval characters. This is in no way similar to modern notions of "realistic characterization," of course. It is Chaucer's characterization, and it produces characters in the Canterbury Tales which are unlike any others.

The three religious figures discussed above constitute an ideal illustration of the principle that the realistic figure is portrayed in terms of this earthly, transitory life, in contrast to the idealized figure, which is seen in abstract simplicity. The Prioress, Monk, and Friar are most appropriate exemplars of this transitory end of the spectrum, yet each contains within him the potential for perfection. Every human does, of course, but these pilgrims possess an added dimension insofar as we see both the potential and the failure to fulfill it. Religious vocations by definition aim at the attainment of perfection, but it is through Chaucer's portrayal of the transitory,

the earthly failings of the Prioress, Monk, and Friar, that the characters become alive, mimetic, realistic. For mimesis is fidelity to life as we know it; perfection is within our knowledge, but often beyond our grasp. This constant comparison of the actuality and the ideal is a mimetic technique; it sharpens our awareness of the transitory lifelikeness of these figures. Convention works in a similar way, enhancing characterization; through variations of the typical we are again called to witness the apparent "realism" of the characters. The key to this process is illusion. Through comparisons to the supramundane, the trite, or the unexpected, these personages are made to "seem" alive. The realism of these figures consists not so much of their fidelity to the realities of the fourteenth century as of their apparent consonance with what we understand human nature to be like, conventional or not.

The Friar's portrait, with sixty-two lines the longest of the General Prologue, is followed by that of the Merchant, one of the shortest. The vignette is a tribute to the deft sketch; in fifteen lines we learn of the Merchant's appearance, financial status, the nature of his business, and are given certain hints that his "chevyssaunce" is not all legal. The directness of this description contrasts with the wandering, haphazard portraits of the Friar and Monk. The brevity of the sketch makes it feasible to quote its entirety:

A Marchant was ther with a forked berd,
 In mottelee, and hye on horse he sat;
 Upon his heed a Flaundryssh bever hat,
 His resons he spak ful solempnely,
 Sowynyge alwey th'encress of his wynnyng.
 He wolde the see were kept for any thyng
 Bitwixe Middelburgh and Orewelle.
 Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.
 This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
 Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette,

So estatly was he of his governaunce
 With his bargaynes and with his chevysaunce.
 For sothe he was a worthy man with alle,
 But, sooth to seyn, I noot how men hym calle. (270-284)

Bowden has pointed out the many elements of this portrait which, if not literary conventions, were at least typical of the merchants of Chaucer's day.³² These include the dignified dress and mount, the concern for gain and freedom of the seas, the temptations to deal in "chevysaunce"--money lending--and "eschaunge"--foreign currencies,--both outlawed, and the especial concern to keep one's debts concealed. In all these things Chaucer's nameless Merchant is typical.

For all the concise, concrete detail, however, the Merchant is less "alive" than the Friar or Monk, a warning that realism does not consist merely of detail, although the proportion of the number of details to the number of lines in the portrait is extremely high. The majority of the details, however, refers to externals: "a forked berd"; "in mottelee"; "hye on horse he sat"; "a Flaundryssh bever hat"; "bootes clasped faire and fetisly." Still, the Merchant is not quite so faceless as the Knight's Yeoman. The Yeoman's portrait consists almost entirely of such details and of comments on his yeomanly abilities. We learn little of the man in the sense that we understand the ethos of Prioress, Monk, or Friar. The Merchant strikes a median point; in the Prologue portrait, his concerns are only hinted at:

His resons he spak ful solempnely,
 Sownyng alwey th'encreass of his wynnynge.

Wel koude he in eschaunge sheeldes selle.

This worthy man ful wel his wit bisette:
 Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette.

Even these comments come at the characterization sideways, from a business angle. We assume that the Merchant values the appearance of

financial prosperity above all else, but this information of itself does not create a mimetic figure. Chaucer breaks with his narrator's limited point of view to say, "Ther wiste no wight that he was in dette," but this too tells us little about the Merchant, aside from the fact that he prefers that his debts remain hidden. The Merchant's characterization is controlled by his occupation and function in society. He remains merely a merchant until he reveals more of himself to the pilgrims in the prologue to his tale. It is only at this point (to be discussed in the following chapter) that the figure of the Merchant is expanded to a mimetic personage, that he becomes a human being with human concerns to be shared with the other pilgrims.

The Merchant's portrait thus shows clearly the ways in which details, realia, can be used to create a figure of apparent prosperity, but one which is mimetic only in a partial, external sense. The use of realia implies a fidelity to externals, but it is only when the externals are used in combination with techniques for the depiction of inner or personal values that we have the essential mimetic elements of "Chaucerian realism."

The Clerk, traditionally regarded as one of Chaucer's ideal figures, shows us that descriptive detail and the ideal type are not mutually exclusive. Spare detail enhances the moral type:

As leene was his hors as is a rake,
And he nas nat right fat, I undertake,
But looked holwe, and thereto sobrelly.
Ful thredbare was his overeste courtsey. (287-290)

Of studie took he moost cure and moost heede.
Noght o word spak he moore than was neede,
And that was seyde in forme and reverence,
And short and quyk and ful of hy sentence;
Sownynge in moral vertu was his speche,
And gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche. (303-308)

It has been observed that the ideal clerk has really no conventional type--"The life of the virtuous student has no annals."³³ On the other hand, records attest to the frequency of town and gown battles which were fatal to many of the participants. Chaucer's Clerk is obviously a representative of a more scholarly milieu than that of the clerks who made contemporary news. Detail in the portrait at every turn enhances the figure of the ideal scholar: his clothes and horse are not good because he spends all his money on books; he is not worldly, hence he has no benefice; he prays for those who give him money; he does not talk overmuch; "gladly wolde he lerne and gladly teche." The details are concrete, but each is subordinated to the idealization of the figure.

The Clerk, as an idealized figure, is a prime example of the "inner discipline in an abstract structure" of which Dvořák speaks:

The higher the concept that a figure is meant to embody, the more simplified is its form; . . . But even the figures of the higher order should not lack what is intrinsic to their physical nature; in the words of St. Thomas, claritas must be joined to integritas.³⁴

The Clerk is of the simplified form. The details through which he is described are kept to the minimum required by his physical nature, which is actually an embodiment of his higher ideal of scholarship. The spareness of the detail entirely eliminates characteristics seen by Dvořák to be the signs of realism--the transitoriness and imperfectness of life. The Clerk is like the Knight in that he is idealized; he is unlike him insofar as he is not limited by real-world references or occupation to a specific era. The simplified form which the idealized figure always has is the substance of its universality. The idealized figure does leave room for mimetic detail, but that

detail is not generous and is at every point subordinated to the ideal. The details themselves are not too unlike those used to describe mimetic figures, but their purpose is different; they provide here a view of a single side of the character, and they unanimously reinforce the type. In other portraits we find that mimetic details contribute to variations of conventions, and through variation bring out non-conventional aspects of the personage described. Such is not the case with the ideal Clerk.

The Man of Law, along with the Shipman and others, has been the subject of much research which would link him to a historical person, Thomas Pynchbek in this case. The realistic or mimetic qualities of the portrait require no such link, however, and gain nothing from it except a possible pun on Pynchbek's name in line 326, a possible "in" joke. The Sergeant is one of the few pilgrims who is not described physically. We learn only that he rides in homely clothes, and that he has many fine robes at home. The fabric of the portrait consists rather of the justice's operations, which are couched in legal terminology appropriate to their subject:

Justice he was ful often in assise,
By patente and by pleyn commissioun. (314-315)

So greet a purchasour was nowher noon:
Al was fee symple to hym in effect;
His purchasyng myghte nat been infect.
Nowher so biay a man as he ther nas,
And yet he semed bisier than he was.
In termes hadde he cas, and doomes alle
That from the tyme of kyng William were falle.
Therto he koude endite, and make a thyng,
Ther koude no wight pynche at his writyng;
And every statut koude he pleyn by rote. (318-327)

The "purchasyng" at which the Man of Law is so adept may well refer, Professor Williams informs me, to a not-quite-legal process of finding

loopholes through which entailed estates could be converted to "fee simple." Such a process might involve a buyer's bringing suit against feudal land held by one who wished to, but could not legally, sell. Through the decision of the uncontested suit, the buyer would be awarded the land. Thus the Sergeant was one means by which the feudal system was being destroyed. The legal language of the description is oddly juxtaposed with the narrator's naiveté:

Discret he was and of greet reverence---
He semed swich, his wordes weren so wise. (312-313)

The innocent pose is not kept up consistently, however; the narrator does remark that "he semed bisier than he was." The portrait thus has an ambivalent tone. Described in terms of his legal milieu, the Sergeant is all business. His abilities are without doubt somewhat exaggerated: "In termes hadde he cas, and donnes alle / That from the tyme of kyng William were falle." But the ". . . semed bisier than he was" casts a definite shadow on the busy legal concerns of the portrait. Its effect is more humorous than satirical, however, since the manifest possibilities for satire have been ignored.

Like the Merchant the Man of Law is described in terms of his occupation, but unlike the description of the Merchant, his appearance, his dress, his horse are all ignored. As a character he exists only within the legal sphere. The legal world is concisely portrayed through Chaucer's cataloging of things all good sergeants of the law should be able to do; the exaggeration and hint of satiric humor add verve to the otherwise dull concerns of the lawyer. But the legal world cannot by itself vivify the Man of Law. He remains merely its representative, hardly a character in his own right.

Descriptive details in the Franklin's portrait center primarily

on life in his household with its snow of meat and drink:

Without bake mete was nevere his hous
Of fissh and flessch, and that so plenteuous,
It snowed in his hous of mete and drynke,
Of all deyntees that men koude thynke.
After the sondry sesons of the yeer,
So chaunged he his mete and his souper.
Ful many a fat partrich hadde he in muwe,
Ful many a breem and many a luce in stuwe. (343-350)

The ever-present table becomes the hallmark of "Epicurus owene sone";
"To lyven in delit" is "verray felicitee parfit." The portrait comes
to mind later as we hear the Franklin expound on gentillesse. We are
given not a detailed description of the man, but an outline of his
philosophy of life, fleshed out with references to table, partridges,
the cook and his sauce.

The Franklin belongs to the literary type of the wealthy vavasour,
who, as a member of the gentry, oftentimes offers luxuriant hospi-
tality to the knight-errant. That the popular imagination also
accorded franklins the elegance of romance is indicated by John
Russell's fifteenth century Boke of Nurture in which he gives a menu for
"A Feste for a Franklen":

A Franklen may make a feste Improberabille,
Brawne with mustard is concordable,
baken serued with peson,

beef or moton stewed seruysable,
Boyled Chykon or capon agreable,
convenyent for the seson;

Rosted goose & pygge fulle profitable,
Capon / Bakemete, or Custade Costable,
when eggis & crayme be geson.

therfore stuffe of houshold is behoveable,
Mortrewes or Iusselle ar delectable
for the second course by reson.

Than veel, lambe, kyd, or cony,
Chykon or pigeon rosted tendurly,
bakemetes or dowcettes with alle.

then followynge, frytours & a leche lovely;
 Suche seruyse in sesoun is fulle semely
 To serue with bothe chambur & halle.

Then appuls & peris with spices delicately
 After the terme of the yere fulle deynteithly,
 with bred and chese to calle.

Spised cakes and wafurs worthily
 with bragot & methe, thus men may meryly
 please well bothe gret & smalle.³⁵

Chaucer's Franklin seems the perfect exemplar of such high living.

His characterization is extended through allusions to St. Julian and Epicurus, odd table companions who represent, respectively, hospitality and the good life.

We are given only little information about the man aside from his Epicurean tastes, and even that supports the type of the wealthy vavasour:

Whit was his berd as is the dayesye;
 Of his complexioun he was sangwyn. (332-333)

An anlaas and a gipser al of silk
 Heng at his girdel, whit as morne milk. (357-358)

The sanguine complexion was indicative of a happy personality, a love of food and drink. Chaucer's use of physiognomy remains consistently faithful to that science, here as elsewhere in the Tales. The dagger and purse were worn only by the wealthier members of society, and the simile "whit as morne milk" reinforces the Epicurean tone of the portrait. The Franklin's duties and offices--lord at sessions, knight of the shire (Member of Parliament), sheriff, and "contour" (pleader in court)--localize the figure and support the narrator's judgment, "Was nowher swich a worthy vavasour."

As a mimetic figure the Franklin occupies a middle ground. Like so many of Chaucer's characters, he is built on a type. Chaucer

elaborates some of these types, namely the Prioress, Monk, and Friar, while others--the Clerk, Yeoman, and Squire--are left much as he finds them. Chaucer reinforces the type of the worthy vavasour with lines on the Franklin's physical appearance and his function in society. His Epicurean tastes form the backbone of the description; his extravagant mode of living was not entirely unusual, as the "Fest for a Franklen" indicates. The portrait acquires its fresh, striking qualities not so much through originality as through the careful selection by Chaucer of details to illustrate the gourmet lifestyle. The snow of meat and drink, the potential woes of the cook, the abundance of "many a breem and many a luce in stuwe" particularize that nice turn of phrase, "Epicurus owene sone." But the fact that the description rests almost entirely on matters of the table leaves the Franklin a one-sided character. His other concerns are developed along the pilgrimage road.

The Five Guildsmen hardly figure in the Canterbury Tales since since we hear nothing more of them, but Chaucer's description is concise and detailed. They dress in fresh new liveries with knives decorated in silver, not brass:

And they were clothed alle in o lyveree
 Of a solempne and a greet fraternitee.
 Ful fressh and newe hir geere apiked was;
 Hir knyves were chaped noght with bras
 But al in silver; wroght ful clene and well
 Hire girdles and hir pouches everydeel. (363-368)

To this description of external appearance the narrator adds several lines on the worth and wisdom of these men. Each is a good enough burgess to sit on the dais in the guildhall, to be an alderman. Each has an abundance of property; their wives prefer to be called "madame," and much like the Wife of Bath, must be first in vigil processions, a

humorous and snide addition which verges on satire.

From these comments an ethos of the successful and powerful guildsman emerges, very similar to the actual position of the guilds in the fourteenth century. But the haberdasher, carpenter, weaver, dyer, and tapicer do not emerge as distinguishable figures. While no detail of the portrait is improbable, the sameness of the five figures, all dressed alike and all of impeccable honor, causes the reader to suspect a leveling of characters, if not exaggeration. The worthiness of the men is in no way made explicit. The portrait depends on details of external appearance to support a type which is then reinforced by abstract assertions of worthiness. The worthiness is brought in question, however, by the allusions to pride. The ideal is thus sullied, but the variation contributes little to the mimesis of the portrait. The Guildsmen and their wives stand all in a row, all alike, like paper dolls.

The Cook accompanies the Guildsmen, and though his place in the Tales is incomplete, we know a great deal about him. He is talented in his way, despite the habitual drunkenness of which we later learn.

A Cook they hadde with hem for the nones
To boille the chiknes with the marybones,
And poudre-marchant tart and galyngale.
Wel koude he knowe a draughte of Londoun ale.
He koude roost, and sethe, and broille, and frye,
Maken mortreux, and wel bake a pye.
But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me,
That on his shyne a normal hadde he.
For blankmanger, that made he with the beste. (379-387)

Chaucer compresses a dozen details into nine lines here, the shortest of the portraits. The technique used to describe the Man of Law, that of utilizing a catalogue of terms vital to a man's trade, is best in evidence here. The poet overwhelms the reader with details which,

like local color, create an atmosphere consisting of specific elements. The result is a seeming specificity related with breathlessness.

In keeping with the compaction of this portrait, Chaucer compresses all he has to say at present about the Cook's character into the line, "on his shyne a mormal hadde he." The mormal works allusively to reveal the man's character, as Curry has noted. The mormal, or malum mortuum, is described thus by Bernardus de Gordon, one of the Physician's mentors:

Malum mortuum is a species of scabies, which arises from corrupted natural melancholia . . . The marks of it are large pustules of a leaden or black color, scabbed, and exceedingly fetid, though suppuration and discharge do not occur; and it is frequently accompanied by a certain insensibility in the places affected. In appearance it is most unsightly, coming out on the hip-bones and often on the shin-bones.

Curry further comments that the causes were given as uncleanness, drunkenness, and "disgraceful association with diseased and filthy women."³⁶ Though such habits are only hinted at through allusion in the General Prologue, the later events on the pilgrimage substantiate this characterization by means of diagnosis.

Almost as an afterthought the narrator adds, "For blankmanger, that made he with the beste." The grotesquerie accomplished by sandwiching the mormal between lines on mortreux, pies, and blankmanger indeed fits the grossness of the Cook. It typifies the personality of the hopelessly drunken man who accompanies the bourgeois but dignified Guildsmen, reflecting, however, on their hardly dignified choice of cook. By introducing the grotesque element in the midst of the Cook's culinary accomplishments Chaucer adds humor--

of the grotesque variety--and skirts the edges of satire. The innocent narrator's understatement--"But greet harm was it, as it thoughte me . . ."--destroys the whole impression of the Cook's art. The personality implied by the causes of the mormal is quite in keeping with the Host's attack on the uncleanness of the Cook's shop and with his drunken fall from his horse. The character which is sketched here--he is never really developed--is one of opposites and contrasts. He cooks very well and lives very loosely, an unexpected combination which, in keeping with Chaucer's tendency to vary his conventions--the cooks of London had a conventionally bad reputation³⁷--leaves the reader with the illusion that an original character has been created. Yet on closer examination that character consists only of hints and culinary terminology.

The Shipman's portrait is one of the most economical of all those drawn by Chaucer. In twenty-three lines we are told much of the man's occupation, his appearance, and something of his personality and values. The identity of the Shipman is a question which has purportedly been solved several times, but which nonetheless remains speculative. The Maudelayne is indeed historical, and no doubt Chaucer had the personality traits and experiences of at least one sailor in mind when he penned the sketch. The historical identity is hardly necessary to the Canterbury Tales, however.

Chaucer makes use of several techniques which we have already observed in other portraits. Geographical references bring a contemporaneity and real-world orientation to the portrait, much as they do for the picture of the Knight. Nautical terminology is also much in evidence, a use of the occupational diction technique already

observed in the sketches of the Man of Law and Cook:

But of his craft to rekene wel his tydes,
 His streames, and his daungers hym bisides,
 His herberwe, and his moone, his lodemenage,
 Ther nas noon swich from Hulle to Cartage.
 Hardy he was and wys to undertake;
 With many a tempest hadde his berd been shake.
 He knew alle the havenes, as they were,
 Fro Gootland to the cape of Fynystere,
 And every cryke in Britaigne and in Spayne. (401-409)

The ports of call indicate actual trading towns known by English seamen of the day. The reference to "every cryke" in Britain and Spain serves through exaggeration to intensify the impression of the Shipman's great experience. A similar effect is achieved through the generous use of the possessive "his" in the lines above: his craft, his tides, his streams, his dangers, his harbor, his moon, his sailing skills together suggest that this Shipman is in personal command of all aspects of sailing in a lordly and proprietary way.

Chaucer includes several pointed remarks on the Shipman's morals, unusual in his shorter portraits:

. . . certainly he was a good felawe.
 Ful many a draughte of wyn had he ydrawe
 Fro Burdeux-ward, whil that the chapman sleep.
 Of nyce conscience took he no keep.
 If that he faught, and hadde the hyer hond,
 By water he sente hem hoom to every lond. (395-400)

A man of very human faults, he does not quibble over drowning his defeated enemies, much less over drawing from the cargo wine. Chaucer is, as usual, careful to phrase these shortcomings obliquely: "Of nyce conscience took he no keep"; "By water he sente hem hoom." The phrase "nyce conscience" effectually presents the Shipman's view; Chaucer uses the same technique when he describes the Monk's shortcomings in words which express the Monk's point of view, allowing no other. The

euphemism "by water he sente hem hoom" similarly shifts the tone of the line away from moral judgment. The narrator offers no overt condemnation.

He does take advantage of the opportunity to laugh at the sun-burned Shipman, however. This sailor is not at home on his heavy-footed horse, and his clothes are more suited to the deck than pilgrimage:

He reed upon a rouncy, as he kouthē,
In a gowne of faldyng to the knee.
A daggere hangyng on a laas hadde he
Aboute his nekke, under his arm adoun.
The hote somer hadde maad his hewe al broun. (390-394)

The portrait is extremely well-balanced, containing descriptive, functional, and attitudinal details in equal amounts. Its proportion of details is high for its twenty-three lines, and the main limitation of its mimetic qualities is the fact that the lines concerning the Shipman's values are concerned only with his occupation. Given the opportunity, Chaucer could no doubt have developed the Shipman into a figure much like the Reeve, or other pilgrim whose ethos is hinted in the General Prologue and developed in the end-links.

The Physician, like the Man of Law, is characterized almost entirely in terms of his occupation. His portrait possesses more details of a functional nature than that of any other pilgrim except the Knight. Chaucer makes use of much vocabulary taken from medicine and astrology, a practice which we will later see the Host parody. The medical terminology is scattered throughout the vignette and includes such terms as phisik, surgerye, astronemye, magyk natureel, fortunen the ascendent, ymage, maladye, humour, praktisour, apothecaries, drogges, letuaries, diete mesurable, superfluitee,

norissyng, digestible, pestilence, cordial, as well as a long catalogue of medical authorities. The vocabulary does nothing to particularize the pilgrim but does create a semi-scientific atmosphere in which Chaucer can recount his abilities. In the list of the Physician's authorities the poet utilizes the cataloging technique to overwhelm the reader with every medical authority well-known in the Middle Ages, and some not so well known:

Wel knew he the olde Esculapius,
And Deyascorides, and eek Rufus,
Olde Ypocras, Haly, and Galyen,
Serapion, Rasis, and Avycen,
Averrois, Damascien, and Constantyn,
Bernard, and Gatesden, and Gilbertyn. (429-434)

All this scientific and semi-scientific lore was expected but not so often attained by the physician of the Middle Ages. Medicine was hardly the scientific pursuit it is today, and the heavy stress placed on the Physician's knowledge and abilities tends to idealize the figure.

Chaucer does not allow this character to become a perfect exemplar of his calling, however. His opening, ambiguous lines can be interpreted as indifferent praise or snide satire:

In al this world ne was ther noon hym lik,
To speke of phisik and of surgerye,
For he was grounded in astronomeye. (412-414)

Astronomy or astrology was regarded as one of the fields of knowledge vital to the medieval physician, but it also came under fire as one of the many ways a physician could set himself up as an all-knowing authority to cheat his patients. Muriel Bowden writes of Petrarch's remarks on the subject:

Petrarch cautions against the audacity and pomp of physicians; he says they neglect medicine proper in their pursuit of dialectic, astrology, and irrelevant reading, and that many

seek out the sick only for sinful gain or the wicked furthering of mere experimentation. "Remember therefore, most gracious Father," Petrarch writes in a letter to the Pope, "the epitaph of that unhappy man who ordered nothing to be inscribed upon his tomb but 'I died from a mob of physicians,' and let the memory turn your attention from that mob which like an enemy's host now surround you."³⁸

Chaucer inserts from time to time remarks on the Physician's talents which we may take ironically. "He was a verray, parfit praktisour" echoes the praise of the Knight--"he was a verray, parfit gentil Knyght," but the line is followed by a detailing of the Physician's deals with the apothecaries:

Ful redy hadde he his apothecaries
To sende hym drogges and his letuaries,
For ech of hym made oother for to wyne--
Hir frendshipe nas nat newe to bigynne. (425-428)

Such understandings were apparently widespread, and find their way into literature in Gower's Mirour de l'omme.³⁹

The satiric tone becomes even more explicit as Chaucer describes the Physician's "studie," elegant dress, and love of gold:

His studie was but litel on the Bible.
In sangwyn and in pers he clad was al,
Lyned with taffata and with sendal;
And yet he was but easy of dispenche;
He kepte that he wan in pestilence.
For gold in phisik is a cordial,
Therefore he loved gold in special. (438-444)

Irreligion and avarice are viewed almost as occupational diseases of the physician in the Middle Ages. Most medical texts originated in heathen lands and consisted in part of pagan charms, lightly Christianized in translation. The Moslems came closest of any culture to a science of medicine, hence the physician becomes guilty by association. Love of money is often denounced by the clergy of the time. Owst writes of

. . . John of Mirfield's careful warnings that the physician

should not have secret conversation with any woman of the house, save where essential for the patient's treatment, neither talking improperly, nor throwing rash glances in their direction, "especially in the patient's presence", and the like . . . "Nor let him sow discord amongst the patient's domestics," he goes on, "nor offer advice unsought, nor brawl with those of the house, nor commit any other improper acts or anything that could reasonably displease folk. For all these things destroy a good opinion, and give the physician an evil name." "For lay-folk", adds the homilist very significantly, "are always wont to speak ill of physicians." Alluding once more, this time in real satiric vein, to the doctors of his own day (moderni medici), he specifies as their three most coveted qualifications--"subtle lying, dishonourable procedure, and a boldness in killing". Rarely is a doctor a good Christian, he says. "Their deeds prove them to be disciples, not of Christ, but of Avicenna and Galen." And therewith he reminds them that if the patient is a poor man, it is their Christian duty to cure him for nothing.⁴⁰

Here we find all of Chaucer's allegations plus many more of which the poet did not avail himself. He could certainly have made his satire more bitter than he chose. Other diatribes against physicians may be found in Langland⁴¹ and Jean de Meun.⁴²

The Physician emerges as a bitter-sweet, ambiguous figure. He may be talented, but he shares the foibles of his breed. As a personage he exists only in terms of his occupation. His character is developed through satiric commonplaces, but is nonetheless vivid. Chaucer snowballs the reader with a mass of medical terminology, creating the impression that much vital information has been conveyed. Actually the medical details convey considerably less information about the character than do the off-hand allusions to satiric convention. Once again we find that convention plays an important role in portraying character.

We have examined a group of pilgrims--Merchant, Clerk, Man of Law, Franklin, Guildsmen, Cook, Shipman, and Physician--whom Chaucer has characterized predominantly by what they do. The Franklin is an

exception to this, since he represents the embodiment of a lifestyle rather than an occupation. The Clerk is also atypical of the group since, as an ideal figure, he shares few human qualities with the others. Characterization of these pilgrims depends on a combination of occupational talents, some personal description, and occasional references to conventions, usually satiric, which to some extent portray the personage's attitudes. None of these figures strikes the reader as being so highly mimetic as the religious figures discussed above, partly, of course, because their portraits are considerably shorter. Like the highly mimetic figures this business group is portrayed in terms of earthly, transitory concerns. Similarly, conventional material is used for both groups to indicate typical attitudes and actions. But the bourgeois characters remain less lifelike than their religious counterparts. Chaucer has concentrated more on occupation and function than on attitude; we see each figure only in a limited way; what little attention is devoted to attitude is more allusive, less explicit than that in the religious portraits. The illusion of lifelikeness is not so strong for these figures as it is for the Prioress, Monk, and Friar, in spite of the fact that the methods of portrayal are similar. Without specific knowledge of attitudes, the reader remains cut off from the secret hearts of the group, from the wellsprings of motivation which he sees in the group of religious; hence he tends to see them as types.

The Wife of Bath has received more critical attention than any other figure on the Canterbury pilgrimage; she is the dominating character of the Canterbury Tales, and her wondrous personality, revealed in the prologue to her tale, is here only glimpsed.

The General Prologue portrait does not rely on the antifeminist devices which are so abundant in Alison's monologue. Indeed, if we force ourselves to read it in isolation from the monologue (a difficult thing to do), we see that it is not much different from many other portraits. The catalogue technique, evident in the Physician's portrait, the sly humor and ironic juxtaposition of details, used to picture the Prioress and Monk, and the seemingly haphazard organization all remain.

We first learn of Alison's deafness and occupation. ". . . She was somdel deaf, and that was scathe," opens the portrait with a tantalizing detail which defies the explanations immediately sought by the reader, until Alison herself, in her own good time, reveals the cause. Her weaving, which surpasses that of Ypres and Ghent--no doubt an ironic comment on Bath's notoriously second-rate goods⁴³--establishes her position in society as a member of the bourgeoisie, and hints at her independent character. Aspects of that character are immediately revealed as the narrator comments on her pride:

In al the paris she wife ne was ther noon
That to the offryng bifore hire sholde goon;
And if ther dide, certeyn so wrooth was she,
That she was out of alle charitee. (449-452)

We are here obviously dealing with a detail from convention. The extreme pride which medievals associated with socially-determined place in the offertory and other processions was often the subject of lamentations by satirists and clergy. Chaucer's Parson, who follows Alison in the Canterbury portrait gallery, will later tell us:

And yet is ther a privee spece of Pride, that waiteth first
to be salewed er he wole salewe, al be he lasse worth than
that oother is, peraventure; and eek he waiteth or desireth
to sitte, or elles to goon above hym in the wey, or kisse
pax, or been encensed, or goon to offryng biforn his
neighebor, / and swiche semblable thynges, agayns his duete,

peraventure, but that he hath his herte and his entente in
 swich a proud desir to be magnified and honoured biforn the
 peple. (X. 406-407)

Indeed we have already encountered this precedence-consciousness in
 the wives of the Guildsmen, and will see it again in the Reeve's Tale.
 Such company does not reflect well on Alison, but does place her
 socially and morally.

Chaucer returns to personal description, qualifying each item
 with a phrase which carries implicit commentary:

Hir coverchiefs ful fyne weren of ground;
 I dorste swere they weyeden ten pound
 That on a Sonday weren upon hir heed.
 Hir hosen weren of fyn scarlet reed,
 Ful streite yteyd, and shoes ful moyste and newe.
 Boold was hir face, and fair, and reed of hewe. (453-458)

The picture is one of ostentation, and the narrator forestalls the
 reader's anticipated suspicions of his veracity by assuring us, "I
 dorste swere . . ." The emphasis on rich materials and "fyn scarlet
 reed" also reinforces the picture of a proud, showy woman, and pro-
 vides the first hints that Alison's sexual mores might well prove
 scandalous. Chaucer proceeds at once to assure us, for the next line
 reads, "She was a worthy woman al hir lyve," but that worthiness is
 immediately defined in a non-religious moral system:

Housbondes at chirche dore she hadde fyve,
 Withouten oother compaignye in youthe,--
 But therof nedeth nat to speke as nowthe. (460-462)

One recalls that "worthiness" is a battlefield virtue of the Knight,
 and Alison later reveals herself as a powerful warrior in the battle of
 the sexes. The words "as nowthe" are yet another come-on; the reader
 may find revealing information if he continues reading.

Chaucer returns to externals, saying of Alison's travels:
 And thries hadde she been at Jerusalem;

She hadde passed many a straunge strem;
 At Rome she hadde been, and at Boloigne,
 In Galice at Seint-Jame, and at Coloigne,
 She koude muchel of wandrynge by the weye. (463-467)

Alison's trips to Jerusalem, Compostela, Boulogne, Rome, and Cologne somewhat explain her presence in the Canterbury group, anchor her in the real world, and in the phrase "wandrynge by the weye" hint again at her Marcian-Venerian nature. While pilgrimages were not entirely unusual for women in the fourteenth century, Alison's extensive travels are; they serve to depict her as the bold woman she is and to separate her ever so slightly from the conventional Duenna figure to which she has some affinity in her monologue. The completeness of her list, which includes every major pilgrimage and two minor ones, contributes to the portrait through exaggeration, or, at least, improbability. The fact that we tend to believe that the Wife has made these pilgrimages, while we don't believe that the Shipman knows every creek in Britain and Spain, is another indication of realism in the Wife's portrayal. It is virtually the difference between routine hyperbole and a fully realized descriptive attribute. The exaggeration alone justifies the double-mention of her experience in strange lands, and coupled with the habitual dangers of travel, further reinforces the boldness which forms so great a part of her character. We will recall the many prohibitions against pilgrimages by nuns, mentioned in conjunction with the Prioress' portrait; the dangers of pilgrimage were viewed by church authorities to be as much spiritual as physical.

In keeping with his haphazard organization, Chaucer returns for one more look at Alison's appearance, closing with yet another

tantalizing hint that there is much more to this personage than we might think:

Gat-tothed was she, soothly for to seye.
 Upon an amblere esily she sat,
 Wympled wel, and on hir heed an hat
 As brood as is a bokeler or a targe;
 A foot-mantel aboute hir hipes large,
 And on hir feet a paire of spores sharpe.
 In felaweshipe wel koude she laughe and carpe.
 Of remedies of love she knew per chaunce,
 For she koude of that art the olde daunce. (468-476)

The gat teeth symbolically encapsulate the Wife, signifying, according to various interpretations, love of travel, love of Venus' works, and lechery, all suitable to Alison. Again a hyperbolic figure--her hat "As brood as is a bokeler or a targe"--restresses her boldness. A very descriptive, if unflattering, tone is introduced by the phrase "the olde daunce." It is perhaps ironic that it is the "remedies of love" which Alison knows. Alison would doubtless say that it is the art of love of which she is master. When we view her in retrospect of the narration of her marital experiences, we might well agree that Alison herself is one of the remedies!

The Wife's vivacity has never really been questioned, although the attitudes toward it which the reader is supposed to take have long been disputed. The long continuance of these arguments is itself evidence of Chaucer's creation of a figure which, much like a real human being, cannot be easily explained. The mimetic qualities which comprise this character are rooted in Chaucer's descriptive technique. Stock characteristics are borrowed from iconography and moral exemplum--the red hose, the peacock pride in church--and qualified by personal details--deafness, the ten-pound headdress, her five husbands. All are juxtaposed in a seemingly haphazard manner so that they comment

ironically or humorously upon one another and give the impression that the poet is making his observations from real life, not from catalogues in books. This interplay of details, in which one qualifies, or contradicts, or undercuts another, bulks large, as we have seen, in Chaucer's realistic technique. The whole is never merely the sum of the parts, but that sum qualified and enhanced by the descriptive pattern. The elements of the Wife's description are more varied and less governed by a single type of detail than the portraits of the Physician, Man of Law, Shipman, or Franklin. Alison's portrait is comprised of a balance and interrelation of physical appearance, past experiences, and tell-tale comments on her personality and values. Chaucer has included details, seemingly unimportant to the General Prologue, which will be fully developed in the course of the pilgrimage. The portrait is extremely economical: there are no empty lines injected for the sake of rhyme; every detail is eventually incorporated into Alison's personality. Though the portrait is only of middling length, it presents the personage more completely than any other sketch except those much longer portraits of the religious figures. Alison is a mimetic figure, but she embodies a combination of the real and unreal—a characterization based on carefully selected and sometimes exaggerated bits of life which the catalyst of Chaucer's art makes to seem real.

As with the other highly mimetic figures pictured thus far, assessing the precise position of Alison on the spectrum of characterization is extremely difficult, involving the tensions between individual and type that we found in the sketches of Prioress, Monk, and Friar. In the General Prologue Alison is pictured with considerably

less satiric detail than the others. We might expect this to make her more mimetic than the other figures, but such is not the case. Alison becomes more and more lifelike as we observe her more and more in the context of antifeminist satire. We are faced with a knotty medieval tendency, completely counter to accepted modern criticism and logic, which portrays a character's ethos through conventional material. This tendency, one suspects, is profoundly rooted in the habitual medieval way of viewing society and the individual. Yet another problem emerges when we observe that it is variation on convention which makes a character especially "lifelike." Alison is pictured through a multitude of details. The fact that they are more varied than those picturing the Physician or Franklin definitely makes her more vivid than these pilgrims. But her personal attitudes are here only briefly mentioned, and in this respect her mimetic qualities lag behind those so elaborately expressed for the religious figures. Like them, she rates far to the realistic-imperfect end of Dvořák's spectrum. Pictured entirely in terms of the transitory and in terms of those things important to her, she has nothing in common with the idealized figures except that both types must, within reason, be expressed in concrete detail. The extensiveness of their portraits supplies greater realism to the Friar, Monk, and Prioress.

The two brothers among the pilgrims, Parson and Plowman, are the most highly idealized, and hence least individual, of any of the characters of the Canterbury Tales. The Parson's is the second longest of the portraits with fifty-one lines; it is curious to note that the Plowman's is the second shortest, yet both portraits are equally idealized and vague. The only descriptive detail in the

Parson's portrait is the picture of the priest, staff in hand, visiting parishioners in "reyn" and "thonder." He does not so much as receive a geographical location:

A good man was ther of religioun,
And was a povre persoun of a town. (477-478)

The unnamed town immediately idealizes the figure; he could live anyplace, but the lack of locale sets his perfection apart, in a sort of Platonic heaven of the Ideal. We do not find perfect persons in every town. Fully a fifth of the lines are broad laudatory statements which serve to generalize rather than individualize the Parson. Detail is extremely vague: "Riche he was of heoly thoght and werk"; "A better preest I trowe that nowher noon ys." The remainder of the portrait consists of rhetorical statements concerning acknowledged faults of the clergy to which the Parson is not prey--

He sette nat his benefice to hyre
And leet his sheep encombred in the myre
And ran to Londoun unto Seinte Poules
To seken hym a chaunterie for soules (507-510)

and of small metaphorical images concerning the priest as good shepherd:

He dwelte at hoom, and kepte wel his folde,
So that the wolf ne made it nat myscarie. (511-512)

Other examples portray his sermons, beliefs, and attitudes towards wanderers from the fold. None portrays the Parson however; they depict priestliness, or, more specifically, a pastoral (in its ancient figurative sense) state. The Parson, in keeping with his thematic role of shepherd on the path to the Heavenly Jerusalem, is the least earthly and least "human" of the pilgrims:

Wel oghte a preest ensample for to give,
By his clenness, how that his sheep sholde lyve. (505-506)

He is a humble Melchisedek, more symbol than personage. This perfect

man is portrayed in a radically different way from the less spiritual pilgrims. Dvorak[✓] writes that even perfect figures must have "what is intrinsic to their physical nature." The Parson, having no real "physical nature," possesses none of the transient, physical characteristics or foibles shared by the others. He has no location in the actual world, no physical peculiarities, and not even his horse merits description. He is described in terms of negative conventions, in the manner that some mystics described God. The positive qualities which he possesses are those of the Good Shepherd--of Christ--and, like Christ, he is on earth only for a while; he is not of the earth.

The Plowman is equally faceless. Composed of precepts, he has only his work to distinguish him: "He had ylad of dong ful many a fother" (530). He loves God with his whole heart and his neighbor as himself; he works for Christ's sake and pays his tithes; he wears a tabard and rides a mare, these last the only details added by Chaucer to give his portrait some verisimilitude. Perhaps if the Plowman had been given further attention in the completed Canterbury Tales he would have emerged as a character something like Langland's Piers. Indeed, he and his brother remind us momentarily of the concepts of Dowell and Dobet. The overall conception is similar, but Piers has a dramatic context in which to express himself:

'I wil worschip ther-with treuthe by my lyve,
And ben his pilgryme atte plow for pore mennes sake.
My plow-fote shal be my pyk-staf and pecche atwe the fotes,
And helpe my culter to kerue and clense the forwes.'

Now is perkyn and his pilgrymes to the plowe faren,
To erie this halve acre holpyn hym manye.⁴²
Dikeres & delueres digged vp the balkes.

Similarly the Plowman:

He wolde thresshe, and therto dyke and delve,
For Cristes sake, for every povre wight. (536-537)

Coulton has stated, "In all medieval literature the peasant is very seldom noticed, and, even then, the notice is almost universally scornful."⁴⁵ Langland and Chaucer are exceptions to this trend. Chaucer's Plowman, like the bourgeoisie, is pictured in terms of his calling, but unlike the business-oriented portraits, the moral light of the picture is ideal, not satiric. Like the Parson, the Plowman is pictured in terms of perfection. He does possess characteristics which link him to life on this earth--the references to dung, his dress, and mount. But those references at no point link him with the other imperfections which plague the earthly. Like the Parson, the Plowman occupies a place far at the idealized, perfect, and un-lifelike end of the mimetic spectrum.

The Miller's portrait is in striking contrast to the two which precede it. With twenty-one lines it is among the shorter portraits, but it contains the highest number of personal descriptive details of all the sketches in the General Prologue. The picture is strikingly vivid and compact. Chaucer returns to his haphazard ordering of details in which blocks of physical description are interspersed with activities which reflect on physical make-up; this is followed by comments on character and concluded by his clothing and more activities. The total effect is that of an alternation of physical description and comments on character which defies logic but has pronounced artistic effect:

The Millere was a stout carl for the nones;
Ful byg of brawn, and eek of bones.
That proved wel, for over al ther he cam,
At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram.

He was short-sholdred, brood, a thikke knarre;
 Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre,
 Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed.
 His berd as any sowe or fox was reed,
 And therto brood, as though it were a spade.
 Upon the cop right of his nose he hade
 A werthe, and theron stood a toft of herys,
 Reed as the brustles of a sowes erys;
 His noethirles blake were and wyde.
 A swerd and bokeler bar he by his ayde.
 His mouth as greet was as a greet forneys.
 He was a jangler and a goliardeys,
 And that was moost of synne and harlotries.
 Wel koude he stelen corn and tollen thries;
 And yet he hadde a thombe of gold, pardee.
 A whit cote and a blew hood wered he.
 A baggepipe wel koude he blowe and sowne,
 And therwithal he broughte us out of towne. (545-566)

The figure characterized is more than anything else a grotesque.

Chaucer chooses to emphasize the ugly, coarse, and gross, and selects his images from the barnyard and the workshop: the beard is red as any sow and broad as a spade; the hairs of the wart are red as the bristles of a sow's ear; the nostrils are black and wide; the mouth is like a furnace. Chaucer dwells on this ugly hyperbole until it takes on elements of humor; repeated stress of the grotesquerie of the Miller's appearance disposes the reader to see his personality as equally grotesque. His character is indeed like his appearance: he is a thief, a jangler who talks only of sin and harlotry. Many details of his appearance symbolically support the few lines in which the narrator makes direct statements about the Miller's morals. Physiognomically the Miller's appearance indicates shamelessness, immodesty, loquacity, boldness, quick temper, treacherousness, and lust.⁴⁶

Millers were notorious for little work and high fees. The miller, writes Rogers, is "the opulent villager, who is keen after his gains, and not over honest in the collection of them."⁴⁷ Langland attacks

millers as well as reeves in Piers Plowman as thieves and ignorant rascals (C. III. 112-113; B. X. 38ff.). As a caricature the miller appears in French fabliaux, the Reeve's Tale, Langland, and other denunciations of the rascally peasant. Chaucer goes out of his way to make the caricature grotesque. His description dwells on the sort of vivid things we expect from a brawny rascal: "At wrastlynge he wolde have alwey the ram"; "Ther was no dore that he nolde heve of harre, / Or breke it at a rennyng with his heed." The characterization consists of selected exaggerations. We can believe in the Miller, not so much because we see him as plausible as because we see him vividly. The limitations of the plausibility go unnoticed, overshadowed by the vivid grotesquerie.

The Manciple is an extremely vague figure in the Canterbury group, although for different reasons than the lack of personality we have seen in some of the other bourgeois figures. Of the Manciple we learn only that he works for "mo than thries ten" learned men in "a temple." There is no other detail given concerning his appearance, his horse, or his occupational duties. But fully one half of the twenty line description is devoted to the honor and worth of the Manciple's employers, "That weren of lawe expert and curious," and the irony

That swich a lewed mannes wit shall pace
The wisdom of an heap of lerned men. (574-575)

The naive narrator implies his wonder and admiration of that fact. It is not the Manciple who is real in this portrait, but rather a common condition of life--cleverness can outsmart or outperform the wisdom of the learned. The narrator again offers his tacit approval of this state of affairs: "This Manciple sette hir aller cappe."

The Manciple is merely an embodiment of craftiness in a "lewed

man," another variant on the type of the crafty peasant. The portrait's realism is that of situation, not personality. The Manciple does appear later in the Tales when he reproves the drunken Cook and then makes his peace with him, but even that incident serves more to illustrate his cleverness than to portray a many-sided personality. The Manciple's portrait lacks even those things intrinsic to human nature which Dvorak finds even in idealized figures. He is not a personage; he is a state of being. The situation may indeed be realistic; the character is not.

The Reeve's portrait balances that of the Miller. Choleric and crafty, his personality traits are also illustrated physiognomically:

The Reve was a sclendre colerik man.
 His berd was shave as ny as ever he kan;
 His heer was by his erys ful round yshorn;
 His top was dokked lyk a preest biforn.
 Ful longe were his legges and ful lene,
 Ylyk a staf, ther was no calf ysene. (587-592)

Curry remarks that the traits indicated by this appearance include sharp wit, prudence, lust, intemperance, and a long memory.⁴⁸ Chaucer devotes many lines to Oswald's duties as reeve:

Wel koude he kepe a gerner and a bynne;
 Ther was noon auditour koude on him wyne.
 Wel wiste he by the droughte and by the reyn
 The yeldyng of his seed and of his greyn.
 His lordes sheep, his neet, his dayerye,
 His swyn, his hors, his stoor, and his pultrye
 Was hoely in this Reves governyng,
 And by his covenant yaf the rekenyng,
 Syn that his lord was twenty yeer of age.
 Ther koude no man bryng hym in arrerage.
 Ther nas baillif, ne hierde, nor oother hyne,
 That he ne knew his sleighte and his covyne;
 They were adrad of hym as of the deeth. (593-605)

Chaucer returns to the use of occupational diction and the catalogue of terms unused since the Physician's portrait. The listing of

seed, grain, sheep, neet, dairy, swine, horse, stock, and poultry establishes the Reeve's total control of his master's estate, as does the remark that he knew everyone's faults. The Reeve's own sleight-of-hand operations are hinted in the lines:

His lord wel koude he plesen subtilly,
To yeve and lene hym of his owene good,
And have a thank, and yet a cote and hood. (610-12)

Reeves had a reputation in medieval England much like that of millers. Both belong to a larger type of the crafty vassal. Oswald's portrait is a subdivision of craft, however. Robin's evil, like that of the miller in the Reeve's Tale, is evident to all; Oswald depends on deceit. Chaucer does not stress the grotesque quite so much as in the Miller's portrait: the similes employed--"dokked lyk a preest biforn," "legges . . . ylyk a staf," "adrad . . . as of the deeth," "tukked as is a frere"--are spare, dark, almost ascetic when compared to those in the Miller's portrait, which are dominated by the furnace and the sow. The Reeve's images, for the most part religious ones, are unsuited to the crafty servant, but their use in his description evokes images of the wolf in lamb's clothing. The actions of the Reeve also depend upon pretense; as a reeve he keeps a model farm but "lends" to his master from his master's goods. We later see that he is a choleric man under a melancholy covering. The type of the crafty servant is rarely portrayed with so much subtlety. The Miller is a more typical representative; his bluster and cheating are no secret, and his noisy volubility more in keeping with the type than the apparent taciturnity of the Reeve.

Chaucer closes the portrait in his typical manner. He relates numerous unrelated details which combine to leave a vivid impression.

We learn that the Reeve is also a carpenter, his horse is named Scot, he comes from Norfolk, and

Tukked he was as is a frere aboute,
And evere he rood the hyndrest of oure route. (621-622)

The carpentry is gratuitous at the moment, but assumes importance when the Miller and Reeve begin to spar; Oswald's Norfolk origins are later mimetically supported by his speech. The final two lines briefly but vividly picture the ascetic appearance of the melancholy, choleric man who almost slinks along after the pilgrims.

The Reeve's portrait is slightly longer than average, and contains a high proportion of details of both personal and functional description. Organized on the occupational principles of the Physician's and Man of Law's portraits, it departs from them to add elements indicative of disposition which contribute greater depth and considerably more realism to the usual occupational portrait. All three of this series of portraits--Miller, Manciple, Reeve--are in many ways variants on the type of the crafty peasant, and are arranged roughly in ascending order of financial success.

The Summoner and his friend the Pardoner join the Miller as the grotesques of the Canterbury pilgrimage. But whereas the Miller is portrayed with tolerant humor, these figures of the ecclesiastical fringe are pictured with considerable satire. Summoners, also known as apparitors, occupy a curious place in the social and literary history of the time. They rarely appear in literature, but when they do, they are always, without exception, the object of satire which ranges from moderate to vehement. As a historical figure, however, the summoner rarely appears, and there is little evidence that the occupation had descended to quite the depths of corruption indicated

by literary portrayals.

Louis A. Haselmayer has surveyed the documentary and literary evidence for information on the activities of summoners in England.⁴⁹ The position grew out of the Roman judicial system in the early years of the church, but does not appear in English records until 1237. The office seems to have become fairly common by the late thirteenth century, although Haselmayer has found exceedingly few references to it in diocesan records. Fourteenth century records, while much more numerous, reveal little:

An examination of episcopal records of the fourteenth-century English dioceses reveals documents on the apparitor which are curiously scattered and lacking in uniformity. The function was not one which appeared in the ordinary memoranda of consistory courts. The citations were addressed by the bishop to the rural deans, rectors, and archdeacons. Most of the apparitors were attached to the archidiaconal courts, the documents of which are either not available or no longer extant. Thus we are unable really to find traces of the daily activity of the apparitor, except in episcopal notices which are one degree removed from the actual routine. As a result, in some dioceses no records appear, and in others long periods of years might elapse without any mention of the officer. We cannot necessarily assume that he did not exist, but merely accept the probability that our documents did not note it.⁴⁰

The summoner's most important duty was the serving of the writs, or summons, of the consistory courts; in at least some places he was also responsible for seeing that the person actually appeared in court. As a minor officer of the courts the summoner frequently searched out intestate estates and performed duties concerning the probation of wills. It is not until late in the fourteenth century that the summoner seems to have gained a free hand in the issuing of citations; at that time he became not so much an emissary of the court as a criminal investigator on the look-out for criminal offenses. In the

courtroom the summoner served as a sort of bailiff or marshall. He was appointed by the bishop and might be either the apparitor general-- the bishop's prime summoner with jurisdiction throughout the diocese-- or the apparitor of an archdeaconry. Appointments were made indefinitely, sometimes for life, sometimes "at the bishop's pleasure," sometimes for the life of the bishop. Compensation appears to have come most often from the fines leveled by the ecclesiastical court; the summoner got a percentage of the take. He was usually not in orders, and apparently not always literate, for several records specify that the appointee is either "clerk," or "literate."⁵¹

Haselmayer says that "Specific examples of corrupt apparitors are not frequent,"⁵² but does find two instances of the murder of summoners by groups of criminals and several cases of extortion. He finds only one recorded incident of false accusation of crime, which was by a pretender to the job and involved three vicars and several other men and women accused of "grave fornication."⁵³ More bothersome, to judge by the number of times the abuse is mentioned, is the habit of the archdeacon's apparitors to wander from their appointed jurisdictions. Finally they were forbidden horses, but the prohibition was repeated many times. Summoners also made a practice of collecting gifts from the various people attending the courts, as protection against the archdeacon's "curse." In 1378 we find a parliamentary plea which indicates a "large and troublesome group of men who took advantage of the peculiar situation of their office to prey upon the people, collect money and other gifts":

Et auxint les ditz Sommeurs facent leur sommons as diverses gentz par malice, come ils sont en alantz a leur charuets en les champs, et aillours, & les surmettent diverses crimes

torcenouses, & la facent les povres gentz de faire fin, qu'ils appellent The Bischope Almois; ou autrement le dit Sommour les face sommon de XX ou XI leukes de la, einz & aucun foitz en deux leiux a un jour, a grant desease, empovreiment, a oppression des ditz povres Comunes. Dont Vous plese considerer le grant meschief, & ent ordoner due remedie, Dieu, & en oeuvre de charitee.⁵⁴

And also the said Summoners make their summons to diverse people for malice when they are going in their carts to the fields and elsewhere, and these extortioners impute crimes to the poor, contriving that the poor shall pay a fine which is called the Bischope Almois; or else the said Summoners demand that the people appear for trial twenty or more leagues from their homes, sometimes to two places on one day, to the great dis-ease, impoverishment, and oppression of the said poor Commons. It is begged that Parliament consider these great harms etc., etc.⁵⁵

Haselmayer wisely observes that the records of abuses like the above are so scant as to warrant our not taking them as typical. Evidence also exists that the position was at times not only respectable, but desirable. It has certainly been the summoners' fate, like the friars', to have been considered more in terms of the satires which have been written about them than in the light of historical objectivity, which certainly admits many abuses but does not condemn all.

When Chaucer's Friar Huberd says, "Pardee, ye may wel knowe by the name / That of a somonour may no good be sayd," he is accurately reflecting the literary state of affairs. While summoners appear but seldom--being minor officials they are subject to the archdeacons who were the targets of considerably more satire--the references are never kindly. Langland mentions summoners three times in Piers Plowman.⁵⁶ Summoners are present among the rogues at Meed's wedding; they praise her; they love lechery. The anonymous Jacob's Well includes the summoner in a list of robbers: "Also sommours & bedels, that dwellyn in offyce vnder hem, spare no conscyens to take what thei may getyn."⁵⁷

The "Satyre on the Consistory Courts" also pictures the summoners:

Yet ther sitteth somenours myxe other sevene,
 Mys motinde men alle by here evene,
 And recketh forth heore rolle;
 Hyrd-men hem hatieth, ant uch mones hyne
 For everuch a parosse heo polketh in pyne,
 And clastreth with heore colle.⁵⁸

Lastly the play "The Trial of Joseph and Mary" of the Ludus Coventriae also satirizes the summoner who, in the role of Prologue, says:

A. serys god save you all
 here is a fayr pepyl in good ffay
 Good serys telle me what men me calle
 I trowe ye kan not be this day
 Yitt I walke wyde and many way
 but yet ther I come I do no good
 to reyse slawdyr is al my lay
 bakbytere is my brother of blood.
 Dede he ought come hedyr in al this day
 new wolde god that he wore here
 and be my trewth I dar wel say
 that yf we tweyn to-gedyr a-pere
 More slawadyr we te xal a-rere
 with-in and howre throwe-outh this town
 than evyr ther was this thowsand yere
 and ellys I shrewe you bothe up and down.⁵⁹

Such are the literary references to summoners, and against this background we must view Chaucer's portrait. Chaucer's Summoner is considerably more individualized, but is without doubt in the tradition which can say nothing good about the summoner. He is one of the few pilgrims whom the narrator seems to dislike. Chaucer first sketches the grotesque appearance of the man in terms which physiognomically reveal much about his personality:

A Somenour was ther with us in that place,
 That hadde a fyr-reed cherubynnes face,
 For saucefleen he was, with eyen narwe.
 As hoot he was and lecherous as a sparwe,
 With scalled browes blake and piled berd.
 Of his visage children were aferd.
 Ther nas quyk-silver, lytarge, ne brymstoon,
 Boras, ceruce, ne oille of tartre noon;
 Ne cynamet that wolde clense and byte,

That hym myghte helpen of his whelkes white,
Nor of the knobbes sittynge on his chekes. (623-633)

Chaucer opens the description with a reference calculated to recall to the reader the context of the portrait: we are "in that place," the Tabard Inn. While the phrase is without doubt a line-filler, it also serves to verify the actuality of the grotesquerie which follows it.

The Summoner's diseased skin, so vividly portrayed, is an accurate description of gutta rosacea which has developed into a kind of "leprosy" known as alopicia. It should be noted that the word "leprosy" was used very loosely in the Middle Ages to refer to almost any type of skin disease. Curry defines gutta rosacea using a sixteenth-century description:

Gutta rosacea be the Latin wordes. In Englyshe it is named sauce fleume face, which is a rednes about the nose and chekes, with small pynples: it is a prevy signe of leproumes.⁶⁰

Arnoldus de Villa Nova describes alopicia as follows:

Alopicia is a species of leprosy which is produced ex sanguine adusto. This type is marked by a complete depilation of the eyebrows and beard. The eyes of the patient become inflated (inflantur) and exceedingly red. Pimples of a reddish colour appear in the face and even on the whole body, from which runs corruption mixed with blood. . .⁶¹

The causes were said to be "'flesshlye lyking' by a contaminated woman-- 'and sometimes it cometh of too hot meates, as long use of strong pepper, and of garlike, and of such other . . . and of uncleane wine and corrupt.'"⁶² The compounds recommended for use on the face are exactly those which Chaucer says have not helped cleanse the Summoner.

Like the Miller, the Summoner is described in images of great ugliness: fyr-reed cherubynnes face, saucefleem, eyen narwe, lecherous as a sparwe, scalled browes blake, piled berd, whelkes white, knobbes sittynge on his chekes. The fact that he scares children makes him

particularly repugnant, as does the mention of his lecherousness. The "fyr-reed cherubynnes face" is a choice term of ironic-grotesquerie: the red face in itself would be nothing grotesque; in fact the mention of cherubin conveys another connotation entirely. But the following line, "For saucefleem he was . . ." defines the nature of the redness, completely negating the image of any heavenly fire and replating it with the fire of the devil. The list of remedies which do not help likewise stresses the extreme state to which the disease has progressed; quyk-silver, lytarge, brynstoon, boras, ceruce, oille of tartre, and oynements all imply an atmosphere of medical certainty and hopelessness.

Chaucer follows the semi-medical description of the Summoner with remarks on his tastes:

Wel loved he garleek, oynons, and eek lekes,
 And for to drynken strong wyn, reed as blood;
 Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood.
 And whan that he wel dronken hadde the wyn,
 Thanne wolde he speke no word but Latyn.
 A fewe termes hadde he, two or thre,
 That he had lerned out of som decree--
 No wonder is, he herde it al the day;
 And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay
 Kan clepen "Watte" as wel as kan the pope.
 But whoso koude in oother thyng hym grope,
 Thanne hadde he spent al his philosophie;
 Ay "Questio quid iuris" wolde he crie. (634-646)

The lines on garlic, onions, leeks, and wine would seem to be a return to the "haphazard" technique, did we not know that such tastes were medically connected with the Summoner's disease. The grotesque mode is maintained by these details, incongruous after the lines on medications, "whelkes," and "knobbes sittynge on his chekes." "Wyn, reed as blood" is likewise grotesque in the context and serves as a bridge to the next subject, the Summoner's learning, or pretense to learning. We have seen that not all summoners were literate, hence the lines on

the Summoner's "philosophie" and the narrator's scorn of it. "Thanne wolde he speke and crie as he were wood," says the narrator, explaining that what he speaks is "no word but Latyn." He pulls the rug from beneath the Summoner in a superb satiric deflation by adding, "A fewer termes hadde he, two or thre." He learned them from "som decree," the inconsequential word "som" expressing infinite scorn which is amplified by the explanatory, almost apologetic, "no wonder is, he herde it al the day." Chaucer is careful to make sure that we do not attribute to the Summoner the cleverness which his narrator so admires in the Manciple:

Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace
 That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
 The wisdom of an heep of lerned men? (573-575)

He proceeds to further deflate the Summoner's pretensions by taking the reader into his confidence: "And eek ye knowen wel how that a jay / Kan clepen "Watte" as wel as kan the pope." In "eek ye knowen" the narrator allies the reader with his own position, although there is hardly any question of the need to convince the reader. The Summoner is degraded to the intelligence of a jay and his Latin is worth all of the jay's cry, "Watte." Moreover, Chaucer does not hesitate to let his satire spill over on ecclesiastical authority in general: the pope can do as well. He clinches the argument with a sample of the Summoner's philosophy, "Questio quid iuris?" In the context, the line is completely meaningless, and the Summoner is obviously, at this point, a complete fool. Chaucer's satire has destroyed him completely. Yet the coup de grace is not yet administered. The narrator adds, magnanimously and ironically, "He was a gentil harlot and a kynde; / A bettre felawe sholde man neght fynde" (648-649).

Chaucer has thus far condemned the Summoner on intellectual

grounds; he proceeds to expose him morally, in the process proving that the outward appearance does indeed portray the inner man. Men in the Summoner's jurisdiction can always buy their ways out of the archdeacon's curse; besides, the Summoner keeps a concubine himself. Chaucer does not permit the narrator's tacit approval of the Summoner's methods as he has done for so many other questionable pilgrims, however; even the innocent narrator is not fooled. Chaucer leaves the Summoner's words in the Summoner's mouth, offering his own comments on them:

And if he foond owher a good felawe,
 He wolde techen him to have noon awe
 In swich caas of the ercedekenes curs,
 But if a mannes soule were in his purs;
 For in his purs he sholde ypunysshed be.
 "Purs is the ercedekenes helle," seyde he.
 But wel I woot he lyed right in dede;
 Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede,
 For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith,
 And also war hym of a Significavit. (653-662)

These lines on cursing and absolving have been problematic, their difficulty arising from Chaucer's levels of irony. Chaucer first sets forth the Summoner's view: no one need fear for his soul's damnation through the archdeacon's curse; if he has money he shall not be damned, unless his soul lies in his purse. "But wel I woot he lyed right in dede," the narrator comments earnestly. "Of cursyng oghte ech gilty man him drede, / For curs wol slee right as assoillyng savith." These lines were surely written in the cast of mind which controls Dante's Divine Comedy. In the Inferno and the Purgatorio we find that souls who have been given absolution, but have never really repented, are damned, and others who have been excommunicated but have experienced a change of heart at the last moment, are saved. It is not the archdeacon's curse that slays; it is the eternal curse which the sinner brings upon himself through his refusal of grace. The Significavit (the order

which remanded the excommunicate to prison) deprives man of the channels of grace available through the church. The lines do not make Chaucer a heretic; he does not question the authority of the church, but of the church's corrupt members, the archdeacon and summoner.

Chaucer does not dwell on theological speculation, however. He adds one more condemnatory comment, seemingly haphazard in its tacked-on position, but all the more striking in its penultimate placement in the portrait:

In daunger hadde he at his owene gise
The yonge girles of the diocise,
And knew hir conseil, and was al hir reed. (663-665)

As the counsellor of the young the Summoner becomes a still greater menace. The narrator returns to happier description when he says,

A gerland hadde he set upon his heed
As greet as it were for an ale-stake.
A bokeleer hadde he maad hym of a cake. (667-669)

The comic-grotesque element enters once again to mellow the very bitter tone of the major part of the sketch. The ugly Summoner becomes, through his garland and cake, an incongruous figure. These items belie his inner blackness somewhat by disguising it in part with the joyousness of the April day. They also symbolize the ontology of the Summoner--illusion. The entire portrait is a study of what the man is and what he appears to be: a leprous harlot, he claims, for money, to save souls from the archdeacon's curse; a stupid fellow, he pretends to great learning; a diseased lecher, he wears the signs of spring.

The Summoner's portrait is without doubt one of the ugliest of the General Prologue. Like the Friar, the narrator regards him with "louryng cheere," and the portrait is considerably more vehement than the few other appearances the summoner makes in literature. Langland and the

anonymous playwright and poet attack avarice, extortion, and backbiting. Chaucer attacks an individual first of all; the type is indeed indicted, but the specific and grotesque details of the sketch make the Summoner first a personage, secondly a representative of his occupation. Chaucer has created a personality through satire. Each satiric possibility has been followed to its logical end--a sort of reductio ad absurdum which makes the Summoner a stupid but powerful rascal who has absolutely nothing good about him. The Summoner, a man of perverted morals and perverted calling, is pictured in the ugliest possible way using the ugliest possible images. As a likely or even possible member of a pilgrim band, this man is highly questionable. Yet Chaucer has created an illusion of reality in the portrait. He overcomes the reader's skepticism concerning the total evil of the character by carefully balancing the ugly satire with the grotesque and its accompanying humor. There is, after all, a fascinating quality in the supremely ugly. The narrator, who at this point seems quite probably identical with the poet, seasons his dislike of the Summoner with grotesquerie which produces a personage at the same time hateful and fascinating.

The satire of the Pardoner, "freend" and "compeer" of the Summoner, is considerably milder than that we have just observed. While the Pardoner also partakes of the grotesquerie evidenced in the portrayals of Summoner and Miller, that too is considerably lessened. The Pardoner's activities are fully described in the Prologue to his tale, and the General Prologue portrait only outlines the practices which are so fully illustrated later. Since the full scope of the Pardoner's activities does not emerge before we hear his monologue, a discussion of the actual

practices and abuses of the pardoners will be reserved until that time. Like summoners, medieval pardoners maintained a low profile in literature; our pictures of the typical pardoners come primarily from the documents which attempted to regulate their abuses. Chaucer's Pardoner is very much a type; the only basic variation is his blatant use of false relics, a practice strictly prohibited by the church authorities and one whose abuse in actual life was minimal, though its literary appearances might not indicate that.

In the Pardoner's portrait Chaucer returns to a very extensive use of the technique of haphazard organization. The grotesquerie which we find in the sketch arises primarily from juxtaposition of unrelated details, rather than from images of revulsion, ugliness, or incongruity, such as we observed in the portraits of Miller, Reeve, and Summoner. Chaucer opens the description by linking the Pardoner with that disreputable character, the Summoner:

With hym ther rood a gentil Pardoner
 Of Rouncivale, his freend and his compeer,
 That streight was comen fro the court of Rome.
 Ful loude he soong "Com hider, love to me!"
 This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun;
 Was nevere trompe of half so greet a soun. (669-674)

The linking of Pardoner and Summoner as friends immediately posts one strike against the Pardoner; the linking of the Pardoner with Rouncivale posts a second. Rouncivale refers to the hospital of the Order of Roncevalles established at Charing in 1229. The parent order was that of St. Mary of Roncevall, Spain. The English hospital had a history of receiving rich gifts and its affairs were bolstered just before the beginning of the fourteenth century when a Brother Lupus became preceptor of all the houses of the order in England and Ireland.

Brother Lupus was also a papal envoy and was licensed to sell indulgences:

. . . from his advent as leader of the Order in England until well into the fifteenth century, the selling of indulgences was the special interest of the alien St. Mary Roncevall: Brother Lupus had all too successfully demonstrated that traffic in pardons was an exceedingly profitable business.⁶³

Scandals, particularly those arising from the business of pardons, acquired such notoreity that in 1379 the Crown seized the buildings and lands of the order and issued a writ calling for the arrest of anyone collecting and misusing funds intended for the hospital. The lands were later returned, but the scandals continued. Just the mention of Rouncivale suffices to make the Pardoner suspect. The fact that he "streight was comen fro the court of Rome" further undermines his position; Boniface IX in a papal edict of 1390 complains that many vagabonds pose as pardoners, always claiming to be sent from Rome.⁶⁴ The phrase used, "streight was comen," is the sort of colloquial expression we would expect from the Pardoner himself as he explains his mission, showing his "bulles of popes and of cardynaies, / Of patriarkes and bishopes."

But Chaucer does not dwell on his occupation just yet. He passes to the relationship between Pardoner and Summoner. The repeated linking of the two in three of the first four lines of the portrait suffices to establish a shared grotesquerie and moral perversion. The Pardoner sings "ful loude," accompanied by the even louder voice of the Summoner. The double entendre of "This Somonour bar to hym a stif burdoun" is gradually developed in Chaucer's long, accelerating description of the Pardoner, culminating in the line, "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare":

This Pardoner hadde heer as yelow as wex,
 But smothe it heeng as dooth a strike of flex;
 By ounces henge his lokkes that he hadde,
 And therwith he his shuldres overspradde;
 But thynne it lay, by colpons oon and oon.
 But hood, for jolitee, wered he noon,
 For it was trussed up in his walet.
 Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet;
 Dischevelee, save his cappe, he rood al bare.
 Swiche glarynge eyen hadde he as an hare.
 A vernycle hadde he wowed upon his cappe.
 His walet lay biforn hym in his lappe,
 Bretful of pardoun, comen from Rome al hoot.
 A voys he hadde as smal as hath a goot.
 No berd hadde he, ne nevere sholde have;
 As smothe it was as it were late shave.
 I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare. (675-691)

As before, Chaucer's physiognomy is trustworthy, for it indicates precisely the kind of man we discover the Pardoner to be. The yellow, thin, straight hair indicates impoverished blood, lack of virility, effeminacy of mind, cunning, and deception; glaring eyes typify folly, gluttony, drunkenness, and shamelessness. The wide, glaring eye is also associated with the eunuch, as is the high voice and lack of beard. Moreover the eunuch is judged to be foolish, lustful, and presumptuous.⁶⁵ Chaucer no doubt also intends us to be aware of the spiritual eunuchry of his character.

While the elements of the physical description are not of the same grotesque ugliness as those of the Summoner's portrait, the stress laid on the hair, "yellow as wex," hanging like flax, in "colpons, oon and oon," coupled with the foppish pretensions which cause the Pardoner to keep his hood "trussed up" for the sake of some imagined fashion, produce a near-grotesque effect through oddity, rather than ugliness. The glaring eyes "as an hare" also contribute to the caricature-grotesque. The vernycle, completely unrelated to the type of details being related, recalls the Pardoner's occupation. In his

wallet with the hood are pardons, "comen from Rome al hoot." The phrase is typical of the subtle way in which the narrator expresses his contempt. "Al hoot" recalls the cries of the London street vendors, and Chaucer certainly pictures his subject as a sort of holy huckster. The line on his pretension to fashion, "Hym thoughte he rood al of the newe jet," conveys the same sort of scorn. The narrator takes the reader into his confidence, implying that of course, we recognize that he is not in fashion at all.

The haphazard reasserts itself as Chaucer clinches the argument. The high voice and beardlessness are no surprise at this point, for they have been carefully hinted all along. The line "I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare," introducing for the moment the callow narrator, reduces the Pardoner to the state of a workhorse, good for little; satirically it deflates him to a position singularly lacking the dignity which he thinks he has by being the height of style. It completes a process which began in the first lines of the portrait, a lengthy progression which calls great attention to the Pardoner's physical and spiritual lack. Furthermore, when Chaucer says "I trowe," he expresses more innocent surprise than certainty, but has maneuvered the reader to a position where the reader readily believes the narrator, not the Pardoner who later tells the Wife of Bath he was contemplating marriage.

Chaucer makes a habit of ironically attempting to recover the ground which a character loses by a direct satirical hit, and he does so here: "But of his craft, fro Berwyk into Ware, / Ne was ther swich another pardoner." The application of the word "craft" to a man with a vocation like the Pardoner's speaks volumes, leading nicely into the

catalogue of fraudulent relics. The narrator outlines the contents of the wallet:

For in his male he hadde a pilwe-beer,
Which that he seyde was Oure Lady weyl;
He seyde he hadde a gobet of the seyl
That Seint Peter hadde, whan that he wente
Upon the see, til Jhesu Crist hym hente.
He hadde a croys of latoun ful of stones,
And in a glas he hadde pigges bones. (694-700)

Chaucer accomplishes a superb satiric and humorous deflation of the supposed relics by at once stating their ostensible origins and their actual composition. Starting with the inelegant "pilwe-beer" he proceeds to the "gobet," and at the last need not even say what the "pigges bones" are supposed to represent. Everyone knows, and the convention has worked its ends. The deprecatory language applied to "thise relics" serves satire well. Their ordinariness and the narrator's evident scorn give the Pardoner no chance to fool the reader. As relics go, they are extremely dull. The question of false relics and their effects upon the people is discussed later in this study. Suffice it to say that Chaucer's Pardoner carries along an unassuming batch of them; the relics which were actually worshipped and the even more spectacular ones of literary provenance show considerably more style.

It is of course the believing poor who suffer most at the hands of the Pardoner. With "feyned flaterye and japes" he takes "moore moneye / Than that the person gat in monthes tweye." This reflects a very real complaint of the time. Pardoners and friars shared techniques of preaching to the parish on feast days, appropriating the extra-large offerings normally received by the parish priest. Or they would compete with him, taking up position in the town square, depriving him

of his congregation. The priest was obliged to let the pardoner preach in his church and the pardoner was obliged to let the priest say his usual Mass, but abuses were common. When enmity developed, as it often did, the pardoner was sometimes able to blackmail the priest, even, Jusserand shows, to have him excommunicated.⁶⁶ In other instances, the priest and pardoner collaborated, splitting the profits.

For all this, Chaucer tells us, "He was in chirche a noble ecclesiaste." He is, as we later discover, a superb preacher:

Wel koude he rede a lessoun or a storie,
 But alderbeste he song an offertorie;
 For wel he wiste, whan that song was songe,
 He moste preche and wel affile his tonge
 To wynne silver, as he ful wel koude;
 Therefore he song the murierly and loude. (709-714)

The unclerical phrase "wel affile his tonge" recalls the similarly described wiles of Pandarus and completes the portrait of the Pardoner as fast-talking salesman. The narrator stresses, as the Pardoner himself will do later, that his purpose is "nat but for to wynne," and indeed, that was regarded as the pardoner's main goal by many. Wyclif writes:

. . . there cometh a pardoner with stollen bullis and false relikis, grauntyng mo yeris of pardon than comen biforn domes day for gevyng of worldly catel to riche placis where is no nede . . . And this pardoner schalle telle of more power than evere crist grauntid to petir or poul or ony apostle, to drawe the almes fro pore bedrede neigheboris that ben knowen feble and pore, and to gete it to hem self and wasten it ful synfulli in ydelnesse and glotonye and lecherie.⁶⁷

But the Pardoner's own confession indicates his aims and methods better than any other and will be discussed in Chapter Four.

Chaucer's Pardoner is very much in keeping with other appearances of this official, both literary and documentary. In literature the word pardoner is a byword for the false, deceitful, and avaricious

hypocrite-churchman, subject to all the characteristic vices to which the professional fund-raiser is heir. The figure appears infrequently, usually merely a passing reference. Langland mentions pardoners several times. They are vicious and wicked, gullers of the ignorant, friends of gluttons and liars, lovers of lechery.⁶⁸ Chaucer's Pardoner has much in common with these companions. He is a personage composed of a combination of conventional and mimetic details. The conventional aspects of his occupation establish the context in which we are to view him. The mimetic details--those of physical description--vivify the type. His portrayal borders on the grotesque, mainly through his association with the Summoner and the stress on his appearance, but Chaucer does not dwell so selectively on ugliness in the Pardoner's portrait. His personality is well-established through physiognomic details and the brief picture of his operations among the poor and in church. As a mimetic figure the Pardoner is definitely on the transitory-worldly end of the descriptive spectrum. We shall observe him to become more and more lifelike in his Prologue where the beliefs and attitudes outlined in the General Prologue are substantiated by the confessional monologue.

Only six lines of the General Prologue are devoted to description of Harry Bailly, the Host. We learn that "A large man he was with eyen stepe," who is "Boold of his speche." He is "semely," a "fair burgeys," and "of manhed hym lakkede right noght." The narrator tells us about rather than shows us the Host. But Harry Bailly dominates the pilgrimage and needs little introduction. Before reaching Canterbury we know more of him than of any pilgrim except the Wife of Bath.

We have up to this point almost ignored the most important member

of the pilgrim band, Chaucer himself, or rather, Chaucer's pilgrim persona. In the General Prologue and later in the prologue to his Tale of Thopas he retains the naive, wide-eyed characterization established for himself in the earlier works, The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame, and The Parliament of Foules. His naiveté is expressed in his proneness to exaggerate, to judge by appearances, and to accept each of the pilgrims as the very best of his type. The last is most obvious: of the Knight, Yeoman, Monk, Friar, Merchant, Clerk, Man of Law, Franklin, Cook, Shipman, Physician, Parson, Plowman, Miller, Manciple, Summoner, Pardoner, and Host he ambiguously states either that "Ther was nowher swich a worthy . . ." or that "certainly he was a good felawe"! The frequency of these ambiguously laudatory lines reflects on the pilgrim described, most often ironically, and on Chaucer the narrator.

A humor born of incongruity borders on a gentle satire of both the object and the perpetrator of the descriptions. Chaucer's persona listens wide-eyed to the worldly Monk, as we have noted. Naively impressed, he agrees that the world could never be served if all monks stayed in their cloisters or at manual labor. Similarly he accepts the fallacious reasoning of the Friar:

. . . unto a povre order for to yive
 Is signe that a man is wel yahryve;
 For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
 He wiste that a man was repentaunt;
 For many a man so hard is of his herte,
 He may nat wepe, althogh hym soore smerte.
 Therefore in stede of wepyng and preyes
 Men moote yeve silver to the povre freres. (225-232)

Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous.
 He was the beste beggere in his hous. (251-252)

The incongruity of the hard heart and smarting conscience is not apparent to the overly-credulous narrator.

As a simple-minded soul, Chaucer's persona expresses great admiration of trickery. We hear him praise the crafty Shipman and Pardoner. He seems to admire the great knowledge of the Physician and the business acumen of the Manciple:

Now is nat that of God a ful fair grace
That swich a lewed mannes wit shal pace
The wisdom of an heep of lerned men? (573-575)

. . . this Manciple sette hir aller cappe. (586)

The ironic nature of these bits of praise is of course obvious, but Chaucer achieves double-duty from them, using them both as ironic comments and as characterizing devices which contribute to the narrator's wide-eyed, naive pose.

The image of the narrator as naive, simple, and earnest is further developed in his words to the reader:

But first I pray yow, of youre curteisye,
That ye n'arete it nat my vileynye,
Thogh that I pleylnly speke in this mateere,
To telle yow hir wordes and hir cheere,
Ne thogh I speke hir wordes proprely.
For this ye knowen al so wel as I,
Whoso shal telle a tale after a man,
He moot reherce as ny as evere he kan
Everich a word, if it be in his charge,
Al speke he never so rudeliche and large,
Or elles he moot telle his tale untrewe,
Or feyne thyng, or fynde wordes newe.
He may nat spare, althogh he were his brother;
He moot as wel seye o word as another.
Crist spek hymself ful brode in heoly writ,
And wel ye woot no vileynye is it.
Eek Plato seith, whoso that kan hym rede,
The wordes moete be cosyn to the dede.
Also I prey yow to feryeve it me,
Al have I nat set folk in hir degree
Heere in this tale, as that they sholde stonde.
My wit is short, ye may wel understonde. (725-746)

Fearful lest he offend, the narrator blames "vileynye" on his fellow pilgrims, faux pas on his ostensible lack of wit. Secure behind this opaque screen, Chaucer-the-poet is free to manipulate his personages in very sophisticated fashion, while at the same time putting forth a simplistic rationale of truth in literature. He promises us a realistic, mimetic work. The very promise, however, points up the fact that the work is literary and imaginative, told by a narrator who has at this point already established himself as an excellent artisan. The commentary is also a sort of come-on, like the warning before the Miller's Tale, and a protective device: if we don't like the tale, we should certainly not blame him, he says. He's only the scribe. Chaucer sets up a reality which we know is unreal and asks us to accept it. He never loses his medium, which is in fact, unreality, art; we suspend our disbelief, not to the point of ignoring his medium, but of accepting it as a mirror of reality. The art of mimesis encourages us to accept the work of art as a representation of life. To do this we need not abandon our awareness that artistry is not equivalent to life. Chaucer always manages to keep the elements of both art and life within the reader's consciousness. In so doing, he keeps himself constantly in the reader's mind, creating a believable and likeable character for his own persona.

Pausing to assess Chaucer's portraiture in the General Prologue, we find several basic types of characterization, each type representing reality to a different degree. First, and least realistic, is the ideal figure, represented in the Tales by the Knight, Clerk, Parson, and Plowman. A second group contains those pilgrims described externally, according to appearance and occupation, but who have been

given no or only few personality traits and includes the Yeoman, the Cook, and the Manciple. Described in much the same way is a larger group whose appearance and occupation is most important but whose portraits contain at least hints of values, opinions, etc. which transform the figures into personages. In this group we find the Physician, the Shipman, and the Franklin. The grotesque figures likewise form a group; they are notable not for lack of characterization, but for singularity and excessive stress of peculiar traits, for their incongruity or ugliness. Such are the Miller and Summoner, but the Reeve and Pardoner partake of some of the same characteristics. Lastly we find a group of pilgrims who, by virtue of the many-sided portrayal given them, are most lifelike. These include the Wife of Bath, the Friar, and the Monk. These categories of course overlap, and cannot be consistently defined for each pilgrim; it remains to examine each one somewhat closer.

The idealized figures are the least individualized and are portrayed as exemplars of a state or role in society. We have the holy person, dutiful peasant, studious clerk, honorable knight. The Parson, Plowman, Clerk, and Knight do not exist as individuals. They are portrayed as given sets of attitudes, conventions without traits to humanize them. Some of the same descriptive techniques which are used to describe the most mimetic figures are also used for these. But because Chaucer has put them in a world where each is the best of his type, with no faults imputed, they lack the transitory, earth-bound qualities which are one very important sign of their humanness. The language of their portraits is often prescriptive rather than descriptive. In making them ideal figures, Chaucer has removed individualizing

elements. As personalities, each is a kind of bookish perfection. In the Canterbury Tales they serve as touchstones. Because they are models of perfection we do not actually expect anybody to be like them; they represent the state of perfectness towards which members of the transitory and worldly sects ought to strive, and against which they can be measured.

Other pilgrims are described according to Chaucer's announced intention

To telle yow al the condicioun
Of ech of hem, so as it semed me,
And which they weren, and of what degree,
And eek in what array that they were inne. (38.41)

Chaucer's descriptions of pilgrims such as the Merchant, Man of Law, Cook, and Manciple are largely mimetic, consisting of detailed descriptions of the appearance and occupation of the personage. Undoubtedly some of the narrator's value judgments show through these portraits. Comic-satirical possibilities are manifest: the Man of Law's "pur-chasyng" in "fee symple"; the Merchant's selling "wheeldes"; the Manciple's implied larceny by conversion. Nevertheless the narrator's attitude towards these characters is relatively objective; we are told little of their values or personalities, and when such details are made known, it is usually through allusion or implication. The portraits consist for the most part of details, the realia spoken of by Margaret Schlauch, so often assumed to constitute realism. Realia-type details do indeed produce vivid pictures. But because they consist of externals, little illuminates the inner personality, the ground of being, of the characters so described (except perhaps in a symbolic sense). Chaucer is a master of such usage, nonetheless. His

basic techniques include meticulous selectivity of details, careful use of coordinating images to confirm or deny the surface sense, apparent haphazard arrangement of details to achieve particular effects through juxtaposition and change of context, implications of the narrator's opinion through choice phrasing, and the catalogue of terms from a particular discipline to convey an atmosphere. In those portraits which do convey some sense of the personage's values, Chaucer hints at the figure's ethos through satiric comment, more often humorous than bitingly Juvenalian, or through stress on a given preoccupation, such as the Franklin's concern for appearances. In many ways the characters governed by realia seem most realistic to the modern critic since they represent Chaucer's most objective portrayal. Yet they lack the character development which comes, most often, from the use and variation of conventions.

Those pilgrims whose personalities are most vividly revealed are characterized by a combination of mimetic description (like the realia-governed characters) and satiric conventions indicative of certain personality traits. The convention is a distillation of "typical" traits associated with a given figure. It grows out of a consciousness of the typical figure (often accompanied by implied moral judgments) and may have its referents in actual life (the friars, monks, pardoners, for instance), or in literature (the knight, courtly lover), or in both. Conventions exist for both the ideal and the realistic types. The realism or idealism of the portrait depends upon the particular characteristics that are emphasized. The ideal convention moves away from reality towards perfection and the ultimate typological referents; the mimetic convention tends towards comedy, satire, caricature,

grotesquerie. The mimetic convention can be made realistic or grotesque, depending on the use to which it is put. The functioning of convention is highly allusive. In medieval literature figures described in terms of convention may be either trite clichés, repetitions of types which have appeared again and again, or they may be personages which have acquired, through conventions, a depth of personality built upon all the accumulated conventional figures which precede them. The difference between the flat convention and the mimetic figure is the poet's artistry. We have seen that Chaucer rarely leaves a convention just as he finds it. His realistic figures are not mere conventions because they have at no point shed that element of realia-based description which they share with the strictly externally-pictured figures. Furthermore, the conventions are infinitely variable. We have seen a variety of techniques by which Chaucer extracts new life from a convention while retaining the traditional connotations which accompany it. He may mismatch a character and a convention, as he does in the Prioress' portrait. He changes point of view in his narrator's transcription, putting some conventional details in the mouth of the character whom they traditionally criticize, as in the sketch of the Monk. He dilutes or distills the traits pictured. Most of all, he relies on the interaction of allusive conventional details with personal description, the narrator's persona, and the humorous and ironic modes. When the figure described is highly mimetic we find that the scope of the portrait is wide. Those figures portrayed in many situations or from several points of view are extremely lifelike. When the figure is ultimately a grotesque, the scope is not so important as is the cartooning technique. Particular traits are emphasized in such a way as to

create a monster. While the grotesque has much in common with the realistic figure, he is not quite so lifelike because his plausibility has been sacrificed to the cartoon or caricature, whose aim is humor or satire.

For all his extensive use of satiric materials, Chaucer is primarily a humorist. He lacks the malice and pessimism which characterize the satirist who attacks his foes with a vengeance. He is amazingly serene, especially in his naive pose, when confronted by the abuses which he describes in satiric terms. He is thus able to draw profoundly on the humor inherent in the satiric mode. For satire and humor both draw on incongruities, over- and under-statements, exaggeration, and the like. By sacrificing the satirist's venom, Chaucer achieves vibrant humor while at the same time retaining the allusiveness which keeps satire and irony always in his readers' minds. Of course if we read the Tales typologically we are apt to find considerably more satire than this examination of the surface techniques of characterization and narrative management shows. Chaucer does venture into satire from time to time, notably in the Summoner's portrait, and several times in the tales which follow. His satire shines for the same reason that his characters are so lifelike: he writes of individuals who often happen to be types, but he portrays them first as individuals. The mimetic qualities inherent in the portrayal of individuals vivify the satire in the same way that they humanize the types.

It is impossible to outline specific characteristics possessed by every portrait because variation is great. There is considerable overlapping of technique in all types of the sketches. Some observations can be made, however, concerning the relationships between mimesis

and the types of details used in a portrait. It was observed earlier that details tend to fall into two categories, those of personal description and of societal function. Each category contains details which may be regarded as conventional or nonconventional. The Appendix to Chapter Two reflects data concerning these categories, together with some comments on their statistical importance. The data probably tell us more about the limitations of using numbers of details in gauging the realism of a personage than anything else. It is not surprising that the longer the portrait the more details that portrait tends to contain. The portraits which concentrate on externals are among the highest in functional description, but a number of ideal figures also rank highly. Statistically, functional description is not significant for mimesis. When personal and functional descriptive details were subdivided into conventional and nonconventional groups, no statistically significant trend emerged, indicating that convention alone is not a determinant of realism. It is not feasible to test for trend in variations on convention, for such qualities cannot be quantified. The total number of details is significant in determining the realism of a portrait, however.

Thus, it is Chaucer's artistry which determines how realistic a portrait shall be. The figures which are most lifelike are those portrayed in their transience, in their faults. The least realistic are portrayed simply, in terms which stress their universality, not their individuality. The Canterbury Tales include a wide variety of figures set forth in varying perfection and imperfection. Chaucer's artistry is fully in control when he chooses the degree of mimesis to which a personage shall be portrayed. It guides his combinations of convention

and mimetic detail. Always vivid, he selects unexpected details or gives an unusual turn of phrase to a familiar fact. His descriptive language is always adapted to the subject, especially in the catalogues of concrete details pertinent to a pilgrim. He achieves an informal and immediate tone through colloquialisms--"nat worth a fishh,"--references to his opinions, or lack of information--"Sooth to weyn, I noot how men hym calle,"--and the haphazard organization so common to the vignettes. His integration of detail and convention is skillful. The details often do not match the type, sometimes pointing up the narrator's naiveté, sometimes accomplishing variations on the type. The juxtapositions of two variant types may produce satire as well as vivid description. In all this, Chaucer maintains his concern for the specific, the concrete, the individual, and for the creation of a work which is lifelike and which his readers can enjoy.

APPENDIX TO CHAPTER II

Following are statistical tallies concerning the following categories of details in the General Prologue: number of lines per portrait; personal descriptive details; details relating to the function of the pilgrim in society. In each category the pilgrims are ranked according to the number of lines/details each has, from the greatest to the least number. The number of occurrences follows each entry. A subdivision of personal descriptive details and functional details into conventional and non-conventional elements is possible, but indicates nothing statistically significant. One can find statistically significant correlations between the number of lines given to a pilgrim and the number of descriptive details used in the portrait of that pilgrim. No such correlation exists between lines and functional details. Similarly, a correlation exists between the overall mimetic ranking of a pilgrim and the number of personal descriptive details. No significant correlation exists between mimesis and the total number of details. The test used was the Cox-Stuart test for trend. (Statistical consultant: Merrilee Helmers, Department of Statistics and Probability.) The pilgrims have been ranked according to overall mimetic effect. This mimetic listing is completely subjective, but variations of two or three places do not significantly affect the correlation factor. The significance level used was 5%.

Lines:	Personal Description	Functional Description	Total Details	Mimetic Ranking
Friar 62	Prioreess 20	Knight 27	Prioreess 34	Monk
Parson 51	Miller 20	Physician 25	Knight 30	Friar
Prioreess 47	Monk 16	Parson 18	Physician 29	Wife of Bath
Summoner 46	Reeve 15	Squire 16	Friar 28	Prioreess
Pardoner 45	Yeoman 14	Friar 16	Reeve 28	Pardoner
Monk 43	Summoner 14	Shipman 14	Squire 25	Summoner
Knight 36	Pardoner 14	Reeve 13	Pardoner 25	Reeve
Reeve 36	Wife of Bath 13	Pardoner 11	Monk 24	Miller
Physician 34	Friar 12	Cook 11	Summoner 22	Physician
Wife of Bath 33	Squire 9	Franklin 10	Miller 22	Shipman
Franklin 30	Franklin 7	Prioreess 9	Wife of Bath 21	Franklin
Clerk 24	Merchant 6	Monk 8	Shipman 19	Merchant
Shipman 23	Clerk 6	Man of Law 8	Parson 18	Manciple
Squire 22	Shipman 5	Wife of Bath 8	Yeoman 17	Man of Law
Man of Law 22	Guildsmen 5	Manciple 8	Franklin 17	Cook
Miller 21	Man of Law 4	Summoner 8	Clerk 13	Guildsmen
Manciple 20	Plowman 4	Clerk 7	Man of Law 12	Knight
Guildsmen 18	Physician 4	Plowman 7	Cook 12	Yeoman
Yeoman 17	Knight 3	Guildsmen 5	Plowman 11	Squire
Merchant 15	Cook 1	Merchant 4	Merchant 10	Clerk
Plowman 12	Manciple 0	Yeoman 3	Guildsmen 10	Plowman
Cook 9	Parson 0	Miller 2	Manciple 8	Parson

NOTES TO CHAPTER II

¹Dvorak, xxvii-xxviii.

²All quotations from the Canterbury Tales are from F. W. Robinson, The Works of Geoffrey Chaucer, 2nd ed. (Boston: 1961).

³I am aware that the siege of Alexandria and the Baltic campaigns were regarded even in the fourteenth century as inexcusably barbarous. This, along with the Knight's armor, which appears to be old fashioned, might call in question the idealization of the personage, according to U. T. Holmes. If so, the Knight would rank considerably closer to the realistic end of the mimetic-idealistic spectrum which I am constructing. While admitting this possibility, I personally believe the consistency of the portrait and other appearances of the Knight to be such as to call this possible interpretation into doubt.

⁴J. M. Manly, "A Knight ther was," Transactions of the American Philological Association, 38 (1907), 101 ff.

⁵Schlauch, 8.

⁶John Livingston Lowes, "Simple and Coy," Anglia, 33 (1910), 440-451.

⁷Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the Canterbury Tales, (New York: 1948), 94.

⁸All quotations from the Roman della rose are from the edition of Felix Lecoy, 3 vols. (Paris: 1968).

⁹All translations of the Roman de la rose are from Romance of the Rose, trans. Charles Dahlberg, (Princeton: 1971).

¹⁰Bowden, 98-99.

¹¹G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: 1961), 327.

¹²Eileen Power, Medieval English Nunneries c. 1275 to 1535, (Cambridge: 1922), noted in Bowden, 93.

¹³See Appendix to Chapter II, p. 108.

¹⁴See William Langland, Piers Plowman, C. VI. 147-152; also John Gower, Mirour de l'homme, 20845 ff., Vox Clamantis, IV. 281-282; John Wyclif, English Works of Wyclif Hitherto Unprinted, F. D. Matthew, ed., E.E.T.S. os. 74, (London: 1880), all noted in Bowden 109.

- ¹⁵The Rule of Saint Benedict, trans. Cardinal Gasquet, (London: 1936), chapter 66.
- ¹⁶Bowden, 108.
- ¹⁷Gower, Mirour, 20953-20966, 21044-21048.
- ¹⁸Bowden, 111.
- ¹⁹Bowden, 119.
- ²⁰The rise and fall of the mendicant orders has been vividly and concisely traced by J. J. Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages, trans. Lucy Toulmin Smith, 4th ed. (New York: 1889, rpt. 1950); Bowden; Arnold Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," Speculum, 28 (1953), 499-513; "Two Notes on Chaucer's Friars," Modern Philology, 54 (1956-57), 117-120; and "The 'Limitour' of Chaucer's Time and his 'Limitacioun'," Studies in Philology, 57 (1960), 463-478.
- ²¹Matthew Paris, Chronica Maiora: Chronicles and Memorials of Great Britain and Ireland during the Middle Ages, Rolls series, 57, noted in Bowden, 121.
- ²²Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," 500.
- ²³Williams, ibid., 501, 504.
- ²⁴Thomas Wright, Political Poems and Songs, 3 vols., Rolls series, 14, I. 266, noted in Bowden, 134-135.
- ²⁵Gower, Mirour, 21241-21264, 21283-21288.
- ²⁶Langland, B. V. 138-150.
- ²⁷St. Bonaventura, Life of St. Francis, (London: 1912), 344.
- ²⁸Bowden, 138.
- ²⁹Bowden, 135-136.
- ³⁰Williams, "Two Notes on Chaucer's Friars," 117-118.
- ³¹Williams, "Chaucer and the Friars," 513.
- ³²Bowden, 146-153.
- ³³Hastings Rashdall, The Universities of Europe in the Middle Ages, ed. F. M. Powicke and A. B. Emden, 3 vols, (Oxford, 1936), III. 441.
- ³⁴Dvořák, xxvii-xxviii.
- ³⁵Frederick J. Furnivall, Early English Meals and Manners, E.E.T.S. o.s. 32, (London: 1868), 54. I have expanded all thorns to "th."

³⁶Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Medieval Sciences, (New York: 1926), 48.

³⁷Bowden, 188-189.

³⁸Bowden, 210-211.

³⁹Gower, Mirour, 25621 ff.

⁴⁰Owst, 350-351.

⁴¹Langland, B. VI. 259-272.

⁴²Jean de Meun, 5091-5102.

⁴³John Matthews Manly, ed. Canterbury Tales, (New York: 1928), 527, n. 445.

⁴⁴Langland, VI. 103-109.

⁴⁵G. G. Coulton, The Medieval Village, (Cambridge: 1925), 237.

⁴⁶Curry, 79-90.

⁴⁷James Thorold Rogers, Six Centuries of Work and Wages, (London: 1894), 65.

⁴⁸Curry, 36 ff.

⁴⁹Louis A. Haselmayer, "The Apparitor and Chaucer's Summoner," Speculum, 12 (1937), 43-57.

⁵⁰Haselmayer, 45.

⁵¹Haselmayer, 51.

⁵²Haselmayer, 52.

⁵³Haselmayer, 53.

⁵⁴Haselmayer, 54.

⁵⁵Translation by Bowden, 266.

⁵⁶Langland, C. III. 59; III. 187; IV. 171.

⁵⁷Haselmayer, 55.

⁵⁸Wright, 157.

⁵⁹Ludus Coventriae, or The Plaie Called Corpus Christi, ed. K. S. Block, E.E.T.S. e.s. 120, (London: 1922), ll. 1-16.

⁶⁰Curry, 40.

⁶¹Curry, 49.

⁶²Bowden, 263-264.

⁶³Bowden, 285.

⁶⁴J. J. Jusserand, "Chaucer's Pardoner and the Pope's Pardoners,"
Chaucer Society Publications, series 2, no. 19, 425.

⁶⁵Curry, 57 ff.

⁶⁶Jusserand, "Chaucer's Pardoner," 432-433.

⁶⁷Wyclif, 154.

⁶⁸Langland, C. I. 66-80; B. II. 108; C. III. 229.

CHAPTER III: THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE

Pilgrimage in the middle ages was more than a religious exercise, a custom, habit, an escape, an entertainment or an act of profound faith. Simply because it contained all these qualities in varying degrees it cannot be viewed in isolation. It interweaves the whole of the social as well as religious life of the people from king to beggar. The different attitudes towards pilgrimage are an expression of the different attitudes towards living, towards every aspect of the temporal and spiritual worlds.

Though Chaucer's pilgrimage does not interweave quite the whole of social life from king to beggar, it does encompass almost the entire spectrum of attitudes towards living, both spiritual and temporal. As such, it is not an unfaithful representation of the groups which Chaucer no doubt observed setting out, either by his house on the Canterbury Road, or at the Customs House, bound for overseas sanctuaries.² They ranged from the solitary penitent, condemned to wander the remainder of his life in reparation for some horrible sin, to the truly devout, such as Margery Kempe, to the rag-tag, unsavory group pictured by Langland:

Eremytes on an hep with hokede staves,
Wenten to Walsyngham and hure wenches after:
Grete lobies and longe that loth were to swynke,
Clothede hem in copis to be knowe fro othere,³
And made hem-selve eremytes hure eise to have.

Chaucer sets forth his company in the General Prologue, and we have observed the variety of personages and techniques comprising this artistic accomplishment. Like manuscript illustrations, they include varying degrees of realism, grotesquerie, idealization. But portraits do not

make people, no matter how vivid their picturing. Chaucer is capable of realistic portraiture, a master of it when it suits his purpose. Moreover, he is eminently capable of portraying his personages dramatically, placing them in contexts in which they relate to one another, interacting with emotions common to everyday life. Such interaction is essentially dramatic, and Chaucer's realism in the portrayal of the pilgrimage is determined largely by his abilities to handle the dramatic potential inherent in the pilgrimage situation plausibly and, hence, mimetically. Basic unrealities, often pointed out, do exist in the Canterbury Tales. It is unlikely that some thirty travelers, strung out along a busy, no doubt muddy road, could tell stories to the group as a whole; the Reeve would never hear the Miller's tale, and vice versa. Much of the pilgrimage life is selectively omitted; the pilgrims never sleep, and they eat only once. Attention is devoted to the telling of the tales and to interchanges closely related to the story-telling. But these things, like the fact that the narrator knows more of his companions than he could possibly learn in an evening, are ignored by the reader, who suspends his disbelief willingly. The Canterbury Tales as a whole is not a photographic representation of life. When we speak of "Chaucerian realism," we do not mean that the Tales constitute a realistic novel. Chaucer's presentation of reality is not consistent, yet when he chooses to relate events in mimetic fashion, he is admirably capable of doing so.

The end-links relate the story of the Canterbury pilgrimage in a piecemeal fashion. While the Canterbury Tales concentrate on the stories rather than the pilgrims and pilgrimage, it is the dramatic cameraderie of the pilgrims which constitutes the actual life of the

pilgrimage. In the links to the stories Chaucer amplifies and modifies the portraits of the General Prologue. The Prologue presents the pilgrims described by the narrator, but in the course of the pilgrimage we ostensibly see them revealing themselves through speech and action. A very large portion of the end-links is devoted to dialogue, a very small part to the narrator's descriptions. The Host and several emergent themes serve as unifying factors. Chaucer-the-poet nominally abrogates his position as controller of the whole to one of his personages, Harry Bailly. The Host directs the route and the tales, and controls, or attempts to control, the pilgrims' reactions and activities; Chaucer is only a slightly obtuse, self-appointed recording secretary. The position of Harry Bailly as guiding spirit is established early and reiterated often during the course of the pilgrimage:

This thyng was graunted, and oure othes swore
 With ful glad herte, and preyden hym also
 That he wolde vouche sauf for to do so,
 And that he wolde been oure governour,
 And of oure tales juge and reportour,
 And sette a soper at a certeyn pris,
 And we wol reuled been at his devys
 In heigh and lough; and thus by oon assent
 We been accorded to his juggement. (809-818)

Up roos oure Hoost, and was oure aller cok,
 And gadrede us togidre alle in a flock. (823-824)

"Whoso be rebel to my juggement
 Shal paye for al that by the way is spent." (833-834)

The Host remains the cock throughout the pilgrimage and his judgment encompasses a multitude of things. He attempts to control the fellowship, literary taste, and marital mores of the pilgrims, while constantly rushing them along with references to geography and the quickly passing time. In these concerns he is much like that creation of the Nun's Priest, Chauntecleer, complete with Chauntecleerian bluster.

The drama of the pilgrimage begins after the completion of the Knight's Tale when the Host unsuccessfully asserts himself to stave off the drunken Miller who

. . . nolde . . .
 Abyde for no man for his curteisie,
 But in Pilates voys he gan to crie,
 And swoor, "By armes, and by blood and bones,
 I kan a noble tale for the nones,
 With which I wol now quite the Knyghtes tale." (3121-3126)

The Miller will not be quieted—"I wol speke, or elles go my way"—and the Host, in spite of his dictum that he shall be boss, gives in to the abundant oaths of the Miller: "Tel on, a devel wey!" The Host loses his first battle in the confrontation with the Miller. He continues in the course of the pilgrimage to lose them all, as we shall see, but he never realizes that he is a loser. The character of the Host is discovered cumulatively throughout the end-links. His encounter with the Miller marks only the first exposure of his bluster and proneness to back out of a bad situation.

The interchange bears out Chaucer's original characterization of the Miller as a brawny, burly man who speaks of "sin and harlotrie." It also establishes some structural principles which reappear throughout the Canterbury Tales. The tales are neither entirely independant of one another nor of the pilgrims who tell them. Since the travelers are engaged in a contest to tell the tale "of best sentence and moost solas," it is not surprising that rivalries and variations on given themes develop.

The Miller says he will tell a "noble" tale to quit the Knight. His fabliau has in fact a plot parallel to the Knight's Tale, but only pseudo-nobility. He antagonizes the Reeve and sets off a series of

tales designed to "quit" a preceding tale, often through satire. The Miller defends his "harlotrie" much as Chaucer excuses himself for transcribing it:

But first I make a protestacioun
That I am dronke, I knowe it by my soun;
And therefore if that I mysspeke or saye,
Wyte it the ale of Southwerk, I you preye. (3137-3140)

The Miller makes use of the apology topos, but not quite in the usual way. Unconcerned about the literary qualities of his tale, he worries most that he will be incomprehensible because of his drunkenness. He does of course "mysspeke" insofar as his tale is of "synne and harlotrie," hardly a tale of "sentence" and "solas" such as the tale-competition has designated to be the winner.

The Miller's apology is echoed by the narrator, whose "protestacioun" is more sophisticated and echoes his rationale for literary realism in the General Prologue:

For Goddes love, demeth nat that I seye
Of yvel entente, but for I moot reherce
Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse,
Or elles falsen som of my mateere.
And therefore, whoso list it nat yheere,
Turn over the leef and chese another tale;
For he shal fynde ynowe, grete and smale,
Of storial thyng that toucheth gentillesse,
And eek moralitee and hoolynesse.
Blameth nat me if that ye chese amys.
The Millere is a cherl, ye knowe wel this;
So was the Reve eek and othere no,
And harlotrie they tolden bothe two.
Avyseeth yow, and put me out of blame;
And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game. (3172-3186)

The motif of literary criticism enters the Tales with Chaucer's statement that he will record "Hir tales alle, be they bettre or werse." Abrogating control of events and of pilgrims, he also surrenders, nominally, control over the materials included. It is not surprising, then, to find that the pilgrims themselves will take over his responsi-

bilities. Their abilities are varied, as we learn when the Host becomes the leading literary critic in the Tales. We shall observe him do as self-satisfied and inept a job as critic as he does as cock. Though he may have gotten the troop on the road early, he is a poor marshall at other times. While claiming merely to record the tales, Chaucer also recalls to mind the literary nature of his work: "Turn over the leef." Such a reminder at once undercuts the claim that the work consists of impartially recorded stories heard on a pilgrimage by reminding us that it is also literary.

Chaucer's other disavowal of responsibility, based on the rationalization "man shul nat maken ernest of game," is one more recurring motif. The protestation that all said is said in game is very much a part of the fabliau mode. Horrible things can happen in fabliaux, but since the aim of the mode is humor, no matter how black, no illusion that the characters are really hurt plagues the reader afterwards. Realism and convention meet in the final two lines of Chaucer's apology: "Avyseth yow, and put me out of blame; / And eek men shal nat maken ernest of game." While swearing that he merely records what happened, Chaucer embraces the fabliau ethos by assuring us that all occurs in jest. The reminder will reappear whenever things seem to get too serious, except for the final peroration of the Parson and the conventional Retraction. The melding of mimesis and game strongly supports Chaucer's claim to be, above all else, a humorist. Satire should be taken with a grain of salt, and Chaucer utilizes it primarily for its humor. We should not, of course, blot out humor, jest, and game in the service of a higher meaning. The ultimate message of the Canterbury Tales embraces the pilgrimage to the Celestial City, but that does not oblige us to ignore

the delightful wanderings through a multitude of earthly situations which we experience on the way.

The Miller's Tale is one of drunken harlotry, but apparently even the "gentles" of the group enjoy its good natured ribaldry:

Whan folk hadde laughen at this nyce cas
Of Absolon and hande Nicholas,
Diverse folk diversely they seyde,
But for the moore part they loughen and pleyde.
Ne at this tale I saugh no man hym greve,
But it were oonly Oswold the Reve.
By cause he was of carpenteris craft,
A litel ire is in his herte ylaft. (3855-3862)

As the Miller's Tale is motivated by Robyn's desire to quit the Knight, so the Reeve's Tale is motivated by personal antagonism, the Reeve's choleric disposition, and his desire to make good the insult he deems given him because of his carpenter's craft. A traditional hatred between reeves and millers, both notorious for underhanded doings and often in contact with one another on the feudal manor, is made personal when the choleric Oswald takes offense. The fact that the offense comes by way of Oswald's double occupation tempers the antagonism somewhat, however. The situation is also slightly more subtle than the usual scenario of the fabliau.

Further distancing occurs through Chaucer's individualizing of the Reeve, in keeping with the picture of the General Prologue. From time to time he transcribes his northern dialect:

"So theek," quod he, "ful wel koude I thee quite
With bleryng of a proud milleres ye,
If that me liste speke of ribaudye.
But ik am cold, me list not pley for age." (3864-3867)

The dialect is not used consistently, but recurs often enough, bringing with it the images of the description in the General Prologue, to remind the reader of the character's existence outside his occupation. But

the Reeve of a sudden achieves a completely unexpected dimension as he embarks on a melancholy sermon-like lament, strikingly rich in metaphor:

But ik am oold, me list not pley for age;
Gras tyme is doon, my fodder is now forage. (3867-3868)

The lank, dark, choleric Oswald has a melancholy streak in him and sermonizes adroitly, drawing together three themes:

Four gleedes han we, which I shall devyse,--
Avauntyng, liyng, anger, coveitise;
Thisse four sparkles longen unto eelde. (3883-3885)

And yet ik have alwey a coltes tooth. (3888)

For sikerly, whan I was bore, anon
Deeth drough the tappe of lyf and leet it gon;
And ever si the han so the tappe yronne
Til that almoost empty is the tonne. (3891-3894)

The sermonette is an elegant one in spite of its off-color puns. Its great effectiveness lies in the fact that it comes from one of Chaucer's acknowledged churls, who we know from the Miller's Prologue, will tell "harlotrie." The shift in mode gives the Reeve an added depth and furnishes the reader with a characteristic Chaucerian surprise. The melancholy sermon does not individualize the Reeve in the same way as his dialect; it rather broadens his character by injecting an unexpected element of philosophy.

Dramatically the sermon is also an unexpected change, following Chaucer's remark that Oswald "gan to grucche." It is not surprising to find, however, that his imagery is not religious; almost all is drawn from food and drink, in both his comments on aging and in his more general remarks on life. The examples are typical of a reeve, although the use to which he puts them is not. The type is varied and expanded through use of the sermonette, but Chaucer does not simply put any sermon in the Reeve's mouth. The lines are adroitly suited to him.

Equally effective is the Host's interruption of the "tappe of lyf" motif; the Reeve could not continue much longer without becoming a bore:

Whan that oure Hoost hadde herd this sermonyng,
 He gan to speke as lordly as a kyng.
 He seide, "What amounteth al this wit?
 What shul we speke alday of hooly writ?
 The devel made a reve for to preche,
 Or of a soutere a shipman or a leche.
 Sey forth thy tale, and tarie nat the tyme.
 Lo Deyeford! and it is half-way pryme.
 Lo Grenewych, ther many a shrewe is inne!
 It were al tyme thy tale to bigynne." (3899-3908)

Harry Bailly, man of the here and now, shifts the focus from the time of life to the time of day and to the immediate surroundings of the pilgrims. True to his early image of cock gathering his flock, the Host repeatedly harangues his charges with references to the clock. We shall see Chaucer's pilgrim persona burlesque the Host's concern in several instances of elaborate time-computation. Bailly's concern here accomplishes several things. It gives local habitation, name, and time to the incident, thus contributing to the "plausibility topos" erected to establish the pilgrimage's verisimilitude. The Reeve is brought back to the supposed insult by the Miller. An ironic and somewhat humorous contrast is established between the melancholy but churlish Reeve who despite his philosophical pose proceeds to tell satirical "harlotrie" and the Host, speaking "lordly as a kyng," who likewise misses the implications of the Reeve's sermonette. Harry Bailly is a man who sees people as types, each type carefully classified socially. We shall observe him again and again reacting violently when a fellow pilgrim does not act in a way consonant with the type from which he is drawn, or the type to which Bailly believes he belongs. For Harry Bailly is a worldly man, to his own thinking, one who feels he understands

the world, life, the people in it. He becomes highly resentful when life does not concur with his preconceived notions. Ironically, Harry Bailly is not exactly a type himself, as we shall see, and, of course, variation of the type is one of Chaucer's fortes--a habit which promotes numerous dramatic outbursts from the Host. Ostensibly in charge, the Host continually protests actions which Chaucer has contrived to irritate him by puncturing his illusory belief in his own power.

After each tale, Chaucer concentrates on the reaction of one pilgrim, linking the tales by selecting that pilgrim to tell the next tale. Such a focus is, in terms of realism, more effective than "folk hadde laughen," or other general statements concerning enjoyment of the tale. A general approach of this type is reminiscent of the field full of folk; no individual emerges. Focus on the single pilgrim supplies opportunities for dialogue, conflict, character illumination, and the concrete specifics which Chaucer handles so well. The Cook reacts favorably to the Reeve's fabliau:

The Cook of Londoun, whil the Reve spak,
For joye him thoughte he clawed him on the bak. (4325-4326)

The Cook proceeds to draw his own "sentence," and that moral lesson forshadows the subject of his own tale:

Ne brynge nat every man into thyn hous;
For herberwyng by nyghte is perilous. (4331-4332)

The Cook promises to tell a tale of one of London's hostlers; we are not surprised, because innkeeper Harry Bailly has his fun at the Cook's expense:

Now telle on, Roger, looke that it be good;
For many a pastee hastow laten blood,
And many a Jakke of Doveere hastow sold
That hath been twies hoot and twies could.
Of many a pilgryn hastow Cristes curs,

For of thy percely yet they fare the wors,
 That they han eten with thy stubbel goos;
 For in thy shoppe is many a flye loos. (4345-4352)

These jocular insults imply a familiarity which will lead to similar exposures of the Host's trade. The joke on occupations is an old tradition which always allows for realism. The details "twies hoot and twies coold," and "many a flye loos" are vivid and serve to perpetuate the pattern of satiric repartee established by the Miller and the Reeve, but without the viciousness of Oswald's attack on the Miller. The fact that the details are the same as, or drawn from the tradition of long-standing jokes does not lessen the realism so much as it fulfills the expectations of the reader. The concreteness of the details enables Chaucer to fulfill that expectation with insults more interesting than simply, "You're a lousy cook!"

The fragmentary nature of the Tales deprives us of a continuous narration of the pilgrimage. We rejoin the group in Fragment II with an old theme, however. The Host expounds once more on the passage of time, but not before the narrator makes some pseudo-scientific fun of his concern:

Oure Hooste saugh wel that the brighte sonne
 The ark of his artificial day hath ronne
 The ferthe part, and half an heure and moore,
 And though he were nat depe ystert in loore,
 He wiste it was the eightetethe day
 Of Aprill, that is messenger to May;
 And saugh wel that the shadwe of every tree
 Was as in lengthe the same quantitee
 That was the body erect that caused it.
 And therfore by the shadwe he took his wit
 That Phebus, which that shoon so clere and brighte,
 Degrees was fyve and fourty clombe on highte;
 And for that day, as in that latitude,
 It was ten of the klokke, he gan conclude. (II. 1-14)

Having reached this conclusion, the Host announces the fact to the pilgrims, exhorting them to "leseth no tyme." His philosophy shows

much shallower than even that of the Reeve as he states, no doubt with great self-importance:

[Time] wol nat come agayn, withouten drede,
Nemoore than wol Malkynnes maydenhede. (29-30)

The Host is spokesman for temporality, ever concerned with the temporal aspects of the pilgrimage, not once mentioning its spiritual side. His humorous fuss reminds us once again that the world goes on in the background of the stories.

The Man of Law is called on for his tale. The Host puts on his Sunday manners to make the request, borrowing terms from legal phraseology, just as the narrator did in the General Prologue:

"Sire Man of Lawe," quod he, "so have ye blis,
Telle us a tale anon, as forward is.
Ye been submytted, thurgh youre free assent,
To stonden in this cas at my juggement.
Acquiteth yow now of youre biheeste;
Thanne have ye do youre devoir atte leeste." (33-38)

Harry Bailly attempts to master, or to appear master of, everyone's business, in addition to his own. Invariably, when he steps into another field, he sets himself up for foolishness. (No one believes for a minute that the Host knows much of law.) The Man of Law goes on to introduce another theme concerning which the Host repeatedly makes a fool of himself--literary criticism:

I kan right now no thrifty tale seyn
That Chaucer, thogh he kan but lewedly
On metres and on rymyng craftily,
Hath seyde hem in swich English as he kan
Of olde tyme, as knoweth many a man;
And if he have noght seyde hem, leve brether,
In o book, he hath seyde hem in another. (46-52)

The assessment, substantiated by a bibliographical catalogue, is perfectly consonant with Chaucer's naive persona. The question of the poet's writings and abilities is brought up with complete objectivity, as if

he were neither there, nor had anything to do with the Canterbury Tales. The mention of the poet reinforces the mimesis of the passage by clearly placing it in fourteenth century life through reference to a historical figure. Yet at the same time it destroys the illusion that the Canterbury Tales are a transcription of the actual. The mention of the poet brings firmly to mind that Chaucer, "rymyng craftily," is the creator of the work. The reader is of course amused to find the author criticized by a personage who, for the time being, has taken on his own life and is seemingly out of the poet's control. On one level the pilgrimage as reality has become independently "real," referring to reality outside itself, and becoming equivalent to that exterior world. On a second level these artistic efforts to attain verisimilitude recall attention to the fact that the work is an artistic one and only imitates reality. Through careful manipulation of persona and personages, Chaucer stresses both the artificiality and the autonomy of his work.

In the Epilogue of the Man of Law's Tale the Host calls upon the Parson for a tale, and does so with one of his more sizeable outbreaks of swearing:

. . . "Goode men, herkeneth everychon!
 This was a thrifty tale for the nenes!
 Sir Parisshe Prest," quod he, "for Goddes benes,
 Telle us a tale, as was thi forward yore.
 I se wel that ye lerned men in lore
 Can moche good, by Goddes dignitee!" (1164-1168)

The outburst is so habitual to the Host that he is no doubt shocked by the Parson's response: "Benedicite! / What eyleth the man, so synfully to swere?" Never at a loss for words, Bailly assumes the man is a Lollard, a follower of the reformer Wyclif. With another oath, "for Goddes digne passioun," he predicts a sermon. It was common to label

any grumbler a Lollard in the fourteenth century, for Wyclif and his sect were regarded primarily as that, although it is not absolutely clear as to whether Chaucer refers to the Parson as a Loller--Lollard--or a loller--grumbler. The accusation by the Host is conventional, but at the same time establishes contemporaneity. The lines, as so often happens in the end-links, tell more of Harry Bailly than of the Parson. It is unlikely that Chaucer intended the Parson to be a Lollard--although he does advocate some, but not the prime tenets of the sect--for he is the pilgrim who draws the exegetical parallels between the Canterbury pilgrimage and the journey to the Heavenly Jerusalem. It is also unlikely that Chaucer would support a Lollard, since the Wycliffites had already been condemned as heretics. From any point of view, however, Harry Bailly emerges tarnished by his lack of courtesy and abundant swearing.

The Wife of Bath's long monologue opens Fragment III. Since it comprises more an autobiography than a link in the pilgrimage, it will be discussed in the following chapter. As she closes her meandering confession, Chaucer foreshadows the coming quarrel of Summoner and Friar:

And whan the Somonour herde the Frere gale,
 "Lo," quod the Somonour, "Goddess armes two!
 A frere wol entremente hym everemo.
 Lo, goode men, a flye and eek a frere
 Wol falle in every dyssh and eek mateere.
 What spekestow of perambulacioun?
 What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit down!
 Thou lettest oure disport in this manere.!" (III. 833-839)

The Summoner in these insults not only motivates the satiric exchanges to follow, but hints at his own scatological revelation of the friar's destined place in hell, equating friars with flies in their presence

around "every dysak and eek matere." Chaucer takes the opportunity to make fun of the Summoner's small learning, already satirically exposed in the General Prologue, by setting the entire quarrel in motion through the Summoner's misunderstanding of the Friar's use of "perambulacioun." This is only the first of a series of incidents in the Tales based on the misunderstanding or mispronunciation of words. Harry Bailly is notorious in this respect, especially in his forays into the terminology of other disciplines. The Summoner continues only to betray his misunderstanding in the superbly colloquial line, "What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit down!" He vividly expresses his irate impatience with the Friar's constant commentary, or "glossing" of the text. Even the Wife of Bath, whose monologue has been interrupted, takes shots at the friars in the opening lines of her tale.

Drama in the pilgrimage turns to overt antagonism as the Friar and the Summoner quarrel on the conclusion of Alice's tale.

This worthy lymytour, this noble Frere,
He made alway a maner louryng chiere
Upon the Sumonour, but for honestee
No vileyns word as yet to hym spak he. (1265-1268)

The Friar remains careful not to speak to him, but reminds Alice that "Us nedeth nat to speken but of game" (1275). The pointed reference to the game topos belies his intent, for he proceeds to attack summoners before the company:

Pardee, ye may wel knowe by the name
That of a somonour may no good be sayd;
I praye that noon of you be yvele apayd.
A somonour is a rennere up and down
With mandementz for fornicacioun,
And is ybet at every townes ende. (1280-1285)

Obviously the noble, worthy, honest Friar will not speak in game. We discover these liberally-applied adjectives to be laden with irony, an

irony which reflects both on the Friar and on the narrator who has made the value judgments.

The Summoner retaliates with a brilliant but foul-mouthed satire on flattering friars.

This Somenour in his styropes hye stood;
Upon the Frere his herte was so wood
That lyk an aspen leef he quook for ire. (1665-1667)

Beyond this brief description, Chaucer lets the quarrel speak for itself. The dispute, augmented by interruptions of both tales, is yet another instance of Chaucer's integrating the tales and the frame story. The pilgrims spar literally in the end-links and literarily in their tales. The disputes keep alive an interest in the pilgrimage by presenting dramatically the reactions of the pilgrims and thus providing the reader yet another level for enjoyment. One may read the tale merely for its own sake, but may also read it with a critical eye to its ostensible audience.

Fragment IV opens with the Clerk's tale. This end-link does nothing to advance the pilgrimage, but reinforces the Clerk's character as painted by the narrator in the General Prologue. The Clerk shows himself extremely academic in documenting the source of his tale and offering his own literary criticism of it by way of introduction. It is interesting to note that the Clerk's criticisms are limited to the "prohemye" which Petrarch "enditeth" in "heigh stile," and which the Clerk omits as "impertinent." He does not touch upon the standard modern objections to the tale's capricious motivations and fairy tale atmosphere.

If we learn about anyone in the Clerk's prologue, it is the gregarious Harry Bailly. He is consistent with past conduct in addressing

the Clerk in as polite language as he knows, but he does not hesitate to state his preferences:

Telle us some myrie tale by youre fey!
 For what man that is entred in a pley.
 He nedes moot unto the pley assente.
 But precheth nat, as freres doon in Lente,
 To make us for eure olde synnes wepe,
 Ne that thy tale make us nat to slepe.
 Telle us som murie thyng of aventures.
 Your termes, youre colours, and youre figures,
 Keepe hem in stoor til so be that ye endite
 Heigh style, as whan that men to kynges write.
 Speketh so pleyn at this tyme, we yow preye,
 That we may understonde what ye seye. (IV. 9-20)

The Host's rhetorical terms are limited, and we begin to suspect that his literary tastes are likewise limited. He fears a dull, clerkish tale, punctuated by dull, clerkish footnotes.

The Clerk is capable of livening his footnotes, however, as we see at the end of his tale in his gentle humor at the expense of the Wife of Bath. The Host requested a "murie tale," not a lesson, and since the Clerk has indeed presented a moral tale, he forswears its moral purpose. He puts himself out of reach of the Wife of Bath and "al hire sect," and is free to make fun of her by understating the disclaimed moral:

But o word, lordynges, herkneth er I go:
 It were ful hard to fynde now-a-dayes
 In al a toun Grisildis thre or two. (1163-1165)

He can also reintroduce the Wife's "sentence," women's sovereignty in marriage, in a song which countenances all the Wife's methods, in style and earthy imagery reminiscent of Alison herself. When the "archewife," strong as "a greet camaille," pierces her husband's breast with arrows of her "crabbed eloquence," he shall surely know "wepying and waylyng, care and oother sorwe."

The Merchant takes up the story, but with a great change of mood, to present the husband's side of the picture. In contrast to the Clerk's

prologue, in which the Clerk's personality is merely reinforced, the Merchant's prologue introduces a new aspect of this prosperous-appearing man. One cannot but wonder how much the Merchant's wife resembles the Wife of Bath:

I have a wyf, the worste that may be;
 For thogh the feend to hire ycoupled were,
 She wolde hym overmacche, I dar wel swere.
 What sholde I yow reherce in special
 Hir hye malice? She is a shrewe at al.
 There is a long and large difference
 Bitwix Grisildis grete pacience
 And of my wyf the passyng crueltee. (1218-1225)

We are really not given any description of the Merchant's wife. The complaint consists entirely of the Merchant's attitudes towards her, and is therefore a picture of himself. She is entirely a stock figure. We are certainly not prepared to hear that the Merchant has been married only "thise monthes two"! Chaucer completely deflates the dignified personage of the General Prologue with that remark. The small revelation will not be augmented, the Merchant says: "Of myn owene sorwe, / For soery herte, I telle may namoore" (1243-1244). The personal cry of his prologue keys us to look for the Merchant's story nonetheless. The tales of the so-called Marriage Group are more personal than those satires of the quarreling couples, and Chaucer prepares us for each of them by some glimpse into the life of the teller. The cheerful but sarcastic envoy of the Clerk takes on an altogether different tone as we hear anguished personal commentaries on questions concerning marriage.

The sorrows of the Merchant and of January surprisingly strike a responsive chord in the Host, although he misses the important points of the tale, interpreting it in the light of his own marital situation:

Lo, swiche sleighes and subtilitees
 In women been! for ay as bisy as bees

Been they, us sely men for to deceyve,
 And from the soothe evere wol they weyve;
 By this Marchauntes tale it preveth weel.
 But doutelees, as trewe as any steel
 I have a wyf, though that she povre be,
 But of hir tonge, a labbyng shrewe is she,
 And yet she hath an heep of vices mo;
 Therof no fors! lat alle swich thynges go. (2421-2430)

This first outbreak of several concerning Harry Bailly's wife adds depth only to the Host's personality, for it says little about his wife. We have, up to this point, observed his manner with gentlemen and peasants, his literary tastes (often sub-literary), his general bossiness, and his concern that no time be wasted. To keep interest in this amazing character from flagging, Chaucer lets us enter the ironic situation of his married life, albeit one-sidedly. Though he may speak lordly as a king to his charges on the road, we find him meek as a maid at home, and not liking to think about it too often.

In the tales of the so-called Marriage Group Chaucer is especially skillful at presenting the solemn discussion of a problem important to all the pilgrims in an informal, mimetic way. Mimesis is achieved through dialogue--through the use of echo, colloquial figures, and through many insights which serve to reveal character. The problem is posed and observations are presented from many sides, both through the tales and through the commentary of the end-links, but the informality of the road-side discussion is at all times preserved. It is also worth noting that the Host, who as a voluminous non-teller of tales never makes an impersonal, formal pronouncement of his viewpoint, does not enter the dialogue in interaction with the pilgrims. Rather he remains poised on the edges of the discussion, reacting, but not interacting. His comments in this section of the Tales are more musings to himself than dialogue with his fellows. The subject of the Marriage Group

strikes very close to home, and the Host, though obviously concerned, tries not to think too seriously of his problems.

Fragment V is introduced by a cursory exchange between Host and Squire. The Squire's seemingly interminable tale breaks off or is possibly interrupted by the Franklin's praises of the Squire and subsequent disparagement of his own son:⁵

"I have a sone, and by the Trinitee,
I hadde levere than twenty pound werth lond,
Though it right now were fallen in my hond,
He were a man of swich discrecioun
As that ye been! Fy on possessioun,
But if a man be vertuous withal!
I have my sone anybbed, and yet shal,
For he to vertu lasteth nat entende;
But for to pleye at dees, and to despende
And lese al that he hath, is his usage.
And he hath levere talken with a page
Than to commune with any gentil wight
Where he myghte lerne gentillesse aright."
"Straw for youre gentillesse!" quodoure Host. (V. 682-695)

The Franklin of the General Prologue is presented as an exemplar of the lifestyle of the affluent country freeholder. His words to the Squire particularize the man. We learn more of his attitudes, particularly of his concern for "gentillesse"--that magic quality of courtliness which defies modern English translation--and of his treatment of his son. The Franklin is a generic type of the father; disappointed in his own son's attitudes which are different from his own ("he hath levere talken with a page"), he snubs him to pour praises on the Squire. The Squire's reactions are not detailed, but he is no doubt acutely embarrassed. In this vignette we see "Epicurus owene son" pictured in a home situation which is not immediately related to the tale. The Host, impatient with "gentillesse" and all its connotations, interrupts rudely, but the Franklin merely replies in an overly polite, formal, and slightly injured tone to the Host's arrogant demand that he "Telle on [his] tale

withouten wordes mo":

"Gladly, sire Hoost," quod he, "I wole obeye
Unto your wyl; now herkneth what I seye.
I wol yow nat contrarien in no wyse
As fer as that my wittes wol suffyse.
I prey to God that it may plesen yow;
Thanne woot I wel that it is good ynow." (703-708)

The Franklin's actions support his understanding of his professed belief. His character is revealed in his retreat from potential conflict, an action which is also central to his tale. But the Franklin's understanding of "gentillesse" is open to question. It would seem to be limited, on the basis of the General Prologue sketch, the exchange in the end-links, and his tale, to a hybrid politeness and hospitality, i.e. to externals. The values so strongly upheld by the Knight--truth honor, justice--have no apparent place in the Franklin's understanding. He believes in no absolutes, as we see in his own comments on the action in his tale:

Paraventure an heep of yow, ywis,
Wel holden hym a lewed man in this
That he wol putte his wyf in jupartie.
Herkneth the tale er ye upon hire crie.
She may have bettre fortune than yow semeth;
And whan that ye han herd the tale, demeth. (1493-1498)

The Franklin emerges as a parvenu who is under compulsion to display his wealth in fine foods and fine words, but who really has little idea as to the true meaning of "gentillesse."

The Physician's Tale opens Fragment VI without other preface. The Host is so moved by the tale that he breaks into a stream of imprecations unequalled thus far in the Tales: "Oure Hooste gan to swere as he were wood" (VI. 287). By blood, by nails, by "corpus bones" he damns judge, lawyers, nature, and Fortune for Virginia's demise. The passage is ironic in its odd juxtaposition of the Host's questionable piety, his

critical evaluation of the tale, and his peacock-proud misuse of medical terms. The Host's inordinate swearing is ironically self-condemnatory following a tale which turns on a suborned witness. His criticism as usual misses the point, and his "prayer" for the Physician is humorously blasphemous:

I pray to God so save thy gentil cers,
 And eek thyne uryinals and thy jurdones,
 Thyn ypocras, and eek thy galiones.
 And every boyste ful of thy letuarie;
 God blesse hem and oure lady Seinte Marie!
 So moot I theen, thou art a propre man,
 And lyk a prelat, by Seint Ronyan!
 Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme;
 But wel I wot thou doost myn herte to erme,
 That I almoost have caught a cardynacle. (304-313)

The Host preens himself with a mock-disparagement of his talents: "Seyde I nat wel? I kan nat speke in terme." His lack is all too obvious, and Chaucer reintroduces the mispronunciation topos to further expose the Host's "lewednesse" and pretension. Beginning with "corpus bones" the Host proceeds through a jungle of questionable medical lore. His use of all his medical terminology in a dozen lines borrows from the narrator's technique of the General Prologue. The narrator uses it as a sort of local color; Harry Bailly's use is self-serving, and also exposes his pretentious misinformation. The Host likes to hear himself talk, and carries on for that express purpose. Again, his remarks convey small sense of dialogue with the pilgrims.

The Pardoner is called upon for a tale of "myrthe or japes," but the "gentils" of the group have been pushed rather far with fabliaux:

Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!
 Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere
 Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere. (324-326)

The "gentles" respond generically to the anticipated harlotry, and while no one is singled out, the reader knows by now who objects and who

anticipates the expected tale with approbation. The Pardoner, unquestionably not one of the "gentles," bows to the pressure:

"I graunte, ywis," quod he, "but I moot thynke
Upon som honest thyng while that I drynke." (327-328)

He proceeds to entrance but not to trick them with a story of his operating methods and a choice exemplum. The monologue is confessional, but constantly serves the Pardoner's desire to sell his pardons. The monologue and some suggestions concerning its reception by the pilgrims will be discussed in the following chapter.

Yet another clash among the pilgrims erupts at the close of the Pardoner's tale. The most violent in the Tales, it is dramatically expressed and fully motivated. The Host, insulted by the Pardoner's judgment that he is "moost enveloped in synne," is righteously angry that this man, so recently confessed of his one driving passion--avarice--should presume to judge him. Harry Bailly's insults are scatological but nonetheless humorous in their touching the Pardoner's weakness:

Thou woldest make me kisse thyn olde breech,
And swere it were a relyk of a seint,
Though it were with thy fundement depeint!
But by the croys which that Seint Eleyne fond,
I wolde I hadde thy coillons in my hond
In stide of relikes or seintuarie.
Lat kutte hem of, I wol thee helpe hem carie;
They shul be shryned in an hogges toord! (948-955)

The Pardoner answers not a word: "So wrooth he was, no word wolde he seye." The Host, perhaps surprised at his own vindictiveness, pretends he was joking:

"Now," quodoure Host, "I wol no lenger pleye
With thee, ne with noon oother angry man." (958-959)

But even the game topos cannot make peace between them. Appropriately, it is one of "thise gentils," the Knight, who returns order to the

group. The vividness of this passage inheres in Chaucer's management of motivation, the resultant anger, and skillful coup de grace delivered by the Host. A certain effect is also contributed by the shock value of the Host's reply, the vehemence of which foreshadows his fears, to be expressed shortly, that he may kill a man in anger some day.

We see other manifestations of the Host's temper, but Chaucer does not let us forget entirely his more polite aspects. Harry Bailly is no Wrath-figure, yet he is hardly a gentlemanly figure either. He addresses the Prioress in as courtly a tone as he can:

My lady Prioress, by youre leve,
So that I wiste, I sholde yow nat greve,
I wolde demen that ye tellen sholde
A tale next, if so were that ye wolde.
Now wol ye vouche sauf, my lady deere? (446-450)

The Host is comic in his welter of subjunctives, and his efforts at gentility indeed prove clumsy. The Prioress and the Knight are the only pilgrims he does not in any way insult, and his awkward but studied politeness to them pointedly betrays his typical speech.

The typical for Harry Bailly ranges from the jocular ribbing of his address to Chaucer to the tasteless obscenity of his remarks to the Monk and Nun's Priest. To Chaucer he says:

"What man artow?" quod he;
"Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare,
For evere upon the ground I se thee stare.
Approche neer, and looke up murely.
Now war yow, sires, and lat this man have place!
He in the waast is shape as wel as I;
This were a popet in an arm t'embrace
For any woman, smal and fair of face.
He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
For unto no wight deoth he daliaunce." (695-704)

The passage characterizes both pilgrim and Host physically. The poet described all but his own persona in the General Prologue, requiring

the reader to piece his personality together from attitudes expressed towards the other pilgrims and from direct comments to the reader. Here he puts his own description into Harry Bailly's mouth. The physical similarity of the men--"He in the waast is shape as wel as I"--is ironic; their temperaments are most unlike. The one is creator of the work; the other thinks he runs the show.

The poet and persona merge as Chaucer tells of Sir Thopas. The identifying of the two serves to put the Host at a definite disadvantage when he interrupts Chaucer after only one Fit. The "deyntee thyng" is too refined for his comprehension. As the Host intensifies his earthy and inept criticism, playing the analyst at his own expense, Chaucer retreats more and more into his shell of naiveté and hurt pride:

"Namoore of this, for Goddes dignitee,"
 Quod oure Hoeste, "for thou makest me
 So werry of thy verray lewednesse
 That, also wisly God my soule blesse,
 Myne eres aken of thy drasty speche.
 Now swich a rym the devel I biteche!
 This may wel be rym dogerel," quod he.
 "Why so?" quod I, "why wiltow lette me
 Moore of my tale than another man,
 Syn that it is the beste rym I kan?"
 "By God," quod he, "for pleyntly, at a word,
 Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toerd!
 Thou doost noght elles but despendest tyme." (919-931)

The Host has appeared in these roles of amateur critic and keeper of the time before. As critic he appreciates fabliaux and simple moral tales. For the nobility of tragedy and the sophistication of burlesque he has no respect. He is typically loud and assertive in his deprecation of Sir Thopas, just as he is of the Monk's Tale. But he dares not attack the tragedies of the Monk until the Knight halts the tale. Chaucer is a figure of such seemingly small import that Harry Bailly willingly interrupts him.

Chaucer of course has the final word; in an elaborate spoof he promises a "litel thyng in prose," a "litel tretys," a "tretys lite," and a "murye tale." While Chaucer's readers no doubt found the Melibee less wearisome than we do, Harry Bailly surely could not help feel his "eres aken" after a few thousand lines of Prudence's proverbial precepts. He dare not, however, attack this work of stern morality.

Even if Harry Bailly learns nothing from the work, it prompts him to speak again at some length of his own marital situation. The Host's reactions to the tales have up to this point been uniformly those of a bourgeois critic who appreciates only the gross and the simple. Here he slips from the conventional response to one which is individual as he reflects that Goodelief is no Prudence.

By Goddes bones! whan I bete my knaves,
 She bryngeth me forth the grete clobbed staves,
 And crieth, "Slee the degges everichoon,
 And brek hem, both bak and every beon!" (1897-1900)

I woot wel she wel do me slee som day
 Som neighebor, and thanne go my way;
 For I am perilous with knyf in honde,
 Al be it that I dar nat hire withstonde,
 For she is byg in armes, by my feith:
 That shal he fynde that hire mysdooth or seith. (1917-1922)

This picture of the loquacious, manly Harry Bailly alternately cowed and incensed by his wife, comes to the reader as an ironic revelation. We begin to suspect that his eagerness to conduct the pilgrims to Canterbury, his taste for lusty tales, and his brash profanity are all means of escape from a life harried by Goodelief. When he does mention her, he makes an unspoken plea for the sympathy of the pilgrims. Melancholy in this situation, Bailly does not like to think of her; every mention ends with a brusque change of subject: "But lat us passe away fro this mateere." Again, we are given no picture of his wife.

We merely hear the Host "on" his wife, and, as before, she remains a type of the shrew.

Bailly's change of subject is invariably to one of ribaldry. The Host says to the Monk:

Haddestow as greet a leeve, as thou hast myght,
 To parfournen al thy lust in engendrure,
 Thou haddest bigeten ful many a creature.
 Allas, why werestow so wyde a cope?
 God yeve me sorwe, but, and I were a pepe,
 Nat conly thou, but every myghty man,
 Though he were shorn ful hys upon his pan,
 Sholde have a wyf; for al the world is lorn!
 Religioun hath take up al the corn
 Of tredyng, and we borel men been shrympes.
 Of fiele trees ther comen wrecched ympes.
 This maketh that oure wyves wole assaye
 Religious folk, for ye mowe bettre paye
 Of Venus paiementz than mowe we. (1946-1961)

The remarks are made in the spirit of those concerning traveling salesmen in this century; their genesis is conventional. They are nonetheless in poor taste and reveal more of the speaker than they do of the Monk. In fact they reveal nothing of the Monk beyond the fact that he is indeed the "manly man" of the narrator's estimation in the General Prologue. The Host obviously perceives him as worldly and lascivious. By this time we should be suspicious of Bailly's value judgments even more than we may be of the narrator's naiveté. The picture of the Monk in the General Prologue is that of the hunting cleric; he is a man who has made religion his profession, and though he may lose sight of asceticism, he seems to enjoy the business which surrounds him. The Host's lascivious cleric is present only in the form of the potential pun on "venerie." The estimates of both narrator and Host reveal the mind of the perceiver--the one naive, the other obscene--and neither is wholly accurate if we accept the Monk's tale as somehow representative of the man. The Monk's tragedies add one important element to his character:

he is also something of a humanist scholar; his love of pleasure extends to the higher intellectual pleasures of literature. The man is worldly indeed. He presents one of literature's noblest forms, the tragedy. He does not concern himself with humble saints' lives, just as he ignores the ascetic rules of the cloister and the undignified and crude remarks of the Host. Though reproved by the Knight, the Monk refuses to join the ranks of the fabulistes. He rather retreats to his own isolation and from that lofty position looks down on the company.

The exchange between the Knight, Host, and Monk discovers the Knight's literary tastes and reinforces the Host's total lack of any taste whatsoever. It is ironic that Harry Bailly attacks the Monk only after the Knight has criticized his tragedies; the Host's manner is so lacking in courtesy that his criticisms redound only upon his own empty-headedness. The Knight's tastes are what we might today describe as bourgeois; he likes the happy ending of happy tales:

. . . litel hevynesse
 Is right ynough to muche folk, I gesse.
 I seye for me, it is a greet disese,
 Whereas men han been in greet welthe and ese,
 To heren of hire sodeyn fal, alas!
 And the contrarie is joye and greet solas,
 As whan a man hath been in povre estat,
 And clymbeth up and wexeth fortunat,
 And there abideth in prosperitee.
 Swich thyng is gladson, as it thynketh me,
 And of swich thyng were goodly for to telle. (2769-2779)

The comments of the Host contain not even this much substance:

Youre tale annoyeth al this compaignye.
 Swich talkyng is nat worth a boterflye,
 For therinne is ther no disport ne game . . .
 For sikerly, nere clynkyng of youre belles,
 That on youre bridel hange on every syde,
 By hevne kyng, that for us alle dyde,
 I sholde er this han fallen doun for sleep. (2789-91; 94-97)

The rudeness of the Host's speech is marvellously tempered by the

mixture of colloquialism, humor, and profanity with which it is expressed.

We may dislike his personality, but we do not tire of hearing him speak.

Brushed off by the Monk who refuses to speak of hunting, no doubt because Harry requested it, the Host addresses the Nun's Priest "with rude speche and boold":

Com neer, thou preest, com hyder thou sir John!
Telle us swich thyng as may oure hertes glade.
Be blithe, though thou ryde upon a jade.
What thogh thyn hors be bothe foul and lene?
If he wol serve thee, reke nat a bene. (2810-2814)

The "sweet preest," humbler than the Monk, takes no offense at these contemptuous words. Harry Bailly is cowed by neither the Monk's cold dignity nor the Priest's humble acquiescence; there is no stopping his coarseness. He expresses his approbation of the tale in what seems the only terms he knows, unless we recall his awkward address to the Prioress, to whom he speaks "meke as a mayde." There is no meekness now:

I-blessed be thy breche, and every stoon!
This was a murie tale of Chauntecleer.
But by my trouthe, if thou were secular,
Thou woldest been a trede-foul aright.
For if thou have corage as thou hast myght,
Thee were nede of hennes, as I wene,
Ya, moo than seven tynes seventene. (3448-3454)

We see the Nun's Priest through the Host's eyes in these remarks. The lines closely echo the Host's remarks to the Monk, but with entirely different effect. When spoken to the Monk, the traveling salesman remarks delude the reader into thinking, on the basis of the Host's jocularity, that we will indeed hear another fabliau. The reader is deceived, perhaps nearly as much as Harry Bailly. Spoken after the Nun's Priest's Tale the lines again reflect Bailly's coarseness, for the reader already has a good idea what sort of man the priest is, on the basis of his prefatory remarks and the clever and sophisticated

tale he tells. The remarks serve once again to illustrate the Host's crudity and misjudgment of the people supposedly in his charge. He judges solely on appearance: the priest is another "manly man," and no doubt is treated as the Prioress' doormat; therefore Bailly feels licensed to joke with the Priest at the Priest's expense. While the lines may well be meant as a backhanded compliment, they are unkind by any standards and tell us more about Harry Bailly's mind than about the Priest.

The pilgrimage acquires a new member at Boughton under Blee, and the narrator describes the incident vividly and dramatically. The sweaty whirlwind arrival of Canon and Yeoman is artistically effective, both descriptively and thematically, for it prefigures the revelations concerning the Canon's fiery and futile trade. The narrator, in his wide-eyed, naive way, is much struck with wonder at the sudden arrival, and is especially delighted by the foam on the horses and the perspiration running in rivulets down both men. His descriptive language quickly moves from wonder to sophistication however, as he makes use of alchemical diction to describe the scene:

At Boughtoun under Blee us gan atake
 A man that clothed was in clothes blake,
 And under-nethe he hadde a whyt surplys.
 His hakeney, that was al pomely grys,
 So swatte that it wonder was to see;
 It semed as he had priked miles three.
 The hors eek that his yeman rood upon
 So swatte that unnethe myghte it gon.
 Aboute the peytrel stood the foom fyl hye;
 He was of foom al flekked as a pye. (VIII. 556-565)

For he hadde riden moore than trot or peas;
 He hadde ay priked lik as he were wood.
 A clote-leef he hadde under his hood
 For swoot, and for to keep his heed from heete.
 But it was joye for to seen hym swete!
 His ferhead dropped as a stillatorie,
 Were ful of plantayne and of paritorie. (575-581)

The cabbage leaf worn for coolness is hardly appropriate to the April setting, but nonetheless, along with the many references to the sweating horses and riders, it adds a realistic touch to the scene. This, along with the narrator's limited point of view, creates a wonder and curiosity in the reader much like that of Chaucer's persona. Given no clues to the identity of the new arrivals, or the outcomes of their appearance, the reader must follow the dramatic exchanges of conversation along with the narrator and the other pilgrims. The situation is presented as it "actually happened"; Chaucer is of course in control and knows the outcome, but his narrator persona's handling of detail and discourse completely removes the poet from the reader's attention.

Chaucer piques his reader's interest before satisfying it through the Yeoman's ambiguous and ironic statements about his master:

And ye hym knewe as wel as do I,
 Ye wolde wondre how wel and craftily
 He koude werke, and that in sondry wise.
 He hath take on hym many a greet emprise,
 Which wer ful hard for any that is heere
 To brynge aboute, but they of hym it leere.
 As hoomly as he rit amonges yow,
 If ye hym knewe, it wolde be for youre prow.
 Ye wolde nat fergeon his aqueytaunce
 For muchel good, I dar leye in balaunce
 Al that I have in my possessioun.
 He is a man of heigh discrecioun;
 I warne yow wel, he is a passyng man. (602-614)

The "warning" contains the dual ironies of the Yeoman's having practically no possessions at all and the neatly disguised reference to the Canon's fraud. The disclosure that the Canon can "al clene turne [Canterbury] up-so-doun, / And pave it al of silver and gold" at first takes in even Harry Bailly, but he soon recovers his equilibrium to inquire,

Why is thy lord so sluttish, I the preye,
 And is of power bettre cleeth to beye,
 If that his dede accorde with thy speche? (636-638)

He also wants to know why the Yeoman's face is so discolored. Thus the Host's incredulity and curiosity invites the exposure of the Canon by his profitless helpmate. In the interests of verisimilitude the Canon himself must be disposed of. His departure is logical enough. Chaucer's description is more bookish than realistic, but the psychology behind it is sound:

Whil this Yeman was thus in his talkyng,
This Chanoun drough hym neer, and herde al thyng
Which that this Yeman spak, for suspecious
Of mennes speche evere hadde this Chanoun.
For Cateun seith that he that gilty is
Demeth alle thyng he spoke of hym ywis. (684-689)

And whan this Chanoun saugh it wolde nat bee,
But his Yeman wolde telle his pryvetee,
He fledde away for verray sorwe and shame. (700-702)

Unable to halt his Yeoman's exposé, the suspicious Canon flees. The Yeoman is of course goaded on by the Host who is always keen to hear some juicy scandal:

. . . telle on, what so bityde,
Of all his thretyng rekke nat a myte! (697-698)

The servant-master quarrel which leads to an exposure of the master's wrongdoings becomes a popular literary motif in later years.

Of the tale which follows, the first part is really a monologue exposing the collaboration of Canon and Yeoman and the tricks they use to extort gold from others. It will be discussed with the other monologues in the following chapter. The second half, the actual tale, likewise exposes the alchemist, but under the guise of fiction. The three portions of the episode--the prologue or encounter, the monologue, and the tale proper--are among the most consistently motivated and realistic portions of the pilgrimage. More than any other occurrence on the trip, this incident is presented dramatically. We know

absolutely nothing of these characters until they unfold themselves, by means of the narrator's comments and their own dialogue. The presentation is at first that of pure externals; gradually the characters reveal themselves through irony. By allowing the new figures to interrupt the heretofore closed pilgrimage, Chaucer permits the world outside his immediate focus to reassert its presence. This in turn reinforces the illusion that Chaucer is merely reporting, for his persona's wonder at the new figures is as great as that of any of his other characters. Moreover it varies the usual programme insofar as he is not basing the incident on the characteristics of personages we have met in the General Prologue. The other episodes of the end-links require some prior knowledge on the part of the reader; here Chaucer puts us on an equal plane with himself, and we learn only as his persona learns.

Fragment IX opens with the Cook napping on horseback. "A theef myghte hym ful lightly robbe and bynde," says the Host. The Manciple takes the occasion to make fun of him, although his moralizing is singularly bourgeois, even noxious. The Manciple paints a conventional picture of the slothful drunkard, reminiscent of Langland's Sloth, but he intersperses colorful exclamations and direct address to keep the reprimand alive:

See how he ganeth, lo! this dronken wight,
As though he wolde swolwe us anonright.
Hoold cloos thy mouth, man, by thy fader kyn!
The devel of helle sette his foot therin! (IX. 35-38)

Langland's Sloth is similar:

Thanne come sleuthe al bislabeled with two slymy eighen,
"I most sitte," seyde the segge "or elles shulde I nappe;
I may noughte stonde ne stoupe ne with-oute a stole knele."⁴

The Cook, from sleepiness, drunkenness, and ire, finally does fall in the slough

Where as he lay, til that men hym up took.
 This was a fair chyvachee of a cook!
 Allas! he nadde holde hym by his ladel!
 And er that he agayn were in his sadel,
 Ther was greet showvyng both to and fro
 To lifte hym up, and muchel care and wo,
 So unweeldy was this sorry palled goost. (49-55)

We see a rare superciliousness in the narrator's "This was a fair chyvachee of a cook!" The description of the rescue is hardly realistic in concrete detail, but is ironically humorous, indicating enough "showvyng to and fro" to move a hogshead, not a "sorry palled goost."

For once the Host, in a very negative reaction, takes the side of the underdog, reminding the Manciple that the Cook will not treat him kindly for his harsh words. For the Manciple has pointed out to the company the Cook's pale face, glazed eyes, sour breath (twice), and lusty disposition. The Manciple can, however, prove himself possessor of that craft so admired by Chaucer's persona in the General Prologue, for the Cook is appeased by a draught of good wine. The Host thereupon waxes poetic in praise of wine:

. . . I se wel it is necessarie,
 Where that we goon, good drynke with us carie;
 For that wol turne rancour and disese
 T' acord and love, and many a wrong apese.
 O thou Bacus, yblessed be thy name,
 That so kanst turnen earnest into game!
 Worshiþe and thank be to thy deitee! (95-101)

We might wel turn Harry Bailly's own words against him to exclaim, "The devel made a Hoost for to preche!" The Host's panacea is fraught with bitter irony, since drunkenness causes the dispute in the first place, and the irony deepens in the light of the Parson's Tale, which soon follows.

The band approaches Canterbury, and Chaucer pauses momentarily to remind us once more of the passage of time:

The sonne fro the south lyne was descended
 So lowe that he was nat, to my sighte,
 Degrees nyne and twenty as in highte.
 Foure of the klokke it was tho, as I gesse,
 For ellevene foot, or litel moore or lesse,
 My shadwe was at thilke tyme, as there,
 Of swiche feet as my lengthe parted were
 In six feet equal of proporcioun.
 Therwith the moones exaltacioun,
 I meene Libra, alwey gan ascende,
 As we were entryng at a thropes ende. (X. 2-12)

The passage completely lacks logic. The time and computations are scrupulously recorded, but the "moones exaltacioun," carefully and confusedly qualified--"I meene Libra,"--has little to do with either four o'clock or the "thropes ende." The words are the narrator's; they reflect equally on his own earnest concern for getting things right, and on Harry Bailly's manic worry about the passing time, for of course the Host follows these observations with comments of his own:

"Telleth," quod he, "youre meditacioun.
 But hasteth yow, the sonne wole adoun;
 Beth fructuous, and that in litel space." (69-71)

Harry Bailly remains always the same, hoping for fables told in "litel space." He will find his way on the "glorious pilgrimage" also in "litel space," no doubt with much of the Manciple's wine. Harry Bailly is a figure of the secular world, and in the Parson's Prologue we see the contrast of secular and sacred. The Host swears and japes as usual; the Parson speaks exegetically. Having refused all along to join the pilgrims in their japes, he refuses to join them now.

But trusteth wel, I am a Southren man,
 I kan nat geeste 'rum, ran, ruf,' by lettre,
 Ne, God woot, rym holde I but litel better . . .
 And Jhesu, for his grace, wit me sende
 To shew yow the way, in this viage,
 Of thilke parfit glorious pilgrimage
 That highte Jerusalem celestial. (42-44; 48-51)

The temporal and spiritual levels of the Canterbury Tales come

together in the Prologue to the Parson's Tale. The Parson rejects the rhymes and alliterative meter of Harry Bailly's world and turns to the celestial Jerusalem. The Host is left with the hours and the tales of the world, while the Parson departs for spiritual regions. The Canterbury pilgrimage contains within it the potential for the journey to Jerusalem. The spiritual and the temporal are not at odds here, or at any other point in medieval art and literature, as Dvořák reminds us:

Idealism and naturalism [or the spiritual and temporal] appear here not as irreconcilable opposites but as an illustration of St. Thomas's notion of consonantia—a valid criterion for the world of Gothic figures.

The temporal prefigures the eternal which is its fulfillment. The existence of a higher level of meaning in the Canterbury Tales in no way discredits or makes less meaningful the transitory, earthly, mimetic level, however. As Auerbach states,

. . . an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now.

The fact that the emphasis changes from temporal to spiritual at the end of the Canterbury Tales does not negate the temporal. If anything it makes that major portion of the work which does deal with the earthly life all the more notable, poignant, and mimetic by virtue of the implicit contrast which the reader perceives between the actual and the ideal. The Canterbury pilgrimage is above all else presented as a selection from actual life, a fictional "reality" from which spring fictional "fictions." The spiritual concomitants are implied, but it is not until the Parson's Tale that the relationship between temporal and spiritual is made explicit.

If the portraits of the General Prologue may be said to represent the dramatis personae of the Canterbury Tales, the end-links comprise

the drama proper. The Canterbury Tales is not dramatic in the strict theatrical sense, of course, but is conceptually dramatic insofar as Chaucer goes to great lengths to let the pilgrims tell and act the story. Drama, after all, is the son of mimesis. The personages of the work reveal themselves through words and actions with a minimum of commentary from the author or his persona. The General Prologue is composed primarily of such commentary; it is mimetic insofar as the personages sketched are made lifelike by the choice of concrete details and attitudinal comments. Aside from Chaucer's comments on habitual actions, the portraits are static. In the end-links the figures become active, variously exemplifying, broadening, or confuting the statements made about them earlier. The tale of the trip to Canterbury is not so much narrative or chronicle as it is drama. That drama consists of tensions--jealousies, disputes, discussions--presented through dialogue and accompanied by a minimum of commentary and stage directions from the narrator.

As narrator, Chaucer has abandoned the external role of manager of the tales to that loquacious toastmaster, Harry Bailly. None of the carefully contrived selection, qualification, and protestation of the narrator of the Troilus appears in the Canterbury Tales. By leaving management of the pilgrimage to the Host, Chaucer's persona can step in and out of the picture at will; nothing requires Chaucer to be present, and indeed he becomes characterized by his pointed silence. As such he can present a seemingly objective point of view; he need never feel called upon to judge, and he has in Harry Bailly a toastmaster capable of all managerial duties, and only too willing to do the judging. When the narrator does enter the field of vision, he consistently keeps the

naive persona established for himself. This humble pose contributes to the plausibility topos in the Tales, for the reader feels little reason to doubt this unassuming figure. The fact that the narrator is occasionally taken in by one of his companions likewise contributes to his naïveté and plausibility. When the narrator intrudes, it is always as a pilgrim. This careful use of the persona contributes to the dramatic illusion of the work.

Plot and character development do not exist in any unified pattern in the diffuse scenes which make up parts of the journey, but in the many scenes of the end-links the reader's apprehension of the personages of the General Prologue expands appreciably. The Host best exemplifies this process of depth-characterization. Put in the position of command by the pilgrims, Harry Bailly by turns jollies, bullies, coaxes, and curses the pilgrims along to Canterbury. He is thus most useful as a unifying force and a device for Chaucer's narrative management. We also learn many things about this man from his commerce with his fellow-travelers. His attitudes to different members of society are clearly revealed in the deference, or more often, scorn of his address to them. His amateurish literary criticism reveals his bourgeois and often base tastes, and his musings tell volumes about his marital life. Harry Bailly--innkeeper, guide, supreme boss on the road, henpecked husband at home, and guiding spirit of the Canterbury pilgrimage--is a man of many traits, hardly a flat personation of any abstract concept.

The soul of Chaucer's dramatic presentation of the pilgrimage is dialogue. His method in the end-links is to work with pairs of pilgrims, giving them opportunities to respond to a variety of issues ranging from occupational concerns and jealousies, to marital felicity, to

questions of honor and personal taste. The pilgrims react not only to the issue, but to one another. Pairs are singled out for combat, one at a time. By keeping this focus, rather than panning the field, Chaucer stresses the individual over the generic aspects of his subject, even when the response of the individual happens to be a generic reaction, as Harry Bailly's so often are. The narrator's careful focusing on individuals is at loggerheads with the Host's penchant for butting into whatever is at hand. The Host's lack of discipline and control contributes an overall atmosphere of confusion to the pilgrimage which contrasts nicely with the narrator's careful, if not always logical, focus on individuals. The responses are never of one conceptual entity to another concept; direct quotations retain natural speech rhythms, as well as the homely imagery of farm, shop, or proverb, again reinforcing the narrator's assertion that the work is a transcript of the actual.

Comparison of Chaucer's dialogue with that of his contemporaries illustrates the naturalness which he achieves. Many examples from the Canterbury Tales could be chosen, but two will suffice:

What spekestow of preambulacioun?
 What! amble, or trotte, or pees, or go sit down! (III. 837-838)

"Why so?" quod I, "why wiltow lette me
 Moore of my tale than another man,
 Syn that it is the beste rym I kan?"
 "By God," quod he, "for pleynly, at a word,
 Thy drasty rymyng is nat worth a toord!
 Thou doost neight elles but despendest tyme." (VIII. 926-931)

Chaucer includes exclamations, colloquialisms, ungrammatical ellipses, meaningless phrases, all within the metric structure, to introduce the illusion of actual speech; the ease with which the dialogue appears to have been rhymed is one measure of the mimesis. Contrast the artificiality of Gower's octosyllabics:

And sche ayein to him thus seide:
 "Florent, if I for the so schape,
 That thou shurgh me thi deth ascape
 And take worschipe of thi dede,
 What schal I have to my mede?"
 "What thing," quod he, "that thou wolt axe."
 "I bidde nevere a bettere taxe,"
 Quod sche, "bot ferst, er thou be sped,
 Thou schalt me leve such a wedd,
 That I wol have thi trowthe in honde
 Thou thou schalt be myn housebonde."
 "Nay," seith Florent, "that may noght be."
 "Ryd thanne forth thi wey," quod she,
 "And if thou go withoute red,
 Thou schalt be sekerliche ded."⁸

Chaucer's pentameter of course gives him a roomy line in which to play with the colloquialisms which give his dialogue its earthy, realistic flavor. Gower contorts syntax to produce a formal romanticized diction, which, even in the rare instances where he does approach dialogue, as that above, reads stiffly and adds not a whit to the immediacy of Florent or the Beldame. Even in Chaucer the octosyllabic line is capable of transcribing lively dialogue. In the House of Fame we hear Chaucer and the Eagle:

"Seynte Marye!
 Thou art noyous for to carye,
 And nothyng nedeth it, pardee!
 For, also wis God helpe me,
 As thou noon harm shalt have of this;
 And this caas that betyd the is,
 Is for thy lore and for thy prow:--
 Let see! darst thou yet loke now?
 Be ful assured, boldely,
 I am thy frend." And therwith I
 Gan to wondren in my mynde.
 "O God!" thoughte I, "that madest kynde,
 Shal I noon other weyes dye?
 Wher Joves wol me stellyfye,
 Or what thing may this sygnifye?" (573-585)

The passage typifies all that is Chaucerian, but we would hardly call it "realistic." The situation is, of course, completely impossible, but it is nonetheless vivid in its comedy. Yet another masterful handling of

dialogue may be seen in the Second Shepherd's Play by the Wakefield master:

MAK. / Goed wyff, open the hek! / Seys thou not what I bryng?
 VXOR. I may thole the dray the smek. / A, com in, my swetyng!
 MAK. Yee, thou thar not rek / of my long standyng.
 VXOR. By the nakyd nek / art thou lyke for to hyng.
 MAK. Do way!
 I am worthy my mete;
 For in a strate can I gett
 More then thay that gwynke and swette
 All the long day.

This contrasts greatly with the set-speech which we find in much medieval drama, illustrated here from Mary Magdalene:

LAZARUS. Alas, I am sett in grete hevynesse!
 Ther is no tong my sorow may tell,
 So sore I am browth in dystresse!
 In feyntnes I falter for this fray fell;
 Thys dewresse wyl lett me no longer dwelle.
 But God of grace sone me redresse.
 A! how my peynes don me repelle!
 Lord, with-stand this duresse!
 MARY. The in-wyttissymus God, that euer xal reyne,
 Be his help, an sawlys sokor!
 To whom it is most nedfull to cumplayn,
 He to bryng vs owght of ewer dolor.
 He is most mytyest governowr,
 From soroyng, vs to restryne.
 MARTHA. A! how I am sett in sorowys sad,
 That long my lyf I may nat indevre!
 Thes grawous peynes make me ner mad!
 Vndyr clower is now my fathyr's cure,
 That sumtyme was here ful mery and glad.¹⁰

Chaucer's lines shine among such foils, and the qualities of his apparent "realism" become more evident. Successful dialogue depends heavily on trascription of possible speech. The laments of Lazarus, Mary, and Martha are too formal to express any but a most remote and formal sorrow; pain vanishes as an emotion beneath the nobility of the lament. Mak's "Do way!" "open the hek," and other colloquialisms much more closely approach the reality of speech. Furthermore, the dialogue of Mak and Gill, of Chaucer and the Eagle, of the various pilgrims,

makes the presence of both speaker and hearer strongly felt. The laments are addressed more to the audience than to the other personages on stage. This is not dialogue, it is speechifying, and rests on the edges of aside and soliloquy. Effective dialogue takes the listener into account and proceeds according to the individual's response to each statement. Such is the dialogue of the end-links. Chaucer's pilgrims exist as autonomous individuals, and he allows them to act as such. In the process the reader sees them reveal, dramatically, their own personalities. Such is the process of the drama. A man is what he says and does, rather than what is said about him.

Surrounding the characters and action is a set--the geographical background--from which, while never depicted in detail, the reader's consciousness is not allowed to stray. Background occupies a curious position in medieval aesthetics. Dvořák traces the stages of its development in medieval art thus:

The following stages in the medieval development of the relationship between formal and spatial composition thus resulted:

1. In Christian antiquity and in the early stages of the Middle Ages: abstract, spiritual combination and movement of dematerialized forms within ideal spatial ambience.
2. In Romanesque art: arrangement of coordinated cubistic forms and ideal, although cubistically conceived, bodies in an abstract compositional scheme.
3. In Gothic art: ideal union of cubistic forms in a real section of infinite space.

In the late Gothic period the "real section of infinite space" becomes more and more a "real section of finite space," as the decorative background of Romanesque and early Gothic art becomes "naturalistic," in the art historian's sense of that word. Chaucer's use of local reference is not new; we see it in the celebrated medieval anachronism, which transplants events through time and space to convey their

immediacy, as in the Second Shepherd's Play. Langland uses the Malvern Hills to bring some note of believability to the dreams of Piers Plowman; Boccaccio uses Florence and the hills of Fiesole to provide a realistic setting for the tales of the Decameron. Chaucer's use of specific locale is more complex than any one of these, however. It provides setting and plausibility for Boccaccio and Langland, but is integrated into the Canterbury Tales in a way in which Fiesole or the Malvern hills are not in the works of Boccaccio and Langland. In the Canterbury Tales the actualities of the pilgrimage become a unifying feature through the character and concerns of the Host, the worldly guide. It is Harry Bailly who most often mentions geographical landmarks and who continuously urges the pilgrims to lose no time in the journey. Concern for time and for physical progress becomes an integral part of Bailly's personality, and together they provide a sense of motivation rather rare in medieval literature. The use of real-world geography precludes those wide paths or narrow hedged ways of the allegorical pilgrimage, such as we find in Deguileville's Pèlerinage de la vie humaine, and rightly sets the stage for the drama of the pilgrims.

Deguileville provides yet another instructive contrast to Chaucer's realistic use of background detail and mimetic personages. In the Pèlerinage a great deal of attention is devoted to the surroundings, primarily because they serve as allegorical signs. Because the figures of the work are not the least realistic, however, the detailed background contributes nothing to mimesis or plausibility, which are completely outside the poet's concern. An example of a pilgrim-personation who acts as a human, and accompanies the narrator for some way, is Youth, pictured thus:

. . . in the weye a-noon I fond
 A damysele off queynte array,
 Wych me mette vp-on the way.
 And lyke a dowue (as thoughte me)
 She was ffetheryd for to fle;
 And on her leggyss bothe two,
 Lyk a dowve she was also,
 And endownyd softe & ffayr,
 Smothe as gossomer in the hayr.¹²

Neither the surroundings nor any amount of dramatic presentation, of which Deguileville has some, can make this work mimetic.

The realism of the end-links lies in Chaucer's mimetic handling of plausible characters, lifelike action, and dialogue. Chaucer allows the pilgrimage to portray itself with a minimum of apparent guidance on his part. The pilgrims develop not according to a fixed pattern or plan which demands certain specified types, but as each situation prompts. Personalities are revealed in many situations, sometimes in confirmation of and in harmony with the portraits of the General Prologue, sometimes not. Above all, Chaucer allows the trivia of casual conversation and observation, of colloquialism and profanity, to generously season the account of the pilgrimage. The end-links do not develop along any plot line, and indeed, because of the many short scenes and incomplete pilgrimage, could not. This makes these scenes all the more appropriate receptacles for the trivia of everyday life. The end-links are informal, varied, on occasion ribald, but never flat. Unified by several themes and by the indomitable Harry Bailly, they constitute the drama, indeed the actual being, of the Canterbury pilgrimage.

NOTES TO CHAPTER III

¹D. J. Hall, English Medieval Pilgrimages, (London: 1966), 1-2.

²For historical studies of the pilgrimage see Hall; Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life; Bowden.

³Langland, C. I. 51-55.

⁴Langland, B. V. 392-394.

⁵Scholars disagree on the nature of this break. The seemingly interminable Squire's Tale would apparently have to be broken off somewhere, but the nature of the break has no bearing on the realism of the discussion which follows it.

⁶Dvořák, xxviii.

⁷Auerbach, 555.

⁸Gower, Confessio Amantis, I. 1550-1564.

⁹Joseph Quincy Adams, "Second Shepherd's Play," Chief Pre-Shakespearean Dramas, (Cambridge, Mass.: 1924), ll. 305-313.

¹⁰"Mary Magdalene," Adams, ll. 277-295.

¹¹Dvořák, 70.

¹²Guillaume Deguileville, Pèlerinage de la vie humain, trans. John Lydgate, E.E.T.S., e.s. 83, (London: 1901), ll. 11070-11078.

CHAPTER IV: SELF-REVELATIONS

I

Three pilgrims who do not discover themselves during the end-links proper, in commerce with other pilgrims, are given the opportunity by the poet to discourse on their lives, occupations, and dearest concerns in long monologues. These are the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, and the Canon's Yeoman. The Wife of Bath and Pardoner reveal themselves in the prologues to their tales. The Canon's Yeoman's monologue occurs not in his prologue but in the first half of his tale; the story he tells actually comprises part two of the "tale." Each monologue is autobiographical and confessional, and although these literary forms were well-established in the fourteenth century--notably in the drama,--Chaucer makes them very much, and very originally, his own. The examination which follows will concentrate on the methods by which Chaucer reveals the characters of the tellers, the ways and degrees in which reality is represented, and the extent to which these monologues present a "psychological realism." It has long been pointed out that many of the "realistic" traits presented in the monologues are not original with Chaucer but rather derivative or conventional; it is instructive to see how he has used conventional materials to vivify these personages. The originality and lifelikeness of his personages do not necessarily depend upon the originality of the materials used; old fields in Chaucer are often transformed into brilliant life.

II: ALISON OF BATH

The Wife of Bath has by turns fascinated, scandalized, and horrified readers for nearly six hundred years, and without doubt she remains among Chaucer's best liked characters. Alison shares Cleopatra's "infinite variety" in a perverse way, insofar as she can never be definitively explained. But whereas Cleopatra represents a cloyless "Ewig-weibliche," the Wife of Bath shows us Ewigkeit grown old. She is, however, considerably more than the shrew or outworn mistress; though composed of many tradeworn parts, she is no type. Other realizations of her typed character may be seen in Jean de Meun's Roman de la rose and Gautier le Leu's "La Veuve." Alison's portrait partakes of traits of both these other women, but she consists of more than the all-consuming passion for sex found in these French counterparts. The personage of the Wife of Bath has depth, and it is this depth which has so often been called "psychological realism." Vividness of characterization might be a more accurate term, however, for when we examine Alison in terms of actual life, we find her highly improbable.

The Wife of Bath's Prologue proceeds with a studied haphazardness and illogic which encourages the scholar to isolate particular elements rather than view the misorganized whole. Alison's lack of logic, as reflected in the arguments of her monologue, is one of the basic traits of her character, however. Through juxtaposition of housewifery, theology, astrology, ribaldry, and antifeminist satire, Chaucer manipulates various levels of irony, humor, and satire, continually thwarting some of the reader's expectations while fulfilling others. His resultant game with the reader and the Canterbury pilgrims produces a figure which,

because she is created and portrayed so differently from all other figures, takes on life of her own, becoming, for so many readers, "realistic." Her realism is not that of photograph or even psychological theory, however; it is rather of process. The poet pictures occurrences which are an imitation of life, not always faithful, but plausible and artistically superb.

Alison's first words purport to present the theme of her subsequent remarks:

Experience, though noon auctoritee
Were in this world, is right ynogh for me
To speke of wo that is in mariage. (III. 1-3)

The exact nature of this woe is never made explicit. Alison, battle-axe that she is, thrives on endless arguments with her husbands. Except for an occasional blow, she suffers little. The question of happiness is never part of the game--unless we find happiness in her husbands' woes--and her self-centered personality certainly lacks the empathy to see the "war" from the man's point of view. Every word she says is an ironic comment on Alison as the "whippe"; she is herself the "wo that is in mariage," but she proceeds to abstract "wo" from her own personal characteristics, and transforms it to that vague problem of "maistrie." It further becomes obvious that Alison, who has not experienced much woe, does rely on "auctoritee" for a goodly part of her exposition. Her "auctoritees," of course, ironically argue against her. There is no woe in Alison's life unless we take her husbands' points of view; she ironically manages to present these points of view, unwittingly and magnificently.

Alison is always on the defensive, proceeding in her disquisition by first presenting an opposing side of the debate. She invariably

fails, however, to discredit that opposing side. In her egotism she assumes her audience's viewpoint to be her own; the Truth is so obvious to her that it need not be stated. Chaucer builds an edifice of irony around Alison's illusions. She adapts, for instance, material from Jerome's Epistola adversus Jovinianum on several occasions. Those arguments against remarriage were without doubt known to Chaucer's readers, yet the Wife states them, unrefuted, in defense of her multiple marriages:

But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is,
 That with that Criste ne wente nevere but onis
 To weddyng, in the Cane of Galilee,
 That I ne sholde wedded be but ones.
 Herke eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones,
 Biside a welle, Jhesus, God and man,
 Spak in repreeve of the Samaritan:
 'Thou hast yhad fyve housbondes,' quod he,
 'And that ilke man that now hath thee
 Is noght thyn housbonde,' thus seyde he certeyn.
 What that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;
 But that I axe, why that the fifthe man
 Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?
 Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age
 Upon this nombre diffinicioun. (9-25)

The passage typifies Chaucer's transformation of serious material. The Wife's use of her sources incorporates no surprising changes from the texts. Jerome says:

Siquidem et illa in Evangelio Joannis Samaritana, sextum se
 maritum habere dicens, arguitur a Domino, quod non sit vir ejus.
 Ubi enim numerus maritorum est, ubi vir, qui proprie unus est,
 esse desiit. Una costa a principio in unam uxorem versa est.
 Erunt inquit duo in carne una. Non tris, neque quatuor, alioquin
 jam non duo, si plures.

And the Samaritan woman in John's Gospel, who said that she had
 a sixth husband, was corrected by the Lord, who said that he was
 not her husband. For where there has been a number of partners
 there ceases to be a husband, who is properly only one. At the
 beginning one rib only was made into one wife. And they two shall
 be one flesh, said God, not three or four, since they cannot be
 two, if there are more than two.

Unlike Chauntecleer, Alison usually quotes accurately, though selectively

and perversely. She adapts her quotations to her own purposes.

Of the many pilgrims, the Parson provides the greatest contrast to the Wife of Bath in his treatment of scripture in the discussion of marriage. He speaks of the remedies of lust, touching on the topics of Alison's monologue, but in very different style, and, of course, with equally different intent:

Now shaltow understonde that matrimoyne is leefful assemblynge of man and of womman that receyven by vertu of the sacrement the boond thurgh which they may nat be departed in al hir lyf, that is to seyn, whil that they lyven bothe. / This, as seith the book, is a ful greet sacrement. God maketh it, as I have seyde, in paradys, and wolde hymself be born in mariage. / And for to halven mariage he was at a weddyng, where as he turned water into wyn; which was the firste miracle that he wroghte in erthe bifore his disciples. / Trewe effect of mariage clenseth fornicacioun and replenysseth hooly chirche of good lynage; for that is the ende of mariage; and it chaungeth deedly synne into venial synne bitwixe hem that been ywedded, and maketh the hertes al oon of hem that been ywedded, as well as the bodies. / This is verray mariage, that was establissed by God, er that synne bigan, whan natureel lawe was in his right poynt in paradys; and it was odayned that o man sholde have but o womman, and o womman but o man . . .

(X. 916-919)

The Parson's homily exhibits impeccable logic and precise organization; it is typical of the raw homiletic material which the Wife of Bath so brilliantly perverts and which the poet so brilliantly adapts to her characterization.

Like the Parson the Wife of Bath aims to convince the pilgrims of her particular viewpoint. She is not so logical in doing it, probably not half so effective at converting her listeners, but eminently entertaining. If we examine her technique in the passage quoted above, we find that the narrative, derivative portion of her argument is straightforward, but is liberally mixed with phrases referring to a variety of irrelevancies: time, verification, interjections, personal references, oaths, and the like. Much of the Wife of Bath's personality seems to

be a configuration of irrelevancies. Almost every line has its qualifying phrase:

But me was toold, certeyn, nat longe agoon is . . .

That by the same ensample taughte he me . . .

Herkene eek, lo, which a sharp word for the nones . . .

. . . thus seyde he certeyn.

But that he mente therby, I kan nat seyn;

But that I axe . . .

Yet herde I nevere tellen in myn age . . .

And so on. In these phrases we find the heart of the Wife of Bath.

Almost everything she says must in some way be related to her own person.

She feels a compulsion to verify all details, hence a plethora of oaths and qualifying words—"certeyn"—or references to the "auctoritee" she elsewhere disparages. Through these phrases, comparable to the "uh," "uum," and "y' know" found so often in modern speech, the Wife achieves a conversational tone while maintaining the unbroken flow of her monologue. Artistically the monologue cannot be interrupted; Alison's views would demand refutation, and Chaucer would have set himself an impossible task to transcribe the inevitable battle among the pilgrims. With the many dialogue-type interspersions, however, the Wife's monologue takes on the attributes of a one-sided conversation; she speaks to us, but, like her first three husbands, we are denied the opportunity to reply. The seemingly interminable harangue is artistically effective through its ironic use and misuse of "auctoritee," while portraying the domineering woman who cannot be stopped from speaking her mind.

Alison is especially adept at misusing an authority and at fictional elaboration of Scripture. In speaking of multiple marriages she exaggerates for humorous effect:

God bad us for to wexe and multiplie;
 That gentil text kan I wel understonde.
 Eek wel I woot, he seyde myn housbonde
 Shelde lete fader and mooder, and take to me.
 But of no nombre mencion made he,
 Of bigamy, or of octogamy. (28-33)

"Octogamy" originates in Jerome's letter, where he states that not even octogamy is actually damned. Alison takes this to mean that octogamy is therefore good. She ignores Jerome's context: marriage may people the earth, but virginity peoples heaven. His is the old Pauline theme that it is better to marry than to burn. When Alison picks up the word it becomes a vehicle for humor through exaggeration. Jerome also uses it for exaggeration, but his aim is satiric. Alison, rather like the three revellers of the Pardoner's Tale, takes the figure of speech for the literal.

Fictional elaboration becomes a humorous means of proving a point when scripture is viewed through Alison's looking glass:

Lo, heere the wise kyng, daum Salomon;
 I trowe he hadde wyves mo than oon.
 As wolde God it were leueful unto me
 To be refresshed half so ofte as he!
 Which yifte of God hadde he for alle his wyvys!
 No man hath swich that in this world alyve is.
 God weet, this noble kyng, as to my wit,
 The firste nyght had many a myrie fit
 With ech of hem, so wel was hym on lyve. (35-43)

Her obvious envy of Solomon is amplified by her immediate change of the subject to her own marriages. Using Solomon as the means of transition, Alison moves from general scriptural authorities to specific examples--upon which she proceeds to spin fantasies--to her own state, which forms the subject of the remainder of the monologue. Solomon is an appropriate transition, given his many wives, but like most of Alison's appeals to authority, ironic connotations accompany the allusion. It is none other than Solomon who supplies the Wife's husband with material for the

remarks for which she reproaches him:

Thou liknest eek wommenes love to helle,
To bareyne lond, ther water may nat dwelle.
Thou liknest it also to wilde fyr;
The moore it brenneth, the moore it hath desir
To consume every thyng that brent wole be. (371-375)

Both Jerome and Chaucer's Parson cite Solomon in support of their views on marriage. Jerome borrows the above material cited by Alison's husband. The Parson reminds us,

And therefore seith Salomon that "whoso toucheth and handleth a womman, he fareth lyk hym that handleth the scorpioun that styngeth and sodeynly sleeth thurgh his envenymynge"; as whoso toucheth warm pych, it shent his fyngres. (X. 853)

Alison is adept at using scripture to support her ends. Holy writ, like most other things she deals with, ends up as a sort of elaborate scaffolding around her imperturbable ego.

The Wife proceeds to justify her personal life with references to Lameth, Abraham, and Jacob, all Old Testament figures. As in her study of Solomon, she learns only their views concerning marriage. Concerning New Testament counsel, she reminds us, "Conseillyng is no comandement." She proceeds to enumerate the stock arguments in favor of the married state: virginity is nowhere commanded; marriage is nowhere forbidden; one should not expect everyone to be perfect; the sexual organs were made for use; the married state is necessary if the race is to continue. Each argument is elaborated with its own series of exempla, and each is followed by lines referring to Alison herself:

I woot wel that th'apostel was a mayde;
But natheless, thogh that he wroot and sayde
He wolde that every wight were swich as he,
Al nys but conseil to virginitee.
And for to been a wyf he yaf me leve
Of indulgence; so nys it no repreve
To wedde me, if that my make dye,
Withouten excepcion of bigamye. (79-86)

I graunte it wel, I have noon envie,
 Thogh maydenhede preferre bigamy.
 It liketh hem to be clene, body and goost;
 Of myn estaat I nyl nat make no boost.
 For wel ye knowe, a lord in his houshold,
 He nath nat every vessel al of gold;
 Somme been of tree, and doon hir lord servyse. (95-101)

Virginitee is greet perfeccion,
 And continence eek with devocion,
 But, Crist that of perfeccion is welle,
 Bad nat every wight he sholde go selle
 Al that he hadde, and gyve it to the poore
 And in swich wise folwe hym and his foore.
 He spak to hem that wolde lyve parfitly;
 And lordynges, by youre leve, that am nat I.
 I wol bistowe the flour of al myn age
 In the actes and in fruyt of mariage. (105-114)

Crist was a mayde, and shapen as a man,
 And many a seint, sith that the world bigan;
 Yet lyved they evere in parfit chastitee.
 I nyl envye no virginitee.
 Lat hem be breed of pured whete-seed,
 And lat us wyves hoten barly-breed;
 And yet with barly-breed, Mark telle kan,
 Our Lord Jhesu refreshed many a man.
 In swich estaat as God hath cleped us
 I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.
 In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
 As frely as my Makere hath it sent.
 If I be dangerous, God yeve me sorwe! (139-151)

This series of extended passages, which is by no means complete, illustrates Alison's gift for keeping her argument concrete, immediate, and extremely articulate. She is adept at turning the preachers' methods to her own purposes, as in the wheat and barley bread analogy. Alison makes no pretenses to objective or impartial arguments. Theology and philosophy do not interest her for their own abstract sakes. She will follow out her marriage-reasoning to its ultimate relationship to her own affairs, and she will relate things as she chooses.

Alison's articulate argument is extremely effective in that she does work from recognized authorities and that, given the proper assumptions, even Jerome would honor it. As the Friar says,

Ye han heer touched, also moot I thee,
 In scole-matere greet difficultee.
 Ye han seyde muche thyng right wel, I seye. (1271-1273)

But Alison's assumptions concerning matrimony are in no way related to Jerome's. As she proceeds in her defense, relying more and more on her own experience to bolster her case, we see the basic differences between Alison and the "clerk at Rome, a cardinal, that highte Seint Jerome," many of whose arguments are echoed in the Canterbury Tales by the Parson. For Alison, marriage means legalized sexual license. The Parson comments specifically on these ideas:

The thridde spece of avowtrie is somtyme bitwixe a man and his wyf, and that is whan they take no reward in hire assemblynge but oonly to hire fleshly delit, as seith Seint Jerome, / and ne reken of nothyng but that they been assembled; by cause that they been married, al is good ynough, as thynketh to hem. / But in swich folk hath the devel power, as seyde the aungel Raphael to Thobie, for in hire assemblynge they putten Jhesu Crist out of hire herte, and yeven hemself to ordure. (X. 903-905)

That Alison's view of marriage consists of the "fleshly delit" damned by the Parson is further illustrated by her subsequent elaboration:

I wol persevere; I nam nat precius.
 In wyfhod I wol use myn instrument
 As frely as my Makere hath it sent.
 If I be daungerous, God yeve me sorwe!
 Myn housbonde shal it have bothe eve and morwe,
 Whan that hym list come forth and paye his dette.
 An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette,
 Which shal be bothe my dettour and my thral,
 And have his tribulacion withal
 Upon his flessh, whil that I am his wyf.
 I have the power duryng al my lyf
 Upon his propre body, and noght he. (148-159)

Alison up to this point has maintained an argument which she applied only to her own case. It is hardly surprising to find that this woman, so assertive in pressing her case against the celibates, is equally assertive in the face of a mere husband. Her argument thus turns from theory to practice: "An housbonde I wol have, I wol nat lette, / Which

shal be bothe my dettour and my thral." While that statement could be reconciled with the doctrine of the imperious heroine of courtly love, the qualifications which follow certainly cannot: ". . . And have his tribulacion withal / Upon his flessch, whil that I am his wyf." The nature of this "tribulacion" is sexual enslavement, as Alison proceeds to illustrate, but extends also to the monetary sphere. Alison will be dominant physically and materially. The remainder of her monologue is a series of glosses upon the passage quoted above.

The glossing does not proceed without reference to the other members of the company, however. The Pardoner's interruption, humorous in the light of Chaucer's comments upon him in the General Prologue--"I trowe he were a geldyng or a mare,"--highlights Alison's effectiveness as an antifeminist propagandist and supports her position as a male-dominating figure:

"Abyde!" quod she, "my tale is nat bigonne.
 Nay, thou shalt drynken of another tonne,
 Er that I go, shal savoure wors than ale.
 And whan that I have toold thee forth my tale
 Of tribulacion in mariage,
 Of which I am expert in al myn age,
 This is to seyn, myself have been the whippe,--
 Than maystow chese wheither thou wolt sippe
 Of thilke tonne that I shal abroche." (169-177)

The effect on the Pardoner is clearly devastating. He replies in a patronizing tone, eager to escape her claws:

"Dame, I wolde praye yow, if youre wyl it were,"
 Seyde this Pardoner, "as ye bigan,
 Telle ferth youre tale, spareth for no man,
 And tache us yonge men of youre praktike." (184-187)

The contrast with the exchange to come between Pardoner and Host is notable. Alison shows a certain diplomacy in not insulting the Pardoner; she gives him the benefit of the doubt in the marriage game as Bailly does not: "Than maystow chese wheither thou wolt sippe / Of thilke tonne

that I shal abroche." Harry Bailly, lacking Alison's self assurance, is typically adept at insulting the emasculated Pardoner while bolstering his own emasculated ego.

The interruption recalls the audience of pilgrims to the reader's mind and enables Alison to fire off one false start. The false starts are unique to her; we see several before she reaches her tale, and each plays its role in making her personality more vivid.

Now, sire, now wol I telle forth my tale.--
 As evere moote I drynken wyn or ale,
 I shal seye sooth, tho housbondes that I hadde,
 As thre of hem were goode, and two were badde . . . (193-196)

One of Chaucer's most effective devices in the mimetic transcription of Alison's monologue is her penchant for interrupting herself. Above, she pauses for one of her many affirmations, "As evere moot I drynke wyn or ale, / I shal seye sooth," which leads to thoughts of husbands and the resumption of the monologue. Alison seems to free-associate on certain words; wine, ale, truth, and husbands are among them. One thought leads to another in a stream-of-consciousness-like pattern; with the conventional affirmation her mind takes flight from the business of tale-telling, and we return to her experience in marriage. Chaucer's careful patterning and its seeming haphazardness approximates actual thought patterns.

We move into the confessional portion of the monologue with the introduction of the husbands. Alison maintains her position as diverting tale-teller throughout the narration, mainly through her ability to laugh at her marriages, her obvious joy in recollection, and the odd flavor of the narrative; the latter is mainly derived from a mixture of household images and scholastic authorities. The three elder husbands are lumped together in the following reminiscence:

The thre were goode men, and riche, and elde;
 Unnethe myghte they the statut holde
 In which that they were bounden unto me.
 Ye woot wel what I meene of this, pardee!
 As help me God, I laughe whan I thynke
 How pitously a-nyght I made hem swynke! . . .
 I governed hem so wel, after my lawe,
 That ech of hem ful blisful was and fawe
 To brynge me gaye thynges fro the fayre.
 They were ful glad whan I spak to hem faire;
 For, God it woot, I chidde hem spytously. (197-202; 219-223)

One questions whether the husbands were really "ful blisful" to bring her things, especially after reading how Alison bore her husbands in hand.

For, "Half so boldely kan ther no man / Swere and lyen, as a woman kan."

The tirade which follows admirably illustrates Alison's verbal methods. A monologue within the monologue, it consists of her restatement of her husband's accusations of her. This fourth-hand relation of the material enables Alison not only to make her point--how to handle a husband--but to misinterpret when necessary and to add additional comments for the benefit of the audience. The tirade consists entirely of stock antifeminist satire. By putting it in Alison's mouth Chaucer achieves yet another level of irony and humor. He also deprives this thoroughly conventionalized material of its usual setting, thus achieving a novelty which makes the antifeminist material not typed, but dramatic, vivid, and real. This tirade is not directed against the satirist's usual target. The woman of the satires, if she is identified at all, is a combination of shrew and harlot, complete in her wickedness, and, for all the satirist will tell us, completely deserving of her fate. The interposition of Alison between the promulgator of the satire and the hearers of it causes us to reassess both the charges and the object of the satire. We are in a position to do this because Alison has definitely been established as a mimetic figure. In much the same fashion as in the opening passages of

the monologue in which she attempts to set up a scriptural case for remarriage, Alison utilizes the episodes of antifeminist satire in the basically unchanged forms of their traditions. Vivacity is added by the multiple levels of meaning, humor, and irony mentioned above, by use of many, many interruptive devices, and by odd juxtapositions of housewifery and scholarship.

The basic idea for the indirect harangue contained in a confessional monologue is no doubt borrowed from Jean de Meun, but Chaucer transforms it completely. The accusations which the Wife of Bath alleges her husband has made are for the most part those of the Jealous Husband of the Roman de la rose. But Jalous, though ostensibly speaking to his wife, berates an abstract figure, Woman. The net effect of his tirade is dialectic, not dramatic:

Et cil qui font le mariage,
 si ront trop perilleus usage
 et coustume si despareille
 qu'el me vient a trop grant merveille.
 Ne sai don vient ceste folie,
 fors de rage et de desverie.
 Je voi que qui cheval achete
 n'iert ja si fols que riens i mete,
 comment que l'en l'ait bien covert,
 se tout nou voit a descovert;
 par tout le resgarde et esprouve.
 Mes l'en prent fame sanz esprouve,
 ne ja n'i sera descoverte,
 ne por gaigne ne por perte,
 ne por solaz ne por mesese,
 por ce, sanz plus, qu'el ne desplese
 devant qu'ele soit espousee.
 Et quant el voit la chose outree,
 lors fet au fol ses meurs sentir,
 quant riens n'i vaut le repentir. (8631-8652)²

Again, these who marry have a very dangerous custom, one so ill-arranged that it occurs to me as a very great wonder. I don't know where this folly comes from, except from raging lunacy. I see that a man who buys a horse is never so foolish as to put up any money if he does not see the horse unclothed, no matter how well it may have been covered. He looks the horse over everywhere and tries it out. But he takes a wife without trying her out, and

she is never unclothed, not on account of gain or loss, solace or discomfort, but for no other reason than that she may not be displeasing before she is married. Then, when she sees things accomplished, she shows her malice for the first time; then appears every vice that she has. (159)

Alison's account is much more direct, and considerably more effective for its brevity and obvious irritation:

Thou seist that oxen, asses, hors, and houndes
They been assayed at diverse stoundes;
Bacyns, lavours, er that men hem bye,
Spoones and stooles, and al swich housbondrye,
And so been pottes, clothes, and array;
But folk of wyves maken noon assay,
Til they be wedded; olde dotard shrewe!
And thanne, seistow, we wol oure vices shewe. (285-292)

Alison's adaptation of the traditional charge, which also appears in St. Jerome's Epistola adversus Jovinianum, is indicative of her concern for things domestic. Spoons, stools, pots, basins, and clothes are added to the Jaloux's horse. But more effective than that is her constant reference to the present adversary: "Thou seist," "olde dotard shrewe," "seistow," etc. Alison never approaches her argument in the abstract way of the Jaloux; his satiric attack is totally impersonal and lacks the emotional content which would indicate that he is the husband and that he is actually speaking to his wife. The illusion of dialogue, or attempted dialogue, within the monologue is extremely strong in Alison's lesson on how to cow a husband. We can easily see the poor man trying to defend himself, only to be stopped again and again by "Thus seistow . . ." and a new charge. The words "seistow," "thou seist," or variants appear fully twenty-one times during the tirade! We can scarcely forget the husband's inarticulate presence! Alison of course browbeats the reader in the same way. Structurally the repetitions avoid the confusion of Jean de Meun's monologues-within-monologues where the reader soon loses all track of the original speakers, Amis and, later, La Vielle. Artistically,

the repetitions become humorous. Much the same effect is produced by Alison's scathing forms of address: Sire olde kaynard, olde lecchour, lorel, olde dotard shrewe, olde barel-ful of lyes, olde dotard, sire shrewe, sire olde fool, leeve sire shrewe. Each address recalls the potential dialogue, reinforces Alison's argument, and redounds ironically upon her, the ultimate in shrewishness. Chaucer builds a sort of suspense through Alison's complete articulateness: each charge leaves us wondering how she will top it with the next one!

The antifeminist material is traditional throughout and can be found in Jerome, Jean de Meun, even folklore. Alison continually intersperses personal details, however, to give this conventional material new life. The many phrases relating the tirades to her husbands are one instance. Her continual references to the woman's world are another. Images of household and farmyard are habitual with her, and they appear in especially thick concentration in the long speech to her husband. In the space of about one hundred lines we find: cow, mouse, spaniel, goose, pimples, leaky houses, smoke, oxen, asses, horses, dogs, basins, spoons, stools, pots, clothes, oxen, money chests, candles, gnats, the cat with singed fur, worms, as well as Alison's unsubtle euphemisms for the sexual organs. Such an array would of itself mark her for a coarse, homey, and rather dull woman. Alison of Bath is quite worldly, however, as we are left to infer from her travels, and her worldliness includes a considerable acquaintance with scholars and literary material, as we have seen. She quotes indiscriminately, again adapting the material to her purpose. She cites or refers to, in the course of her monologue, the Bible (as a whole), Ptolemy (twice), Romans, Ecclesiastes, Valerius, Theophrastus, Jerome, Tertullian, Crisippus, Trotula, Heloise, Solomon, Ovid, Socrates, Adam

and Eve, Hercules and Dianira, Phasiphae, Clytemnestra, Amphiorax, Livia, Lucy, Latumys. For a woman who swears by experience, Alison shows a commanding knowledge of "auctoritee." The use of authorities is what we expect, however. We certainly see it in Jaloux, who quotes Theophrastus, Titus Livius, Juvenal, Valerius, Abelard, Virgil, Solinus, and others. But the Wife of Bath is never quite what convention leads us to expect. Jaloux, because Jean de Meun does not keep the speaker's identity clear in his reader's mind by repeated tags, appears to speak for his creator, and indeed many critics have accepted him as such. His authorities are eminently acceptable and quoted accurately. Alison draws on the oddest, most heterogenous group one might think of; the comic incongruities inherent in her strange use and juxtaposition of names are such that there is no question of her speaking for anyone but herself, and even her own point is undercut by her indiscriminate choice of authorities. Alison marries "auctoritee" and experience in her exemplum, producing an interesting, personal dialectic which is oftentimes funny because of odd juxtapositions which result. Thus "Daun Ptholome" rubs shoulders with the singed cat, and his dignity suffers in the process.

"Thus," says Alice, "as ye have understende, / Baar I stifly myne olde housbondes on honde." She details her management/extortion:

For al swich wit is yeven us in oure byrthe;
 Deceite, wepyng, spynnyng God hath yive
 To women kyndely, whil that they may lyve.
 And thus of o thyng I avaunte me,
 Atte ende I hadde the bettre in ech degree,
 By sleighte, or force, or by som maner thyng,
 As by continueel murmur or grucchyng.
 Namely abedde hadden they meschaunce:
 Ther wolde I chide, and do hem no plesaunce;
 I wolde no lenger in the bed abyde,
 If that I felte his arm over my syde,
 Til he had maad his raunson unto me;

Thanne wolde I suffre hym do his nycetee.
 And therfore every man this tale I telle,
 Wynne whoso may, for al is for to selle;
 With empty hand men may none haukes lure. (400-415)

The Wife freely acknowledges using all the methods of subjugation which she blames her husband for reproaching her with: deceit, weeping, sleight, force, murmuring, and sexual extortion. "I quitte hem word for word. . . I ne owe hem nat a word that it nys quit," she says. The marriage which emerges from these descriptions is not an unusual one in terms of literary conventions, however. It is merely much more vivid. The husband of the moment is Jean's Jaloux, but he has flesh and blood, because Alison portrays, or implies his presence as a real man. The Jaloux drawn by Amis is hypothetical and so stock as to be no personage at all. Alison is a combination of Jaloux's wife, La Vielle, Gautier le Leu's widow, and many others, but she remains unique. Her uniqueness inheres partly in her portrayal: no other shrew figure is portrayed from her own point of view. It is true that La Vielle also represents the feminine point of view, but she does so with acknowledged vindictiveness towards men.

The Wife of Bath combines the coquettish aloofness of Jaloux's wife with the shocking frankness of La Vielle. She uses the sex act as a bribe: "For wynnyng wolde I al his lust endure." The bribe itself seems an odd one, since she repeatedly states that she makes her husband suffer in bed; the act is certainly no sacrifice on her part. Alison's methods reverse those of the Jaloux's wife, although she pretends to the same rationale. He says:

Nels la nuit, quant vos gisiez
 en mon lit lez moi toute nue,
 n'i poez vos estre tenue;
 car quant je vos veill embracier
 por vos besier et soulacier,
 et sui plus forment eschaufez,
 vos rechiniez conme maufez

ne vers moi, por riens que je face,
 ne volez torner vostre face,
 mes si malade vos faigniez,
 tant souspirez, tant vos plaaigniez,
 et fetes si le dangereux
 qu j'en deviegn si poereus
 que je ne vos ros assaillir,
 tant ai grant pooir de faillir,
 quant après dormir me resveille. (9058-9073)

Even at night when you lie all naked beside me in my bed, you can't be held, for when I want to embrace you to kiss you and comfort you, and when I am thoroughly warmed up, you sulk like a devil and do not want to turn your face toward me for anything that I may do. You pretend to be so sick, you sigh and complain so much and make so much resistance that I become so fearful that I don't dare attack you again, when I wake up after I have slept, so great is my fear of failing. (165)

The fact that Dame Alice almost never repulses her husband's advances, but only uses them for material advantage, distinguishes her from the wife of the Roman de la rose. Like La Vielle, she protests a great deal but takes whatever she can get.

Alison's frankness in protestation is a shock technique derived from La Vielle. Both refer to the sex act often and in vocabulary which would satisfy neither Reason nor the Lover of Jean's work. Haldeen Braddy has discussed Chaucer's use of obscenity in the Canterbury Tales, and though he has not defined his terms explicitly, seems to admit the use of the obscene in the "realistic" portions of the Tales.³ Is Alison obscene? Or merely exhibitionist? Her mind certainly runs to the sexual, but perhaps she doth protest too much. No doubt some members of Chaucer's audience were shocked, though perhaps not so much as was Christine de Pisan at Jean de Meun's work. Alison does not hesitate to proclaim her position:

What eyleth yow to grucche thus and grone?
 Is it for ye wolde have my queynte allone?
 Wy, taak it al! lo, have it every deel!
 Peter! I shrewe yow, but ye love it weel;
 For if I wolde selle my bele chose,

I koude walke as fressh as is a rose;
 But I wol kepe it for youre owene tooth. (443-449)

Alison's frankness really embodies no "realism" as such. She too uses the euphemisms that Raison denounces. Her willingness to speak about sex is not particularly "realistic" either. Though she may not be "realistic," Alison is without doubt unique, the only other personage notable for frankness being La Vielle. La Vielle is probably even more likely to shock than Alison: she uses some of the same euphemisms but treats more of mechanics and dwells on the repulsive. And, like Jaloux, she is distant from her subject, speaking, for the most part, of an abstract "she." It is only when La Vielle speaks of her own life that she attains the interest of the Wife of Bath. But even then her speech lacks the homey irrelevancies which personalize Alison's diction.

The realistic value of the shock technique is relative to its context. In comparison with the so-called "courtly" tales, the Wife of Bath is gross, though not so crass as La Vielle. In comparison to Old French fabliaux, such as "The Widow" by Gautier le Leu or "The Knight who Conjured Voices" by Garin,⁴ Alison does indeed "walke as fressh as is a rose." Alison does achieve certain mimetic effects by striking a median point between dialectic and pornography, for she speaks frankly about matters which are very much a part of life. Frank talk about sex does not often appear in medieval literature, outside of fabliaux and satire, however; sex after marriage is a part of the "happily ever after" syndrome, unmentioned in literature. At the same time, however, Alison's frankness is not likely to have been the mirror image of either polite or "lewed" conversation. The realism of these shocking statements probably rests in the unflattering truth that man tends to think about sex more often than speak about it; and Alison verbalizes her every

thought.

Alison seems to come to a stop with the words, "Swiche manere wordes hadde we on honde" (451), and one expects her story to follow at last, but she immediately picks up the exposé of her marriages:

Now wol I speken of my fourthe housbonde.
 My fourthe housbonde was a revelour;
 This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour;
 And I was yong and ful of ragerye,
 Stibourn and strong, and joly as a pye.
 How koude I daunce to an harpe smale,
 And synge, ywis, as any nyghtyngale,
 Whan I had dronk a draughte of sweete wyn! (452-459)

We see here Alison's obvious inability to stick to her subject. This is the first of several statements that she will speak of her nth husband. She immediately wanders from her announced subject to speak of herself. The digressions further emphasize her almost solipsistic concern for herself and confute her occasional arguments that she has mellowed with age. The wanderings characterize an extended passage which is notable for its stream-of-consciousness-like organization. Her mention of Husband Number Four's revels prompts her to think of her own enjoyment of wine and song. Thoughts of wine return her to her perennial occupation with sex: "In women vinolent is no defence,-- / This knowen lecchours by experience" (467-468). "Experience" tells her back to herself with the knell of memory:

But, Lord Crist! whan that it remembreth me
 Upon my youthe, and on my jolitee,
 It tikleth me aboute myn herte roote.
 Unto this day it dooth myn herte boote
 That I have had my world as in my tyme.
 But age, allas! that al wole envenyme,
 Hath me biraft my beautee and my pith.
 Let go, farewell! the devel go therwith!
 The flour is goon, ther is namore to telle;
 The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle;
 But yet to be right myrie wol I fonde.
 Now wol I tellen of my fourthe housbonde. (469-480)

Such phrases show the effect of Chaucer's fine ear for what must not have been common speech of the court. In Alison's speech, as in the dialogues of the end-links, Chaucer's transcription of various speech patterns does approach a phonographic realism. Alison's off-hand, oddly-organized remarks are nothing like La Vielle's rhetoric, though the content is often similar. La Vielle proceeds with impeccable logic, but without the homey colloquialisms of Alison; the Duenna is very much in the fashion of the schools. Rather than developing, as does the speech of La Vielle, Alison's speech proceeds by variation: she remembers her "jolitee"; it tickles her heart; it does her heart good; she has had her share of joys; age comes; it has taken her beauty; she will let it go; the flour is gone; she must make do with the bran; she will be merry. This progression is typical of Alison, and is more contemplative than didactic or expository. It contributes, by means of homey vocabulary, personal exclamations, and proverbial phrases to the illusion that Alison is present in all her charm and imperfectness. The fact that no one would muse in quite this polished manner does not destroy this illusion of the reality of Alison's presence and the perverse appeal of her words and situation.

Despite her protestations that there is "namore to telle," Alison proceeds to tell a good deal more. She returns to her fourth husband:

I seye, I hadde in herte greet despit
 That he of any oother had delit.
 But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce!
 I made hym of the same wode a croce;
 Nat of my body, in no foul manere,
 But certainly, I made folk swich cheere
 That in his owene grece I made hym frye
 For angre, and for verray jealousye.
 By God! in erthe I was his purgatorie,
 For which I hope his soule be in glorie.
 For, God it woot, he sat ful ofte and song,
 Whan that his shoo ful bitterly hym wrong. (481-492)

Not one line enlightens us concerning him. Alison never does "tell" about him, beyond the two introductory lines: "My fourthe housbonde was a revelour; / This is to seyn, he hadde a paramour." He is perhaps erased from her memory because, as one of the "bad" husbands, he had the upper hand. It is notable that Alison bears him no grudge, as the Duenna does her paramours: "But he was quit, by God and by Seint Joce! / . . . For which I hope his soule be in glorie." The description of their relations is proverbial rather than specific or realistic. The proverbial phrases are vivid in their own right, however: "I made hym of the same wode a croce"; "in his owene grece I made hym frye"; "his shoo ful bitterly hym wrong." These are supplemented by conventional phrases which convey particular information without specifics: "I hadde in herte greet despit"; ". . . he of any oother had delit"; "he was quit"; "I made folk swich cheere"; "I was his purgatorie"; "he sat ful ofte and song." The elements of the passage give no evidence of realism, but the effect produced is clearly vivid, partly because of the proverbs, partly because we see behind this conventional tale of woe in marriage to the state of the teller.

The fifth husband, the only one to receive a name, follows. Alison's earlier classification of her mates as three good and two bad comes into question here. By the end of the monologue, we seriously question the validity of her judgment, because in the course of the narrative her norms have clouded. Jankin is the ultimate figure of a love-hate relationship in marriage. The pith of that vacillating arrangement is discovered in Alison's opening comments:

Now of my fifthe housbonde wol I telle.
 God lette his soule nevere come in helle!
 And yet was he to me the mooste shrewe;
 That feeles I on my ribbes al by rewe,

And evere shal unto myn endyng day.
 But in oure bed he was so fresch and gay,
 And therwithal so wel koude he me glose,
 Whan that he wolde han my bele chose,
 That thogh he hadde me bete on every bon,
 He koude wynne agayn my love anon.
 I trowe I loved hym best, for that he
 Was of his love daungerous to me. (503-514)

Again a comparison with the Roman de la rose is useful. La Vielle says:

Mes quant j'avoie des uns pris,
 foi que doi Dieu ne saint Tibaut,
 tretout donoie a un ribaut,
 qui trop de honte me fesoit,
 mes c'iert cil qui plus me plesoit.
 Les autres touz amis clamoie,
 mes li tant seulement amoie;
 mes sachiez qu'il ne me prisoit
 un pois, et bien le me disoit.
 Mauvés iert, onques ne vi pire,
 onc ne me cessa de despire;
 putain commune me clamoit
 li ribauz, qui point ne m'amoit.
 Fame a trop povre jugement,
 et je fui fame droitement.
 Onc n'amei home qui m'amast;
 mes se cil ribauz m'antamast
 l'espaule, ou ma teste eüst quasse,
 sachiez que je l'en merciassse.
 Il ne me seüst ja tant batre
 que seur moi nou feïsse enbatre,
 qu'il savoit trop bien sa pes fere,
 ja tant ne m'eüst fet contrere.
 Ja tant ne m'eüst maumenee
 ne batue ne trahinee,
 ne mon vis blecié ne merci,
 qu'ainceis ne me criast merci
 que de la place se meüst;
 ja tant dit honte ne m'eüst
 que de pes ne m'amonetast
 et que lora ne me rafetast:
 si ravions pes et concorde. (14446-14477)

But when I got something of value from one of them, then, by the faith I owe God or Saint Thibaut, I would give it all to a rascal who brought me great shame but pleased me more. I calked all the others lover, but it was he alane that I loved. Understand, he didn't value me at one pea, and in fact told me so. He was bad-- I never saw anyone worse--and he never ceased despising me. This sceundrel, who didn't love me at all, would call me a common whore. A woman has very poor judgment, and I was truly a woman. I never loved a man who loved me, but, do you know, if that sceundrel had laid open my shoulder or broken my head, I would have thanked him

for it. He wouldn't have known how to beat me so much that I would not have had him throw himself upon me, for he knew very well how to make his peace, however much he had done against me. He would never have treated me so badly, beaten me or dragged me or wounded my face or bruised it black, that he would not have counseled peace to me and then made me happy in bed, so that we had peace and concord again. (257)

Alison elaborates on this theme for some three hundred lines. She is never so blunt as to say, as does the Duenna, that Jankin called her whore, but we see at the end that her feelings towards this last husband are precisely those of Jean's old woman and very much those of Gautier le Leu's widow.

In her usual fashion the Wife begins to talk of her mate but without fail tells us more of herself:

My fifthe housbonde, God his soule blesse!
Which that I took for love, and no richesse,
He som tyme was a clerk of Oxenford,
And hadde left scole, and wente at hom to bord
With my gossib, dwellynge in oure toun;
God have hir soule! hir name was Aliscoun.
She knew myn herte, and eek my privetee,
Bet than oure parisshe preest, so moot I thee!
To hire biwreyed I my conseil al . . . (525-533)

This is all we learn of Jankin until Dame Alice tells of the book of wicked wives, some hundred lines later. We learn much more of Alison's own concerns and activities. Her desire "for to se, and eek for to be seye / Of lusty folk" motivates many of her actions:

. . . I made my visitaciouns
To vigillies and to processiouns,
To prechyng eek, and to thises pilgrimages,
To pleyes of myracles, and to mariages,
And wered upon my gaye scarlet gytes.
Thise wormes, ne thise motthes, ne thise mytes,
Upon my peril, frete hem never a deel;
And wostow why? for they were used weel. (555-562)

Alison reflects the Duenna's concern for making the correct, frequent public appearance.

Et gart que trop ne sait enclose,
 quar, quant plus a l'ostel repose,
 mains est de toutes genz veüe
 et sa biaute mains conneüe,
 mains couvoittee et mains requise.
 Sovant aille a la mestre iglise
 et face visitacions
 a nocces, a processions,
 a geus, a festes, a queroles,
 car en tex leus tient ses escoles
 et chante a ses deciples messe
 li dex d'Amors et la deesse.
 Mes bien se soit ainceis miree
 savoir s'ele est bien atiree. (13487-13500)

.
 A woman should be careful not to stay shut up too much, for while she remains in the house, she is less seen by everybody, her beauty is less well-known, less desired, and in demand less. She should go often to the principal church and go visiting, to weddings, on trips, at games, feasts, and round dances, for in such places the God and Goddess of Love keep their schools and sing mass to their disciples. But of course, if she is to be admired above others, she has to be well-dressed. (233)

La Vielle gives detailed advice to women concerning those public appearances--the proper walk, the peacock-method of showing one's figure, hints on how to hide one's defects, and so forth. Her instructions, as usual, are more polished than Alison's and are carefully organized. Alison continues in her household role. She is specific as to her dress, implies a "down home" familiarity with her fellow-strollers, and implies at least a small scorn for the whole process in the phrase "to thise pilgrimages." Her concerns are never noble. Her "scarlet gytes" recall to her mind the household problems of moths, and indeed, "thise wormes, thise motthes, thise mytes" seem quite familiar to her. She speaks to the pilgrims as she would to her gossip, Alisoun.

She proceeds, saying she will "tellen forth what happed me." We know by this time that nothing ever simply "happens" to Alison; she controls all:

I seye that in the feeldes walked we,
 Til trewely we hadde swich daliance,

This clerk and I, that of my purveiance
 I spak to hym and seyde hym how that he,
 If I were wydwe, sholde wedde me. (564-568)

Alison, as usual, is the agressor. She makes her motives clear, however.

Her "purveiance" is her means of survival:

Yet was I nevere withouten purveiance
 Of mariage . . . (570-571)

She bolsters her case with the usual household proverb:

I holde a mouses herte nat worth a leek
 That hath but oon hole for to sterte to,
 And if that faille, thanne is al ydo. (572-574)

Not surprisingly, the same proverb is found in the speech of La Vielle:

Et sachiez une chose vaire:
 cil qui sires est de la faire
 doit prendre par tout son toulin;
 et qui ne peut a un moulin,
 hez a l'autre tretout le cours!
 Mout a soriz povre secours
 et fet en grant perill sa druiage
 qui n'a q'un pertuis a refuige.
 Tout ausinc est il de la fame,
 qui de touz les marchiez est dame
 que chascun fet por lui avoir:
 prendre doit par tout de l'avoir,
 car mout avroit fole pensee,
 quant bien se seroit propensee,
 s'el ne voloit ami que un. (13115-13129)

Know also another truth: he who is lord of the fair should collect
 his market-toll everywhere; and he who cannot at one mill-Hey!
 to another for his whole round! The mouse who has but one hole
 for retreat has a very poor refuge and makes a very dangerous
 provision for himself. It is just so with a woman: she is the
 mistress of all the markets, since everyone works to have her.
 She should take possessions everywhere. If, after she had
 reflected well, she wanted only one lover, she would have a very
 foolish idea. (227)

La Vielle seldom resorts to proverbs, one of Alison's basic weapons.

When Jean's personage utilizes them, she is a good preacher, making a
 point with the proverbial material, then exemplifying the point supported
 by the example. The overall effect is didactic, in spite of the colorful
 proverbs. Alison's methods and ends are not didactic in the sense that

La Vielle's are; Alison may wish us to see her point, but she will not be hurt if we are not convinced. Her exempla are allowed to stand without elaboration or explanation, and the reader must adapt the proverb to the situation himself. Alison's speech thus retains its informality; unlike the sermon, it remains close to the illogical patterns of everyday, nondidactic speech.

Chaucer comes strikingly close to the modern-day understanding of stream of consciousness when Alison proceeds to forget what she was talking about:

But now, sire, lat me se, what I shal seyn?
 A ha! by God, I have my tale ageyn.
 Whan that my fourthe housbonde was on beere, . . . (585-587)

The lines are wonderfully appropriate to the woman who, in total disorganization, is never at a loss for words. She thinks out loud, talking to herself, to the company, and swearing, all at the same time. We are allowed to enter her mind for one moment when she is off her guard--not that we do not know what is in her mind at other moments. Alison is continually an actress. She is always on stage, and her performance is on two levels. The one is that of dramatic presentation: we are given her words. The second is that of irony: the contrasting and overlapping of her thoughts, or lack of them, as above, betray her inner self differently and to a greater extent than she is aware.

Back to her narrative, Alison continues to relate the story of her falling in love with Jankin. She never admits to as much, however. Ostensibly she is speaking "of [her] fifthe housbonde." But of course she speaks of herself:

Whan that my fourthe housbonde was on beere,
 I weep algate, and made sory cheere,
 As wyves mooten, for it is usage,
 And with my ceverchief covered my visage,

But for that I was purveyed of a make,
 I wepte but smal, and that I undertake.
 To chirche was myn housbonde born a-morwe
 With neighbores, that for hym maden sorwe;
 And Jankyn,oure clerk, was oon of tho.
 As help me God! whan that I saugh hym go
 After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
 Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
 That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.
 He was, I trowe, a twenty wynter oold,
 And I was fourty, if I shal seye sooth;
 But yet I hadde alwey a coltes tooth. (587-602)

The scenario is not original with Chaucer. We find this standard anti-feminist situation in many places. Eustache Deschamps writes in the Miroir de mariage that after the husband's death the callous wife takes what she can get, is satisfied by a short Mass, and searches in the funeral crowd for another mate:

Elle emporte plus que le tiers,
 Et s'a a part tout desrobé,
 Sa proye prins comme un hobé
 Pour un autre qui la prandra.
 Et sçavez vous qu'il advendra?
 Du service, obseques et les lays
 Oir voudra parler jamais,
 Excepté d'une courte messe;
 Et regardera, en la presse
 A porter le deffunct en terre,
 Quel mari elle pourra querre
 Et avoir après cesti cy. (1966-1975)⁵

Much more vivid and satiric is the portrait painted by Gautier le Leu in

"La Veuve":

Segnor, je vos vuel castoier.
 Tuit devons aler ostoier
 En l'ost dont nus on ne retorne.
 Savés comment on les atorne
 Çaus qui en cele ost sont semons?
 On les lieve sor deus limons,
 Puis l'en porte on barbe sovine
 Vers le mostier de grant ravine,
 Et sa molliers le siut apres.
 Cil qui a li montent plus pres,
 Le tienent par bras et par mains
 Des paumes battre, c'est del mains. . .
 Ensi va acoutant ses fables

Qui ne sont mie veritables.
 Devant l'entree des mostier
 Dont reconence son mestier
 De crier haut et durement.
 Et li prestres isnelement,
 Qui l'ofrande desire a prendre,
 Rueve les candelles esprendre.
 Qant li services est finés
 Et li cors est se atornés
 Qu'il est colciés trestos anvers
 En tere noire avuec les vers,
 Dont velt li dame après salir. (1-12; 23-37)⁶

My lords, I should like to instruct you. We all of us must go off to the wars, on that expedition from which no man returns. And do you know how they dispose of someone who has been convoked to that army? They carry him to the church on a litter, toes up and with great speed; and his wife follows after him. Those who are closest to the wife lay hands and arms on her to keep her from, at the very least, beating her palms together. . . . she carries on, acting her part, in which there is scarcely a word of truth. At the entrance of the church she begins again her business of shrieking and wailing. The priest, who would like to get on with the collection, quickly orders the candles to be lit; and when he has asked God's pardon for the dead man, he says the mass in a great hurry. When the service is finished and the corpse has been laid on his back in the black earth among the worms, then the good wife wants to jump into the open grave. (145-146)

The wife's grief is, like Alison's, mere "usage." She is soon on the prowl, although she does wait until the funeral is over. Gautier's vignette, while clearly not Chaucer's source, is much more vivid than the comments of Repertoire de Science in Deschamps's Mirour. By concentrating on a particular widow, and through tongue-in-cheek humor, Gautier achieves an immediacy which Deschamps's blanket condemnation lacks because of its abstraction.

Chaucer's passage is still more immediate in Alison's first person account. We are no longer objective or disapproving observers, but "insiders" to the experience, and thus somehow accessories after the fact. The shift to a self-conscious first person has vivified and rehabilitated a worn satirical commonplace. Moreover, Alison recognizes her foibles: "I weep algate, and made sory cheere, / As wyves mooten,

for it is usage." "But for that I was purveyed of a make, / I wepte but smal, and that I undertake." Much of Gautier's satire is carried by the utter lack of dignity in his widow. Her sexual desires assert themselves not frankly, as do the Wife of Bath's, but obscenely. In comparison to this satiric figure, Alison can love Jankin at the funeral with relative impunity:

As help me God! whan that I saugh hym go
 After the beere, me thoughte he hadde a paire
 Of legges and of feet so clene and faire
 That al myn herte I yaf unto his hoold.

Gautier's widow is a figure to be scorned for her mock-heroic bluster, which is ill-performed, and for her material and sexual predatoriness. Chaucer walks a narrow line in playing with satire and pathos. The scenario is satiric, but Chaucer does not play for satire, as he did with the harangue of the old husbands. The result is an ironic pathos produced by the Wife's appeals for sympathy and the reader's ability to see through her act to her motivations, which are the same as the widow's. But by this time, we know the Wife so well that she cannot be a one-sided satiric-fabliau character. Chaucer saves her from our immediate scorn by careful manipulation of the conventions of satire and humor which are played off against a character fully drawn. We have looked through Alison's eyes at her experience, and have understood, at least partially, her mis-stated motives. There is also, of course, a level of implicit moral condemnation, but that lies beneath the surface of this mimetic picture.

After a short digression in which Alison attempts to justify her stubborn lusty character through her horoscope, she returns to tell of her marriage to Jankin a month later, and of her foolish gift to him of her accumulated land and money. She devotes some two hundred lines to

the narration of the fight through which she finally gained "maistrie" in their marriage. As usual, her view is anything but impartial. She enlists reader sympathy from the beginning, posing herself as the underdog:

And to hym yaf I al the lond and fee
 That evere was me yeven therbifoore.
 But afterward repented me ful soore;
 He nolde suffre nothyng of my list.
 By God! he smoot me ones on the lyst,
 For that I rente out of his book a leef,
 That of the strook myn ere wax al deaf. (630-636)

Physical battle between husband and wife is a topos of comic and satiric literature; even in iconography we find the husband and wife fighting over the literal "pants" of the marriage. Any number of marital jealousies may lead to the fight, and usually the wife emerges victorious by means of her tears and trickery. The Jaloux of the Roman de la rose beats his wife in exasperation over her extravagance and infidelities:

Lors la prent espoir de venue
 cil qui de mautalant tressue
 par les treces et sache et tire,
 ront li les cheveus et descire
 li jalous, et seur li s'aourse,
 por noiant fust lions seur ourse,
 et par tout l'ostel la traine
 et par corrouz et par ataine,
 et la ledange malement;
 ne ne veust, por nul serement,
 recevoir excusacion,
 tant est de male entencion,
 ainz fiert et frape et roille et maille
 cele qui bret et crie et baille
 et fet sa voiz voler au venz
 par fenestres et par auvenz,
 et tout quan qu'el set li reprouche,
 si con il li vient a la bouche,
 devant les voisins qui la vienent,
 qui por fous ambedeus les tienent,
 et la li tolent a grant paine
 tant qu'il est a la grosse alaine. (9331-9352)

Then the jealous husband, sweating with anger, may seize her straightway by the hair and pull and tug her, break and tear her hair and grow mad with rage over her. A lion's rage at a bear would be nothing in comparison. In anger and rage, he drags her through the whole house and vilifies her foully. His intent is

so evil that he doesn't want to hear excuses on any oath. Instead he hits her, beats her, thumps her, and knocks her about while she gives out howls and cries and sends her voice flying on the winds past windows and roofs. She reproaches him in every way she knows how, just as it comes into her mouth, in front of the neighbors who come there.. The neighbors think them both crazy; with great difficulty they take her away from him while he is out of breath.
(168-169)

After such treatment, of course, the wife proceeds to cuckold her husband with a vengeance, and the husband lives in mortal terror of her revenge. The battle in "La Veuve" is equally vivid but has a happier ending. The wife insults her husband's sexual abilities and his family.

A icest mot li vallés saut.
Il ne dist mie: Dex vos saut,
Ains le saisist par les lubars,
Se li done des esclabars.
Tant li promet et tant li done
Que tot ce dit li gueredone;
Puis li resaut sor le jovente,
Tant li fiert del puing et avente
Qu'il en est sullens et lassés. . .
Puis parole bas a fauset,
Molt set bien faire le qauset
Tot autresi con ele muire; . . .
Qant cele cosse est trespassee,
Puis revienent andoi ensanle. (509-17; 533-36; 544-45)

At these words the young man leaps up, and without so much as a by-your-leave he grabs her by the haunches and gives her such a thrashing, more than she bargained for, that he soon pays her in full for her foul words. Then he leaps on her again and beats and pounds her with his fists until he is all in a sweat and worn out. When she has had enough the widow runs and hides in her chamber . . . she speaks in an affectedly weak voice as though she were really dying; for she knows how to make the most of her wounds. . . . Then, the quarrel over, the two of them come back together again. (154-155)

Both Jean de Meun and Gautier le Leu present satiric approaches to the theme of the sex-starved widow. Their frays are vividly portrayed, but as in all satire, the personages are representative types. The issues are standard, and the husband is pictured as the wronged party.

Chaucer transforms this material. Once again we see the personal immediacy which the first person narrative allows; the antifeminist

material is made credible because it comes from a woman who at the same time portrays herself as wronged yet substantiates the traditional charges. And again, Alison, because of the depth of her characterization, is no stock shrew. This dulls the satiric edge but replaces it with human interest and mimesis--the artistic imitation of human actions,--the perfect arrangement for an ironist. Alison devotes one hundred fifty lines to charges made against women by Jankin. The charges follow the pattern of those made by Jaloux in the Roman de la rose and by Alison's older husbands. Again we see the charges verified by the speaker, just as La Vielle verifies the charges of the Jaloux and Gautier's widow verifies the charges of satirist and husband. But Alison contrives once again to inject her own joie de vivre into the old authorities. The list of unhappy marriages in Jean's work is made dull by the pedantic telling of each episode. We hear of Penelope, Lucretia, Phoroneus, Heloise and Abelard, Dido, Phyllis, Oenone, Medea, Vulcan, Venus, Mars, and others. As in most of the expository speeches in the Roman, each story exemplifies its own well-organized point. Jankin likewise uses authorities to justify his points, but as Alison tells the story the points become confused and haphazard, interspersed with her own comments on marriage.

Alison prefaces the description of her fight with Jankin by a commentary on Jankin's attitudes which identifies him as one of those clerks who wrote of wicked wives:

Thanne wolde he seye right thus, withouten doute:
 "Whoso that buyldeth his hous al of salwes,
 And priketh his blynde hors over the falwes,
 And suffreth his wyf to go seken halwes,
 Is worthy to been hanged on the galwes!" (654-658)

Alison's reaction to this is predictable:

But al for noght, I sette noght an hawe
 Of his proverbes n'of his olde sawe,
 Ne I wolde nat of hym corrected be.
 I hate hym that my vices telleth me,
 And so doo mo, God woot, of us than I. (659-663)

Thus we find the source of Alison's distrust of "auctoritee"; tradition and the words of wise men forbid her to gad about, but experience has taught her that her lusty life is to be enjoyed. Ironically, the Wife of Bath is as much influenced by authority as Jankin, but she does not know it. She sees fit to tell him and all the world about his vices, as she admits telling her gossip (530-542), but hates to be told of her own. She further sees fit to justify things she approves of with all the authorities she can find, as we have seen in the opening section of the monologue. And indeed, she invokes old "auctoritees" to explain why clerks always speak ill of women:

. . . it is an impossible
 That any clerk wol speke good of wyves,
 But if it be of hooly seintes lyves,
 No of noon oother womman never the mo.
 Who peyntede the leen, tel me who?
 By God! if womman hadde writen stories,
 As clerkes han withinne hire oratories,
 They wolde han writen of men moore wikkednesse
 Than al the mark of Adam may redresse.
 The children of Mercurie and of Venus
 Been in hir wirkyng ful contrarius;
 Mercurie loveth wysdam, and science,
 And Venus loveth ryot and dispence.
 And, for hire diverse disposicioun,
 Ech falleth in otheres exaltacioun.
 And thus, God woot, Mercurie is desolat
 In Pisces, wher Venus is exaltat;
 And Venus falleth ther Mercurie is reysed.
 Therefore no womman of no clerk is preysed.
 The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do
 Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho,
 Thanne sit he down, and writ in his dotage
 That womman kan nat kepe hir mariage! (688-710)

Alison invariably turns to astrology, that supranatural explanation of all man's foibles, when she finds herself boxed in. With this device

she turns her own personality into an absolute, to which all else must conform. Thus she justifies her own "nature":

As help me God! I was a lusty oon,
 And faire, and riche, and yong, and wel bigon;
 And trewely, as myne housbondes tolde me,
 I hadde the beste quoniam myghte be.
 For certes, I am al Venerien
 In feelynge, and myn herte is Marcien.
 Venus me yaf my lust, my likerousnesse,
 And Mars yaf me my sturdy hardynesse;
 Myn ascendent was Taur, and Mars therinne.
 Allas! allas! that evere love was synne! (605-614)

In this first instance, Alison tries to justify her taking a husband only half her age. She cannot do it by proverbs or other authorities, so she turns to her experience--the testimony of her other husbands--and to astrology, which saves her from charges of unnaturalness. She is not wholly convinced herself, however, as her plaintive cry, "Allas! allas! that evere love was synne!" would indicate. Similarly she is faced with the irrefutable fact that clerks write of wicked women. Rather than admit that these women were evil, she evolves an astrological explanation which explains why the clerk, child of Mercury, hates the lover, child of Venus. For all its contrived logic, the explanation is in no way pedantic. It contains Alison's usual proverbs--who painted the lion,--imaginative fictional commentary--the outcome if women were to write all the books,--and satiric yet homely exaggeration: "The clerk, whan he is oold, and may noght do / Of Venus werkes worth his olde sho . . ."

Alison continues the catalog of wicked wives, no doubt to impress upon her hearers the full extent of the outrage she has suffered. She does not lose the conversational touch, however, often inserting exclamations and commentary:

Of Phasipha, that was the queene of Crete,
 For shrewednesse, hym thoughte the tale swete;

Fy! spek namoore--it is a grisly thyng--
Of hire horrible lust and hir likyng. (733-736)

She manages to turn the incident of Socrates and Xantippe to Xantippe's advantage by her emphasis on Socrates' passivity, not at all a characteristic respected by the Wife of Bath:

No thyng forgat he the care and the wo
That Socrates hadde with his wyves two;
How Xantippe caste pisse upon his heed.
This sely man sat stille as he were deed;
He wiped his heed, namoore dorste he seyn,
But, "Er that thonder stynte, comth a reyn!" (727-732)

The emphasis of the story has changed in the Wife's telling. Socrates' bon mot becomes merely an indication of his foolishness. Alison has vulgarized her source slightly; Jerome writes that Xantippe threw water on her husband. The changes subtly shift attention away from the import of the example; such subtle changes are a major Chaucerian device. Similarly the vignette of Latumys and Arrius is played for its humor:

Thanne tolde he me how oon Latumys
Compleyned unto his felawe Arrius
That in his gardyn grewed swich a tree
On which he seyde how that his wyves thre
Hanged himself for herte despitus.
"O leewe brother," quod this Arrius,
"Yif me a plante of thilke blissed tree,
And in my gardyn planted shall it bee." (757-765)

The wives of "herte despitus" are left to the imagination.

Alison also relates incidents basically unchanged, including Hercules and Dianira, Clytemnestra, Livia, and Lucilla. Yet each incident is told with the same household imagery, the proverbial commentary, and appropriate exclamation. The insertion of incidents played for comic effect--these are the expanded incidents quoted above--reasserts at every turn the Wife's personality. She will make fun of the exempla whenever she can, thus undercutting them; she obviously believes they vindicate her astrological explanation. She must, of course, leave enough

examples to prove her point that clerks are stupid and vengeful, and that Jankin deserved to be knocked into the fire. The result is that the reader cannot fully trust her--hardly a new observation at this point, but one which we should not forget. Her own concept of what material will work to her own good is often odd.

It is not surprising to find that it is Jankin's attacks on the basic traits of Alison's personality which precipitate the battle:

. . . he knew of no proverbes
 Than in this world ther grown gras or herbes.
 "Bet is," quod he, "thyn habitacioun
 Be with a leon or a foul dragoun,
 Than with a womman usynge for to chyde."
 "Bet is," quod he, "hye in the roof abyde,
 Than with an angry wyf doun in the hous;
 They been so wikked and contrarious,
 They haten that hir housbondes loven ay."
 He seyde, "a womman cast hir shame away,
 Whan she cast of hir smok;" and forthermo,
 "A fair womman, but she be chaast also,
 Is lyk a gold ryng in a sowes nose."
 Who wolde wene, or who wolde suppose,
 The wo that in myn herte was, and pyne? (773-787)

Alison's actions follow:

Al sodeynly thre leves have I plyght
 Out of his boock, right as he radde, and eke
 I with my fest so took hym on the cheke
 That in oure fyr he fil bakward adoun.
 And he up stirte as dooth a wood leoun,
 And with his fest he smoot me on the heed,
 That in the floor I lay as I were deed.
 And whan he saugh how stille that I lay,
 He was agast, and wolde han fled his way,
 Til atte last out of my swogh I breyde. (790-799)

Attacks on her propensity to nag and on her chastity provoke the fight, but, contrary to custom, Alison strikes the first blow. The motivations, which have been detailed for some hundred and fifty lines, are clear, and Alison does make a strong case for reader sympathy. The fight in the Roman de la rose is nowhere so well motivated. Gautier le Leu's battle is perhaps even better provoked, since the wife calls her husband's

sisters whores, but such antagonism is beyond the Wife of Bath. Chaucer has staged a battle which is complex in its development. The full effect grows from the General Prologue, where Alison's deafness is mentioned, and includes all the character traits developed in the monologue. The themes of experience and authority, and woe in marriage are all developed and are drawn together in the climactic action. The action itself is purely conventional, but Chaucer has vivified it by rooting the causes in the characters of the personages involved.

The results are also typical. Alison must kiss Jankin before she dies--ironic, since she again seems to be a widow--but she hits him once more on the cheek to establish her victory.

But atte laste, with muchel care and wo,
 We fille acorded by us selven two.
 He yaf me al the bridel in myn hond,
 To han the governance of hous and lond,
 And of his tonge, and of his hond also;
 And made hym brenne his book anon right tho.
 And whan that I hadde geten unto me,
 By maistrie, al the soverayntee,
 . . . I was to hym as kynde
 As any wyf from Denmark unto Ynde,
 And also trewe, and so was he to me. (811-818; 823-825)

In antifeminist satire the wife always wins this battle, because the husband must have cause for further complaint. Such is the case of the Jaloux and his wife:

. . . je ne croi mie
 qu'ele le veuille amer ja mes.
 Semblant, espoir, en fera; mes
 s'i poait voler jusqu'au nues
 ou si haut lever ses veues
 qu'il peüst d'ileuc sanz choair
 touz les fez des homes voair
 et s'apensast tout par loisir,
 si faudroit il bien a choisir
 en quel perill il est cheuz,
 s'il n'a touz les baraz veuz,
 por soi garantir et tenser,
 don fame se set porpenser.

S'il dort puis en sa compaignie,
 trop met en grant perill sa vie;
 voire en vaillant et en dromant
 se doit il douter trop formant
 qu'el nou face, por soi vanchier,
 enpoisoner ou detranchier,
 ou mener vie enlangoree
 par cautele desesperee. (9360-9380)

.
 I don't think that she might ever want to love him. She might pretend, but if he could fly up to the clouds or raise his view so high that from there, without falling, he could see all the deeds of men, and if he reflected upon all at leisure, he still would have to choose into which peril he fell, and he has not seen all the frauds that a woman knows how to meditate in order to protect and defend herself. Afterward, if he sleeps in her company, he puts his life in very great peril. Indeed, sleeping and waking, he must fear most strongly that, in order to avenge herself, she may have him poisoned or hacked into pieces, or make him languish in a life of desperate ruses. (169)

Jean de Meun's battle scene is not at all developed like Chaucer's, and we see that the results are likewise abstractly detailed. Gautier le Leu works within the same convention but, like Chaucer, makes that convention considerably more lifelike than Jean. He portrays a psychologically developed character, if only developed in one aspect. Jean deals with the abstract figures of the Jealous Husband and Faithless Wife. Gautier varies these stock figures to the young husband and the sex-starved widow. The change is enough to transform the story from worn antifeminism in general to satire dealing with figures made individual.

Gautier closes:

Car se me feme me dist lait,
 Se je m'en vois, ele le lait.
 Et qui dont le volroit respondre,
 Il feroit folie despondre.
 Encor vient mels que je m'en voise
 Que je le fiere d'une boisse.
 Segnor qui estes auduïn
 Et gilleeur et herluïn,
 Ne soies de rien en esmai:
 Li auduïn ont mellor mai
 Q'asent li felon combatant
 Qui les noïsses vont esbatant.

Gautiers Li Leus dist en la fin
 Que cil n'a mie le cuer fin
 Qui sa mollier destraint ne cosse,
 Ne qui li demande autre cosse
 Que ses bones voisines font. (573-589)

.
 For if my wife scolds and says nasty things to me, all I need do is leave and she stops. Anyone who tried to answer her would be reasoning with madness. And it is better for me to go away than to hit her with a piece of wood. Lords, you who are submissive, deceitful, and blusterers, do not be dismayed in any way: submissive men have more joy than do those quarrelsome rascals who are always looking for a fight. And finally, Gautier le Leu says that he who will oppress his wife or quarrel with her only because she wants what all her neighbors want does not have a gentle heart. (156)

Such a moral may easily be applied to Jankin and Alison. Battle accomplishes nothing, and the pleasures of sex heal all wounds. "La Veuve" is a coarse tale filled with unquotably coarse antifeminist material, and as such does not compare with Chaucer's handling of conventional figures and situations in the Wife of Bath's Prologue. Alison may be off-color but she is never obscene like Gautier. Gautier achieves considerable character development, also through a long monologue, although not so much as Chaucer; lacking polish, Gautier's tale seems "realistic" because of its obscenity. The sense of reality which we feel in the Wife's monologue is of a more subtle kind. The realization of these similar attitudes and rationales produces very different works.

Alison of Bath, compounded though she may be from type shrewishness, is more than a type. Types of the shrewish wife are common in Chaucer's sources--Jerome, Deschamps, Jean de Meun, and in numerous other satiric and didactic works. The type is always a sketchy figure and little distinguishes one example from another. Types never exist for their own sakes: they are merely instruments through which the writer may arrive at his "sentence." Individualization of the type in part destroys its universal significance. In the Canterbury Tales, however, nearly a

thousand lines are given over to Dame Alice's self-portrayal. The self-revelation lacks the didacticism that characterizes much literary use of stock characters, particularly by the homilists, of whom the following is only one typical example:

. . . women who put upon their head hair that is not their own, or an unnatural colour on their face / tamper with the handiwork of God in gross presumption. For, to put hair on the head or give a new complexion is the special concern of God. They, therefore, who do this kind of thing desire along with Lucifer to be equal with the All-highest; and for this reason the unnatural colour on their face makes them grow old before the proper time, and in the future they will be punished for it as well.

The Wife of Bath's prologue is set apart from homily and satire by its form and basic assumptions. Because Alison speaks in the first person, satiric and didactic intent can exist only on a secondary level, that of the narrator's intended irony and the reader's perception of it. The narrator, however, is eclipsed by the first person point of view, hence irony, which exists throughout, is implicit and depends upon the reader's apperception of Alison's many contradictions and absurdities. The monologue, in keeping with the character of its speaker, becomes nominally autonomous, and as such serves other pilgrims as a sort of touchstone and motivation for discussion of the married state.

In the discussion of the preceding pages we have examined significant characteristics of Alison's monologue. It differs most notably from its sources in its conversational tone: As we have seen in the end-links, Chaucer can take ordinary or trivial material and transform it to life-like drama through dialogue. Alison does the same with the tired old material of antifeminism. The transformation is based on her disorganized and colloquial manner. Proverbs, auctoritates, oaths, profanity, interruptions, and digressions of all sorts compose Alison's

conversation. Alison's disorganization achieves, to a much greater degree, the same effect as the narrator's seemingly haphazard relation of details in the General Prologue, that of the stream of consciousness. Yet organization and development are eminently strong in Chaucer. The seeming haphazardness is achieved through the art of patterning, juxtaposition, the yoking of the expected/conventional with the unexpected. By seeming to lead us down a conventional path and then turning upon his convention Chaucer achieves a literary effect which strikes the reader as being much like life, for life rarely conforms to the expected. The result is the illusion which constitutes mimesis.

Completely above the controlling idiom of the monologue is Chaucer's acute awareness of the disparity between what one says and what one is. This disparity strikes the reader most vividly when he listens to the Wife of Bath. It is rooted in Chaucer's careful management of convention and levels of meaning. Modifying the conventions of satire and the stock character by changing them to a new form, that of unconscious revelation, Chaucer makes the disparity clearly evident. A strong interplay between conscious and unconscious revelation contributes to a method which is primarily ironic. Accompanying and tempering the irony is a liberal dose of humor--humor rooted in the disparities and juxtapositions which form the heart of the personation of the Wife of Bath.

The "Chaucerian realism," the "psychological realism," the vividness, the mimesis of the Wife of Bath's Prologue is largely built upon the peculiarities of her speech and reasoning patterns. The realism of her portrayal is never photographic; it is highly selective and often constructed upon conventions. Technique makes conventions seem to be like actual life; the art of illusion contributes to mimesis. Alison tells

her tale--of itself an outrageous impossibility--in a way which makes all plausible from beginning to end. We are at no point deluded into thinking that she, her five husbands, and all the pilgrims existed, but we willingly suspend our disbelief to enjoy this monologue, which is highly mimetic.

III: THE PARDONER

The Pardoner and the Wife of Bath are often linked as like examples of Chaucer's treatment of the confessional mode. It is true that both characters utilize the confession to express attitudes not commonly acknowledged of themselves by members of medieval society; each relates in detail how he or she copes with particular problems; and finally, each betrays much more of his character to the reader than he suspects. But when we examine the artistic means through which Chaucer accomplishes these ends, we find very different techniques. Both characters seem "alive," but Alison of Bath is, more than anything else, a character superbly constructed from literary antecedents. The Pardoner is a composite of many vivified commonplaces; he has no significant literary past. "There is no doubt," writes Germaine Dempster,⁸ "that the character of the Pardoner and the episodes in which he appears are largely the creation of Chaucer." In examining the possible literary sources of the Pardoner's Prologue, she finds only the speech of Faux-Semblant in the Roman de la rose and isolated fragments concerning the friars' "gaude" of declaring that great sinners may make no offerings, both satiric conventions of the time. The characteristic historical type which lies behind the Pardoner's portrait is to be found most easily in ecclesiastical documents attempting to regulate abuses by pardoners. The

examination which follows will concentrate on Chaucer's use and variation of this type; to establish that touchstone we must first seek out the pardoner of the day. This will require a relatively long excursus into ecclesiastical history.

J. J. Jusserand's classic English Wayfaring Life in the Middle Ages remains the best picture of the practices of the Church concerning sin and penance:

"Indulgence" was at first simply a commutation of penance. The punishments inflicted for sins were of long duration; fasting and mortification has to be carried on for months and years. The faithful were permitted to transform these interminable chastisements into shorter expiation. Thus a clerk might exchange a year of penance against three hundred lashes, reciting a psalm at each hundred. Tables of such exchanges were drawn up by competent prelates. The learned and autocratic Theodore, born at Tarsus, Cilicia, an encyclopaedic mind and a strong disciplinarian, archbishop of Canterbury from 669-690, who left on the British Church a permanent mark, had published a tariff allowing people to be excused of a month's penance on bread and water if they sang instead twelve hundred psalms with bended knees; for a year's penance the singing was increased, and each course of psalter singing was accompanied with three hundred strokes in the palm of the hand (palmatae). But it was possible to compensate a year's penance and escape at the same time the psalms, fasts and strokes by paying a hundred shillings in alms. In another such table, drawn up in the ninth century by Halitgarius, bishop of Cambrai, is found this additional facility, that if the sinner, sentenced to a month's penance on bread and water, chooses rather the singing of the psalms he may be allowed not to kneel while he sings, but then instead of twelve hundred he will have to sing fifteen hundred and eighty psalms. He may in the same manner be excused of more than one month, up to twelve, in which last case, if he chooses not to kneel, he will have to sing no less than twenty thousand one hundred and sixty psalms.

The payment of one hundred shillings was no doubt more attractive than twenty thousand psalms or a year on bread and water, and those who could afford it willingly paid the price, although they were few in number. Gradually the idea of commutation of penance was replaced by the theory of the "Treasury," which resulted in the system of indulgences. The "Treasury" consisted of the infinite mercy of Christ and of the merits

of the saints, available through the dispensation of the Pope and the clergy. "A short, well selected prayer, a small gift in money, would now exempt devout people from the greatest penalties and from numberless years of a possible purgatory."¹⁰

The Pardoner, or questor, was entrusted with the mission of distributing the heavenly wealth among God's people on earth. These mercies, available through indulgences, were obtained through almsgiving, the rationale being the same as that of Chaucer's pilgrim-friar:

For unto a povre ordre for to yive
Is signe that a man is wel yshryve;
For if he yaf, he dorste make avaunt,
He wiste that a man was repentaunt. (I. 225-228)

It should be noted that the pardon does not constitute forgiveness of sin. Penance consists of contrition, confession, and satisfaction, and the indulgence accounts only for satisfaction; it removes the temporal punishment for sin after confession and absolution remove the moral guilt. Thus the indulgence may be given only to those who are contrite and have confessed their sins, and this stipulation is found in indulgences granted by the Archbishops of Canterbury and York, and by the bishops of Winchester, Exeter, and Durham.¹¹ Furthermore, no indulgence was to be "sold." The almsgiving was, however, necessary to indicate the sincerity of the penitent. Thus the position of the pardoner is strictly limited by canon law, consisting simply, according to Clement V, of communicating "to the people the indulgences confided to them and to humbly request alms."¹²

If we keep in mind the severity of penances during the Middle Ages, it is not hard to understand the eagerness of the people for a portion of the unlimited "Treasury" of heavenly grace or the fact that the pardoner's position was soon abused. Oftentimes a cleric of minor orders,

or perhaps one without orders at all--on the continent even friars sometimes served as pardoners,--the pardoner was foremost a fund raiser. The abuses were not unknown to Church authorities, who issued a succession of regulatory documents relating to the matter. Boniface IX writes contemporaneous to Chaucer:

Certain religious, who even belong to one or the other of the mendicant orders, and some secular clerks, even endowed with privileged benefices, affirm that they are sent by us or by the legates or the nuncios of the apostolic see, and that they have received a mission to treat of certain affairs, . . . to receive money for us and the Roman Church, and they go about the country under these pretexts. . . . Thus, they proclaim to the faithful and simple people the real or pretended authorizations which they have received; and irreverently abusing those which are real, in pursuit of infamous and hateful gain, they carry further their impudence by mendaciously attributing to themselves false and pretended authorizations of this kind.¹³

Boniface's statements are extremely mild compared to this letter of Thomas de Brantingham, Bishop of Exeter:

After hearing public rumor and receiving experience of its truth, we have learned that some questors, equipped with false and forged letters bearing seals, both from the Apostolic See and from us (as the liars assert), in public places falsely preach the writs and abuses contained in these letters before the clergy and the people of our city and diocese, to the deception of souls and for the purpose of extorting money and other goods from our subjects, so that, like false prophets, they deceive the simple. And they offer, not without much boldness and deception of souls, and in fact grant indulgences to the people on their own authority. They dispense from vows, absolve those confessing to them from perjuries, murders, and other sins; for an amount of money they remit things stolen or doubtfully obtained; they relax the third or fourth part of penances enjoined [on those having to do with them]; lying, they assert that they can extract from purgatory the parents or friends of those who give alms to them; to the benefactors of the places where these questors are they grant plenary remission of sins, and many they absolve from all penalty and guilt (as we use these words), contrary to the decrees of the Holy Fathers wholesomely issued in this matter.¹⁴

Thomas goes on to forbid under pain of excommunication the reception of such questors who are without the proper documents. The letter is not unusual, but of course, the questor who could forge bulls from Rome

could do equally well for the bishop of the diocese. Furthermore the archdeacon and his officials, who bore the responsibility of carrying out the bishops' directives concerning pardoners, oftentimes found profit in ignoring the lack or falsification of documents in exchange for "license" fees, or a cut in the take.¹⁵ Thus the reasons for Bishop Thomas' threat of excommunication become evident. Corruption spreads like the plague.

Especially flagrant in their violations of the many statutes aimed at controlling the pardoners were the questors for foreign hospitals, such as that for which Chaucer's Pardoner collects, Roncevalles. The hospitals themselves, located leagues beyond the seas, were in no position to control their fund raisers. And local authorities were powerless to act against the pardoners without authorization from the Pope or archbishop, who had perforce to work through a long chain of subordinates all subject to bribes. Local institutions, on the other hand, were more strictly controlled. Kellogg and Haselmayer describe the means by which Beverley Minster raised funds for the construction of the church. Contracts were drawn up for each of the four dioceses in which the collection was to be taken. The pardoner posted a bond of twenty pounds and was kept under careful watch.¹⁶ Nonetheless abuses were flagrant.

The showing of relics was only one method by which the Pardoner raised money. Chaucer's Pardoner with his sheep bone is of course the classic, but Boccaccio's Fra Cipollo does equally well with his parrot's feather and coals. Surprisingly, the showing of false relics appears to have been rare. As early as 1215 the Lateran Council banned any sale of relics, and anyone causing false relics to be venerated was proclaimed a heretic. Relics, because of their high visibility, were easily controlled,

and few were so hardy as to risk the penalty of heresy:

Traffic in false relics seems also to have been very infrequent. Although one may find the standard abuses of pardoners repeated over and over again, the abuse of false relics does not appear among them. There is no mention of it in any of the manuals which treat of the pardoner, and it is noticed in only a few church councils.

No relics were to be shown without the authorization of the local bishop. Abuse of relics was primarily a literary phenomenon; the pardoners have apparently been abused with accusations concerning false relics nearly as much as have been the friars for their supposed wealth.

A look at some of the supposedly "true" relics does shed some light on the prevalent state of mind which accepted the existence of both relics and the pardons of the heavenly "Treasury": pilgrims at Exeter were shown a piece of the candle lit by the angel in Christ's tomb, brought to the cathedral by Athelstan; one could also see a little of the bush from which the Lord spoke to Moses. Henry III was given a piece of marble bearing a human footprint alleged to be "the mark of one of the Saviour's feet, left by Him as a souvenir to His apostles after His Ascension." It was placed at Westminster along with some of the blood of Christ. Edward III received a vest of St. Peter, and Charles V of France also possessed some of Christ's blood. In literature we find good-humored burlesque of these extravagant claims in the comb of the cock which crowed at Pilate's, half a plank of Noah's ark, and an angel feather; though not strictly accurate, they are much in the spirit of the "actual" relics traded by royalty and the Church.¹⁸ The mentality which supported the veneration of relics is much the same as that which willingly bought pardons from pardoners known to be false; taken in the context of the miracles of the Bible, any such objects, improbable as they seemed, could not be disproved so easily as they could be venerated, and any grace to

be had, from whatever doubtful source, might still guarantee the entry of one's soul into heaven. In spite of the pardoner's abuses, which were known to the people through sermons, the people grasped at any straw, just as Chaucer's Pardoner attempts to make the Canterbury pilgrims grasp at any straw. If one's soul could be saved by a bought indulgence, one would willingly look the other way when the pardoner split the take with the parish priest or the archdeacon's officials. People in general willingly understood the Wager of Belief so well defined by Pascal.

The "realism" of Chaucer's Pardoner is rooted in his use of the typical actions of questors who roamed England in the fourteenth century, but, as we might expect, Chaucer's Pardoner does not step directly from the ecclesiastical documents into the Canterbury Tales. As with the Wife of Bath, Chaucer capitalizes on his literary form--the confessional monologue. Conventional material of which everyone is aware takes on a slightly different tone when it is stated by a guilty party who obviously is not ashamed of his doings. Chaucer is not merely repeating his success with the Wife of Bath, because while Alison remains unaware throughout of her actions' vindicating the charges against which she argues, the Pardoner is not only aware of his guilt, but revels in it, and revels further in the irony of it. The Pardoner is highly self-conscious; Alison is not. In the pulpit the Pardoner is such a good talker that he is sure he can sell his pardons to the pilgrims in spite of the fact that they know all about him. For he is a good salesman, and people on the pilgrimage are aware of their souls' sinfulness, even if they are not overly "religious."

Chaucer's Pardoner is highly sophisticated. He knows his pilgrim audience and knows what they expect from him, which is nothing good:

But right anon thise gentils gonne to crye,
 "Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!
 Telle us som moral thyng, that we may leere
 Som wit, and thanne wol we gladly heere." (VI. 323-326)

The generic objection is transformed through a strong stroke to dramatic characterization. As if to vindicate himself, the Pardoner sets out to tell about his work, giving an example of the preaching which makes him a "noble ecclesiaste," and finally, to sell them pardons in spite of themselves:

"Lordynges," quod he, "in chirches whan I preche,
 I payne me to han an hauteyn speche,
 And ryngge it out as round as gobth a belle,
 For I kan al by rote that I telle.
 My theme is alwey oon, and evere was--
Radix malorum est Cupiditas." (329-334)

He proceeds to outline the standard procedures of the pardoner; in this he concurs with many an ecclesiastical regulatory document:

First I pronounce whennes that I come,
 And thanne my bulles shewe, I, alle and some.
 Oure lige lordes seel on my patente,
 That shewe I first, my body to warente,
 That no man be so boold, ne preest ne clerk,
 Me to destourbe of Cristes hooldy werk.
 And after that thanne telle I forth my tales;
 Bulles of popes and of cardynales,
 Of patriarkes and bishopes I shewe,
 And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
 To saffron with my predicacioun,
 And for to stire hem to devocioun. (335-346)

The tone of his speech is confidential, as if he speaks to equals who know all about what he does to "hem" in churches. All is legal thus far, but we know, as does the pilgrim audience, that many a pardoner carried bulls, seals, patents, and indulgences never seen by Pope or bishop. As we shall learn from the Pardoner's repeated statements that the fruits of his work are all for himself, this man stops at nothing, not even the carrying of false relics, so there seems little need to elaborate on any devious methods used by him to get as far as the local

pulpit. In practice, these methods included forgeries and bribes, but the "gentil pardoner" shifts attention away from this, and for good reason. His self-exposé focuses more on the gullibility of the people who hear his fantastic tales yet still make their offerings. The Pardoner exposes just enough of his trickery to show the pilgrims how clever he is: he wins because people are too stupid or too faithful to challenge him. His actual extortions are minimized in the telling, for exposure of the whole truth might be stepping too far in his attempt to win from the pilgrims. He does not realize that the group has been pushed too far already.

Having impressed the peasants with his Latin, which may not have been more extensive than that of the Summoner, the Pardoner proceeds to show his relics:

Thanne shewe I forth my longe cristal stones,
Ycrammed ful of cloutes and of bones,--
Relikes been they, as wenen they echoon.
Thanne have I in latoun a sholder-boon
Which that was of an hooly Jewes sheep. (347-351)

Again we find the condescending tone through which the Pardoner takes the pilgrims into his confidence. The crystals are "ycrammed," a word hardly conveying reverence towards the contents, be they relics or not. He adds "Relikes been they," just in case the listeners have not followed him, and "as wenen they echoon" expresses his contempt for the peasants who do not know any better. The genesis of the shoulder bone set in brass is heretical--"an hooly Jewes sheep." The Pardoner's contempt for things religious is never hidden. The miraculous virtues of the sheep's bone are extolled in mountebank manner reminiscent of Jonson's later treatment in Volpone:

"Goode men," I seye, "taak of my wordes keep;
If that this boon be wasshe in any welle,

If cow, or calf, or sheep, or oxen swelle
 That any worm hath ete, or worm ystonge,
 Taak water of that welle and wassh his tonge,
 And it is hool anon; and forthermoore, . . . (352-357)

The bone is a panacea for all problems likely to plague the peasant population. It cures sick animals, multiplies crops, heals jealousy. The Pardoner's relics bear great resemblance to pagan charms, and the Pardoner himself appears here more a fairground huckster than an ecclesiastic. His outlandish claims provide the basis for a double satire which is carried throughout the Pardoner's segment of the Tales: the Pardoner, a faithless and thieving churchman, is one target, but the people who believe such claims are in their turn also satirized as a group of stupid, boorish, lumpish peasants.

The relics carried by the Pardoner are not, however, conventional. We have seen that the abuse of relics relatively seldom occurred. If there is any conventionality to the claims made for the sheep bone and mitten, it is the conventionality of any fast-talking swindler who makes exorbitant claims that are so attractive that the gullible believe them in spite of their fantastic nature. The claims of the Pardoner are themselves caricatures of things which the people did believe in. The relics accepted by Church and government as "real" were enhanced by tales of miracles attributed to them. The miracles were magnified out of all proportion by pilgrims just like Chaucer's pilgrims. Chaucer's Pardoner has merely adapted the relic-miracle syndrome to the needs of his audience.

Thus the "realism" of the Pardoner so far is something difficult to isolate. Modelled neither on literary convention nor completely on fact, the spiel nonetheless seems lifelike. The Pardoner's speech is

polished but lacks those "lifelike" faults of the Wife of Bath--disorganization, proverbs, household diction. What is "real" about the Pardoner's approach is not so much its substance as its method, its psychology. It is not the fabled "psychological realism" of Alison of Bath, however, because it portrays little of the Pardoner's psyche. Rather it illumines the psychology of the trickster and the tricked. We are shown the means by which a hypocrite can work on the gullible faithful. The reality here is one of the swindle.

When the wonders of his Latin and relics have sufficed to "stire hem to devotioun," the Pardoner enters the part of his sermon which entices the people to give:

Goode men and wommen, o thyng warne I yow:
 If any wight be in this chirche now
 That hath doon synne horrible, that he
 Dar nat, for shame, of it yshryven be,
 Or any womman, be she yong or old,
 That hath ymaad hir housbonde cokewold,
 Swich folk shal have no power ne no grace
 To offren to my relikes in this place. (377-384)

In this spiritual blackmail the Pardoner makes no reference to the heavenly values of his wares. Rather than say that every man sins and therefore needs pardon, he prefers to say that sinners may not offer. The psychological values of guilt and grace are played off against each other. The Pardoner entices the people to give by arguing that the good will give; the evil may not. The argument ignores the basic value of the pardon.

His exposition finished, the Pardoner resumes his confession, emphasizing several times that his only aim is money:

By this gaude have I wonne, yeer by yeer,
 An hundred mark sith I was pardoner.
 I stonde lyk a clerk in my pulpet,
 And whan the lewed peple is down yset,

I preche so as ye han herd bifoore,
 And telle an hundred false japes moore.
 Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
 And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
 As gooth a dowve sittynge on a berne.
 Myne handes and my tonge goon so yerne
 That it is joye to se my bisynesse.
 Of avarice and of swich cursednesse
 Is al my prechyng, for to make hem free
 To yeven hir pens, and namely unto me.
 For myn entente is nat but for to wyne,
 And nothyng for correccioun of synne.
 I rekke nevere, whan that they been beryed,
 Though that hir soules goon a-blakeberyed! (389-406)

The image of the dove stretching its neck to look around is the most vivid incorporated by the Pardoner into his speech. He obviously rejoices in his "bisynesse" and gloats over the private irony which would have his audience think him no more threat than a dove.

By his own admission, however, he is worse than these images of a benevolent Reynard in the friar's robe or bishop's miter, preaching to the unsuspecting fowl. Like Reynard, the Pardoner is an admitted hypocrite. His collections never see the Pope or other authority, and he cares not a jot for the souls he might save, although he does admit that good may come from the devotion he awakes:

For certes, many a predicacioun
 Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun. (407-408)

But that is not his intent, he stresses yet again:

Thus spitte I out my venum under hewe
 Of hoolynesse, to semen hooly and trewe.
 But shortly myn entente I wol devyse:
 I preche of no thyng but for coveityse. (421-424)

The Pardoner harps on his aims much as the Wife of Bath harps on her abilities to make love. Just five lines later he says yet again:

Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
 From avarice, and soore to repente.
 But that is nat my principal entente;
 I preche nothyng but for coveitise. (430-433)

Through his avarice, ironically fostered by the repentance of others,
the Pardoner aims at certain goals:

What, trowe ye, that whiles I may preche,
And wyne gold and silver for I teche,
That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?
Nay, nay, I thoughte it nevere, trewely!
For I wol preche and begge in sondry landes;
I wol nat do no labour with myne handes,
Ne make baskettes, and lyve therby,
By cause I wol nat beggen ydelly.
I wol noon of the apostles countrefete;
I wol have moneie, wolles, chese, and whete,
Al were it yeven of the povereste pape,
Of of the povereste wydwe in a village,
Al sholde hir children sterve for famyne,
Nay, I wol drynke licour of the vyne,
And have a joly wenche in every town. (439-453)

The Pardoner is a supremely selfish man. He aims to be a man of the world, rich in the good things of life—gold, silver, food, drink, and women. Or so he would have the pilgrims think, and he seeks approbation on account of this cleverness. He assumes that the pilgrims take his sophisticated view of religion and admire the triumph of the smartest man. He assumes they will admire him for his cleverness; through that cleverness he hopes vicariously to join the "manly men" of whose number he is so obviously not a member. But the Pardoner miscalculates his audience, for all his clever sophistication. He cannot win admiration for his cleverness and money for his pardons at the same time, but he seems to have lost track of this fact. Thus he asserts himself at the end of his tale, a masterful sermon and exemplum. He is pretentious enough to believe that the pilgrims will accept his role as Pardoner, in spite of his confession and in spite of themselves:

But sires, o word forgat I in my tale:
I have relikes and pardoun in my male,
As faire as any man in Engelond,
Whiche were me yeven by the popes hond.
If any of yow wole, of devocion,

Offren, and han myn absolucion,
 Com forth anon, and kneleth heere adoun,
 And mekely receyveth my pardoun;
 Or elles taketh pardoun as ye wende,
 Al newe and fressh at every miles ende,
 So that ye offren, alwey newe and newe,
 Nobles or pens, whiche that be goode and trewe.
 It is an honour to everich that is heer
 That ye mowe have a suffisant pardoneer . . . (919-932)

I completely discount Kittredge's interpretation which would have the Pardoner morally waver a moment before launching his sales pitch.¹⁹ It is completely inconsistent with the Pardoner's very consistent character which has been thoroughly exposed. Furthermore it is inconsistent with Chaucer's consistent satirical tone and leaves loose ends which remain pointless and unaccounted for in the ending of the tale. The Pardoner's remarks,

And lo, sires, thus I preche.
 And Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
 So graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
 For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve, (915-918)

do indeed seem inconsistent with what comes before and after. But if we recall parts of the prologue, they may be somewhat explained. The Pardoner recognizes that his work may indeed produce good:

For certes, many a predicacioun
 Comth ofte tyme of yvel entencioun. (407-408)

Yet kan I maken oother folk to twynne
 From avarice, and soore to repente. (430-431)

He qualifies each statement by saying "that is nat [his] principal entente." But the mere recognition that his hypocrisy may accomplish good validates his statement that Christ's pardon is best. For that is the truth and he knows it, but does not care about it. He will willingly act the role because he profits from it; his business depends upon it. His hypocrisy cannot change that truth, and indeed, why should he want it to? If many people did not believe in it, he would have no livelihood. So he can

truthfully tell the pilgrims that they should have Christ's pardon. It is but a short step from that truth to his business; he has the pardons, don't get caught in the rush! He appeals to the pilgrims' sense of morality and to their faith, to the very credulousness he has ridiculed in his peasant audiences, in the belief that they will not dare refuse him. He has shown his bill of goods and dares them to buy. But they will not. Perhaps sophisticated enough to enjoy the tale of his wiles, the pilgrims are not so sophisticated as to accept his hypocrisy by participating in it. Besides, they see through his attempt to assume a manhood he lacks. And Harry Bailly, the garrulous, threatened Host, puts him down superbly, hitting him in the only way possible. He has shown himself invulnerable morally and spiritually, but not physically; indeed his attempts to set himself up for the man he is not--the remarks on his marriage in the Wife of Bath's prologue and the "wench in every town"--have indicated to all where he may be hit. Harry Bailly strikes down the Pardoner not for his pretended relics or for his religious hypocrisy, but for his pretensions to manhood. The complete deflation of the Pardoner completes the satire, leaving him an irate figure laughed at by all.

The reaction of the other pilgrims are not given. It is hardly surprising that Harry Bailly gives no one the opportunity to speak up, and his attack would nonetheless be difficult to top. The Knight of course attempts to restore the equilibrium. He does this because of his own desire to see no animosities, and because of his rank, but we wonder, having seen his bourgeois tastes, if he is not a little horrified at Bailly's attack on the "noble ecclesiaste." Perhaps the Knight would have paid for a pardon just in case . . .

It remains to compare the Pardoner with Jean de Meun's Faux-Semblant, so often regarded as a prototype for the "gentil pardoner." This character is an embodiment of hypocrisy; he appears as a friar, but is capable of becoming what he chooses, for hypocrisy and deceit may exist in all walks of life:

Trop sé bien mes habiz changier,
prendre l'un et l'autre estrangier.
Or sui chevaliers, or sui moines,
or sui prelez, or sui chanoines,
or sui clers, autre heure sui prestres,
or sui deciples, or sui mestres,
or chateleins, or forestiers:
briefement je sui de touz mestiers.
Or resui princes, or sui pages,
et sai par queur trestouz langages;
autre heure sui vieuz et chenuz,
or resui jennes devenuz;
or sui Roberz, or sui Robins,
or cordeliers, or jacobins. (11157-11170)

I know very well how to change my garment, to take one and then another foreign to it. Now I am a knight, now a monk; at one time I am a prelat, at another a canon; at one hour a clerk, at another a priest; now disciple, now master, now lord of the manor, now forester. Briefly I am in all occupations. Again I may be prince or page, and I know all languages by heart. At one hour I am old and white, and then I have become young again. Now I am Robert, now Robin, now Cordelier, now Jacobin. (197)

The controlling concept behind Jean's personation is figural, in Auerbach's sense of that word. The character revealed in Faux-Semblant's confession is portrayed in a way which moves from general to specific: Faux-Semblant, built upon a cue-name, is above all hypocrisy, false-seeming, but he can appear in a multitude of guises. No one guise is all important or a controlling factor of the ultimate reality of his being, however. The Pardoner, in contrast, is characterized in an opposite way. He is an individual who partakes of all the vices of Faux-Semblant, but it is his individuality which controls the portrayal.

Both personages operate in similar ways, and it is their like

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missions in life which have prompted identifications of the two. Faux-Semblant says:

Par ma lobe entas et amasse
 grant tresor en tas et en masse,
 qui ne peut por riens affonder;
 car se j'en faz palés fonder
 et acomplis touz mes deliz
 de compaignies ou de liz,
 de tables plaines d'entremés
 (car ne veill autre vie mes),
 recroist mes argenz et mes ors;
 car ainz que soit vuiz mes tresors,
 denier me vienent a resours.
 Ne faz je bien tumber mes ours?
 En aquerre est toute m'entente,
 mieuz vaut mes porchaz que ma rente.
 S'en me devoit tuer ou batre,
 si me veill je par tout enbatre,
 si ne querroie ja cessier
 ou d'empereours confessier,
 ou rois, ou dux, ou bers, ou contes.
 Mes des povres genz est ce hontes,
 je n'ain pas tel confession.
 Se n'est por autre occasion,
 je n'ai cure de povre gent:
 leur estat n'est ne bel ne gent. (11523-11546)

By my trickery I pile up and amass great treasure in heaps and mounds, treasure that cannot be destroyed by anything. For if I build a palace with it and achieve all my pleasures with company, the bed, with tables full of sweets—for I want no other life—my money and my gold increases. Before my treasure can be emptied, money comes to me again in abundance. Don't I make my bears tumble? My whole attention is on getting. My acquisitions are worth more than my revenues. Even if I were to be beaten or killed, I still want to penetrate everywhere. I would never try to stop confessing emperors, kings, dukes, barons, or counts. But with poor men it is shameful; I don't like such confession. If not for some other purpose, I have no interest in poor people; their estate is neither fair nor noble. (202-203)

The Pardoner, though he is a clever rogue, lacks the polish of Jean's creation. Faux-Semblant evidences in his tastes and speech the elegance which the Pardoner awkwardly aspires to. The Pardoner's tastes, while of the same vein, are of a more bourgeois nature. The palace, tables of sweets, and acquaintance of kings and emperors are clearly beyond him. He rather enjoys the company of the Summoner, good wine,

and thoughts of women, and must perforce be content with making his gains from the middle and lower classes.

Both personages share the confessional monologue, but again, Faux-Semblant is an abstraction among other abstractions. Moreover, his revelations lack even the motivation which Chaucer has supplied for the Pardoner. The confession of an abstract figure by definition must be less effective than that of a fully drawn character by virtue of the fact that the abstraction consists only of the value that he embodies; hence his confession becomes meaningless except in terms of exposition. It is simple enumeration. The Pardoner's confession, because he is portrayed as an individual, serves to characterize him more fully and to motivate subsequent action. Faux-Semblant's confession is controlled throughout by abstractions. He identifies himself as one of AntiChrist's men--as such he is the embodiment of a conventional accusation against friars which stems from William of St. Amour--and, aside from the catalogue of potential forms quoted above, explains his actions in undetailed manner. The Pardoner, while he may be of AntiChrist's band, presents a limited but vivid and concrete account of his methods. The confession of Faux-Semblant, while it has many things in common with the Pardoner's monologue, is more an expression of the satiric atmosphere in the light of which the Pardoner is portrayed than it is a literary source. The Pardoner, though he exemplifies in concrete and less dignified form many of Faux-Semblant's principles, is portrayed as an individual, not an abstraction.

The Pardoner's Prologue does not, like that of the Wife of Bath, portray the innermost reaches of his mind or psyche, but rather pictures the outward manifestations of that psyche. We see the Pardoner through

a double screen: the first layer is that of his own consciousness; the second that of his premeditated designs on the pilgrims' faith and his plan to sell them pardons in spite of themselves. The subjective filter of the personage's own consciousness is by definition a characteristic of the confessional monologue, and the Pardoner shares this aspect of the exposure of his self-image with Alison. Alison, however, has no ulterior motives in uncovering her inmost secrets to the pilgrims; a self-assured woman, she little needs their approbation and is unaffected by their condemnation. The Pardoner, on the other hand, seeks to assert his cleverness and, indirectly, his masculinity. Did he not attempt to sell the pardons, he no doubt would have succeeded in some measure. His self-presentation chronicles his designs; the confession of methods and aims which comprises the monologue is a manifestation of the Pardoner's insecurity.

Overall the Pardoner's confession lacks the excitement of Alison's and is not so entirely successful artistically. Alison gains added interest by speaking of a taboo subject. The Pardoner's subject, hypocrisy and its methods, is not unique, and he does not attack it with Alison's verve and humor. The straightforward portrayal of the Pardoner's methods certainly approximates actual practices more than Alison's husband-managing tricks mirror fourteenth century domestic life. But the straightforwardness itself sacrifices interest; seen in the light of actual pardoners, Chaucer's Pardoner is merely an adequate representative. His monologue gains interest not from Alison's conversational techniques so much as from its own vividness in concrete detail. The underlying concept, that of hypocrisy and trickery, is considerably more abstract than the antifeminist motifs which form the

underpinnings of Alison's harangue. In listening to Alison we are caught up in her thought processes, carried along by unexpected turns of development, and made to feel, because of the intimacy of her revelations, accessories to the action. Her monologue unfolds in a seemingly unplanned fashion which is indeed described by the phrases "psychological realism" and "stream of consciousness." The Pardoner's confession is descriptive exposition. Though he is trying to prove himself and sell his pardons to the pilgrims, the action is merely related; it does not happen before our eyes. It is only when the actual sales pitch is given that the Pardoner's presentation approaches the drama of the end-links or of Alison's monologue-drama about her husbands. The Pardoner, because of his earnest desire to convince, has no use for the implied audience which Alison makes to seem always present. We always sense the presence of her husbands; the Pardoner finds it to his advantage to leave his hearers, the dupes, outside the hearer's consciousness. Furthermore, because he tells of himself with ulterior motives, his hypocrisy and impotence are underplayed, and the final sales pitch comes somewhat as a surprise.

The actual "motives" of the Pardoner have been questioned by many. This questioning, along with the many explanations supplied, would indicate a flaw in the plausibility of the character. While I feel that the Pardoner's actions may be satisfactorily explained by his desire to prove his cleverness and masculinity, selling pardons to the pilgrims in spite of themselves, the nature of the monologue makes it impossible for Chaucer to say as much without breaking into the episode as omniscient narrator. He wisely avoids this, but the result is still less satisfactory than the monologue of the Wife of Bath.

The Pardoner's monologue represents a "psychological realism" at second remove. A masterful portrayal of the methods and rationale of the medieval pardoner, it is also a telling revelation of one man's beliefs, values, and subconscious wishes. The mentality which is revealed is eminently plausible, even when viewed in the light of modern psychology. As such it is a tribute to Chaucer's abilities to capture this essence of man's nature and to transform it into art.

IV: THE CANON'S YEOMAN

Anyone interested in alchemy will speedily learn that the subject is thus far as the sands of the sea unnumbered. Notably for the fourteenth century, even the main patterns of thought can be but guessed at, for we do not have the texts. Corruptions of Arabic terms combined with garbled manuscripts and mystical interpretations to produce extraordinary confusion, which the editions of the seventeenth century, the best we have as yet, could not set right.²⁰

Alchemy, an early forerunner of the science of chemistry, was a strange combination of science, superstition, philosophy, and the occult.

Based upon a belief in the essential unity of all creation, the science sought, through the discovery of the Elixir, Quintessence, or Philosopher's Stone, to restore to the world a golden age of health, wealth, and happiness. Firsthand knowledge, as John Webster Spargo points out above in his essay on the sources of the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale, is well-nigh impossible to come by. The alchemists, who considered themselves initiates into a sacred philosophy, were careful to code and otherwise confuse as much of their written material as possible. As the Yeoman himself declares with a wonderful anachronism, even Plato refuses to discover the secret of the philosopher's stone to his disciples:

The philosophres sworn were everychoon
 That they sholden discovere it unto noon,
 Ne in no book it write in no manere.
 For unto Crist it is so lief and deere
 That he wol nat that it discovered bee,
 But where it liketh to his deitee
 Men for t'enspire, and eek for to deffende
 Whom that hym liketh. (VIII. 1464-1471)

Our knowledge of alchemy stems from general writings about the philosophy of the science and from attacks on the less honest alchemists who, like Chaucer's Canon, made a living from cheating the gullible. Philosophical writings concerning the science set forth the basic assumptions, the abuses practiced, and deplore them. Petrus Antonius Bonus, writing in Pretiosa margarita novella de thesauro . . .²¹ about 1330 remarks that alchemy is a sacred art known only to pure men. He is enraged that "rogues and robbers" should encroach upon the domain of the philosophers so that a supernatural science appears to many to be trickery. Even the philosophers are cursed by greed; rather than looking for material rewards, they should be content with self-satisfaction. These themes are repeated by Robert of York, the mysterious "Senior," and Arnold de Villa Nova ("Arnoldus of the Newe Toun"). Each emphasizes the God-given nature of the science and comments that when man turns away from God through greed, his work is bound to fail. The rogues and robbers who meddled in the pursuit were plentiful enough in the early fourteenth century to be condemned by Pope John XXII in the decree "De Crimini Falsi."²² The Pope states that alchemists deceive both themselves and others, and that hence anyone making or using alchemical gold or silver will be fined the same weight of true gold or silver. If the offender be a cleric, he shall be deprived of all benefices for the remainder of his life.

The literary treatments of the alchemist and his trade are very

much in the spirit of the documentary evidence. Petrarch writes that he always has high hopes for the science, but it never works. Man's expectations are built up by cupidity, which makes him blind in mind and body. Alchemists take one's money and disappear.²³ Gower writes in the Confessio Amantis of the stone "Mineral," which transmutes base metals to silver and gold:

Thei spoken faste of thilke Ston,
 Bot hou to make it, nou wot non
 After the sothe experience.
 And natheles gret diligence
 Thei setten upon thilke dede,
 And spille more than thei spede;
 For allewey thei finde a lette,
 Which bringeth in poverté and dette
 To hem that riche were afore:
 The lost is had, the lucre is lore,
 To gete a pound thei spendeth fyve;
 I not hou such a craft shal thryve
 In the manere as it is used:
 It were betre be refused
 Than forto worchen upon weene
 In thing which stant noght as thei weene.
 Bot noght forthi, who that it knewe,
 The science of himself is trewe
 Upon the forme as it was founded . . .²⁴

Every reference to the philosophy/science of alchemy is characterized by its great but unfulfilled potential. As Gower writes, theoretically it has promise, but man's avarice and inefficiency invariably bring him nothing.

The lament of the Canon's Yeoman is much in this vein. Encouraged by the Host to expose the tricks of his master, he launches into an exposé of the methods and tricks of alchemy's baser practitioners, supplemented by a graphic laboratory experiment and a self-serving display of what knowledge ("termes fewe") he has picked up during his apprenticeship. While the monologue lacks the vividness of the long narrative of the Wife of Bath and the psychological revelations of the

confession of the Pardoner, it borrows narrative techniques from both of them. The confessional revelations are nowhere near so complete or shocking as in the other monologues, but the Yeoman does manage to picture both his master and himself in a plausible, lifelike manner. Nonetheless these semi-scientific characters do not share the depth of the other two.

The Canon's Yeoman operates in thought patterns reminiscent of the Wife of Bath. His remarks are not organized in any consistent way, but like Alison's, proceed in patterns of free association or stream of consciousness. He opens with a personal account of how his seven years' association with the Canon has harmed him:

With this Chanoun I dwelt have seven yeer,
 And of his science am I never the neer.
 Al that I hadde I have lost therby,
 And, God woot, so hath many mo than I.
 Ther I was wont to be right fressh and gay
 Of clothyng and of oother good array,
 Now may I were an hose upon myn heed;
 And where my colour was bothe fressh and reed,
 Now is it wan and of a leden hewe,--
 Whoso it useth, soore shal he rewe!--
 And of my swynk yet blered is myn ye.
 Lo! which advantage is to multiplie!
 That slidyng science hath me maad so bare
 That I have no good, wher that evere I fare;
 And yet I am endetted so therby,
 Of gold that I have borwed, trewely,
 That whil I lyve I shal it quite nevere.
 Lat every man be war by me for evere! (721-737)

These warnings embody both general and specific details. The figure of seven years establishes a verisimilitude through specificity. The proverbial phrase, to wear a hose on one's head, is general in that it adds nothing to the visual appearance of the man, but its proverbial origin imparts the same hominess we find in Alison's proverbs. His former fresh, gay appearance is extremely vague, and his current "leden hewe" is only

a little more vivid. The "blered" eyes add a graphic detail, but on the whole, the lines convey an attitude rather than a vivid, lifelike picture. We are shown not the Yeoman but a picture of the futility of alchemy. His own losses prompt him to reflect on the habit of nature which makes a man, having lost all, trick his fellow into the same loss: "For unto shrewes joye it is and ese / To have hir felawes in peyne and disease" (746-747).

The ever-recurring theme of the Yeoman's lament is,

. . . we concluden everemoore amys.
We faille of that which that we wolden have,
And in oure madnesse everemoore we rave. (957-959)

The substance of these lines is repeated again and again until it becomes a sort of refrain and general commentary on alchemy. In the 251 lines which make up the monologue, this theme recurs on an average of every fifteen lines; it becomes a rondo-like unifying device. The monologue is composed of specifics which illustrate the futility of the search for the philosopher's stone.

For all his hardships, we sense that the Yeoman is nonetheless impressed by scientific bustle:

Whan we been there as we shul exercise
Oure elvysshe craft, we semen wonder wise,
Oure termes been so clergial and so queynte.
I blowe the fir til that myn herte feynte. (750-753)

The Yeoman, as we shall later see, is a "lewed" man who does not understand the "clergial and queynte" terms used around him. Seduced by the "elvysshe" nature of the "craft," he willingly knocks himself out to help. He is proud, too, of what terms he has picked up from his masters. The mention of terms prompts him to outline these for the pilgrims, and we enter the body of the monologue. The lists of terms are interspersed

with a semi-coherent narration of the experiment itself, which culminates in the breaking of the pot some 150 lines later. The catalogue is an old technique by this time, but Chaucer utilizes it here to an extreme he has not even approached before. There is really no way to question Chaucer's knowledge of alchemy on the basis of this terminology, for it really tells us little about the science. It gradually becomes apparent that the Yeoman knows little, too. The compounds, elements, and chemical reactions are listed by name only, with little explanation; Chaucer's purpose is to create a scientific atmosphere, which he does very well.

The first catalogue consists merely of "thynges whiche that we werch upon," and includes "orpyment, brent bones, iren squames, / That into poudre grounden been ful small." All are put in a pot with paper and salt and sealed, "That of the eyr mighte passe out nothyng." These ingredients and this process tell us little, but serve as a typical example of what the alchemist does. The Yeoman continues to catalogue various processes which might be applied to certain metals, punctuating each item with a comment on its futility. He speaks of

. . . the care and wo
 That we hadde in oure matires sublymyng,
 And in amalgamyng and calcenyng
 Of quyksilver, yclept mercurie crude . . .
 For alle oure sleightes we kan nat conclude.
 Oure orpyment and sublymed mercurie,
 Oure grounded litarge eek on the porfurie,
 Of ech of thise of ounces a certeyn--
 Noght helpeth us, oure labour is in veyn.
 Ne eek oure spirites ascencioun,
 Ne oure materes that lyen al fix adoun,
 Mowe in oure werkyng no thyng us availle,
 For lost is al oure labour and travaille. (769-781)

The Yeoman's manner of speaking is reminiscent of the Wife of Bath: one sentence rattles on for nineteen lines! The breathless narration,

coupled with the incredible number of scientific terms, together convey the mysterious urgency of the laboratory.

The Yeoman has only begun to exhibit his knowledge, however. He prefaces the next catalogue with the apology topos:

Ther is also ful many another thyng
That is unto oure craft apertenynge.
Though I by ordre hem hat reherce kan,
By cause that I am a lewed man,
Yet wol I telle hem as they come to mynde,
Though I ne kan nat sette hem in hir kynde. (784-789)

A list of various kinds of pots is begun, then interrupted with the comment "Nat nedeth it for to reherce hem all," then resumed. Like Alison, the Yeoman cannot bear to stop his exhibition. In a sentence which goes on for an endless twenty-three lines, he lists a disordered variety of elements, processes, and sundry related items. Partly it runs:

Watres rubifyng, and boles galle,
Arsenyk, sal armonyak, and brymston;
And herbes koude I telle eek many oon,
As egremoyne, valerian, and lunarie.
And othere swiche, if that me liste tarie;
Oure lampes brennyng bothe nyght and day,
To brynge aboute oure purpos, if we may;
Oure fourneys eek of calcinacioun,
And of watres albfificacioun;
Unsekked lym, chalk, and gleyre of an ey . . . (797-806)

There is no rhyme or reason for this disordered and haphazard combination. The Yeoman assaults the reader with the mysteries of the laboratory. His recital lacks not only scientific organization, but even grammar. He is, after all, a "lewed man," and his speech reflects both his addiction to alchemy and the hopelessness of his ever understanding it. The four spirits and the seven planets and their metals conclude the listing for the moment.

The Yeoman returns to the futility theme, commenting in general

terms that no man is wise enough to succeed in alchemy. For the "lewed man" there is no hope:

To lerne a lewed man this subtiltee--
 Fy! spek nat therof, for it wol nat bee. (844-845)

But he has forgotten many things in his musings, and like Alison, he must return to his subject:

Yet forgot I to maken rehersaille
 Of watres corosif, and of lymaille,
 And of bodies mollificacioun,
 And also of hire induracioun;
 Oilles, ablucions, and metal fusible,--
 To tellen al wolde passen any bible
 That ower is; wherfore, as for the beste,
 Of alle thise names now wol I me reste.
 For, as I trowe, I have yow toold ynowe
 To reyse a feend, al looke he never so rowe. (852-861)

The slip of memory brings plausibility to this ignorant man's recitation of the terms he has picked up much in the way the Summoner learned his Latin. Like that other pilgrim's "Questio quid iuris?" the Yeoman's terminology is largely meaningless to him, as is witnessed by his inability to organize it in any meaningful way. Moreover, he regards his list as the "queynte" terms of an "elvyshe craft," fit to conjure a devil with. Beneath his scientific exterior rests a superstitious heart.

He returns again to the futility topos, expressed this time in exceedingly general religious terms:

But unto God of hevene I make avow,
 For al oure craft, whan we han al ydo,
 He hath ymaad us spenden muchel good,
 For sorwe of which almoost we wexen wood,
 But that good hope crepeth in oure herte,
 Supposynge evere, though we sore smerte,
 To be releevd by hym afterward.
 Swich supposyng and hope is sharp and hard;
 I warne yow wel, it is to seken evere. (865-874)

The repetition has become dull by this time, and the Yeoman's contorted

syntax does little to liven it. Its dullness echoes his intellect, however. He repeats over and over those few things he has learned, but does not understand.

It is only when he speaks specifically of alchemists and his own experiences in alchemy that the monologue regains interest:

And everemoore, where that evere they goon,
Men may hem knowe by smel of brymstoon.
For al the world they stynken as a goot;
Hir savour is so rammyssh and so hoot
That though a man from hem a mile be,
The savour wole infecte hym, trusteth me. (884-889)

The image is vivid and the hominess of the goat retrieves this odd recital from the laboratory. The most vivid part of the narration follows:

Er that the pot be on the fir ydo,
Of metals with a certeyn quantitee,
My lord hem tempreth, and no man but he--
Now he is goon, I dar seyn boldely--
For, as men seyn, he kan doon craftily.
Algate I woot wel he hath swich a name,
And yet ful ofte he renneth in a blame.
And wite ye how? ful ofte it happeth so,
The pot tobreketh, and farewel, al is go!
Thise metals been of so greet violence,
Oure walles mowe nat make hem resistance,
But if they weren wrought of lym and stoon;
They percen so, and thurgh the wal they goon.
And somme of hem synken into the ground--
Thus han we lost by tymes many a pound--
And somme are scatered al the floor aboute;
Somme lepe into the roof. (899-915)

For the first time in the monologue we sense that the Yeoman is actually speaking to the pilgrims. The parenthetical interruptions at the beginning of the passage, in which he comments once more on his master before resuming the tale of pot and fire, are colloquial, explanatory, and convey the same informal tone as Alison's interruptions of herself. He addresses a rhetorical question to his listeners, much as Alison does,

and he seeks to explain what happened in layman's language, something he was incapable of doing with respect to the terminology.

Chaucer constructs a superb crowd-scene in which the scientists argue and quibble about the cause of the accident:

Whan that oure pot is broke, as I have sayd,
Every man chit, and halt hym yvele apayd.
Somme seyde it was long on the fir makyng;
Somme seyde nay, it was on the blowyng,—
Thanne was I fered, for that was myn office.
"Straw!" quod the thridde, "ye been lewed and nyce.
It was nat tempred as it oghte be."
"Nay," quod the fourthe, "stynt and herkne me.
By cause our fir ne was nat maad of beech,
That is the cause, and oother noon, so thee'ch!" . . .
"What," quod my lord, "ther is namoore to doone;
Of thise perils I wol be war eftsoone.
I am right siker that the pot was crased." (920-929; 932-934)

The postmortems are conveyed with a hyperbole—"somme seyde," "somme seyde," "every man . . ."—which produces the impression that there are some two dozen alchemists. The colloquialisms of the men are vivid and believable. Each has his own peculiarity: the first insults his fellows in his anger; the second calls to be heard; the third speaks with the northern "thee'ch"; the Canon's final explanation is filled with general and trite consolations. The Yeoman too, reacts in fear that he may be blamed. But the pieces are swept up and sifted for salvageable ingredients:

The mullok on an heep ysweped was,
And on the floor ycast a canevas,
And al this mullok in a syve ythrowe,
And sifted, and ypike many a throwe. (938-941)

The loss is rationalized with numerous sayings, none of which adds any life to the picture:

Although this thyng myshapped have as now,
Another tyme it may be well ynow.
Us moste putte oure good in aventure.
A marchant, pardee, may nat ay endure,

Trusteth me wel, in his prosperitee.
 Somtyme comth it sauf unto the londe. (944-950)

The true scientist is sustained by his eternal hope of success. But the Yeoman, hardly one of the true scientists, is left to infer that "We concluden everemoore amys."

The monologue is ostentatiously dull in the Yeoman's efforts to explain alchemy from an inexperienced layman's point of view. His catalogues of terms are impressive in their amplitude and in their creation of atmosphere; they also reveal the Yeoman's intellect through their disorganization and their failure really to tell us anything about alchemy. Likewise, the Yeoman's appreciation of the mysteries of alchemy is limited. Though he repeats again and again the conventional arguments against the science--it is a waste of money which produces nothing; it is used to cheat the gullible, etc.--his warnings are much like the proverbial jay's "Watte!" or the Summoner's Latin. Without appreciable variation the warnings are dull and meaningless because they are only part of the half-hearted efforts of the addict to reform himself. The Yeoman is captivated by the science of alchemy. Recognizing its futility, he is typical of all gullible people who know better but are taken in anyway. He is himself the exemplum of his argument. The mysterious, even hellish, atmosphere he imputes to the science, together with his obvious delight in its terms "clergial and queynte" which he does not comprehend, outweigh his oft-repeated warnings.

The monologue is a masterpiece of the use of realia. The reader is overwhelmed by scientific detail which serves to create a general mood and to characterize the Yeoman. This detail, along with the brilliant relation of the alchemists' postmortem, brings verisimilitude to the monologue. Furthermore, as the ostensible narration of the

actual operations of one alchemist, the monologue establishes a "real life" background for the tale proper which follows it. In the tale we find the same arguments reiterated under a fictional guise, only with more emphasis on trickery. The change of emphasis is possible since the Yeoman is no longer ostensibly speaking of an operation with which he is connected; it also serves to impart considerably more interest to the subject, since trickery involves a focus on the psychology of the villain and the dupe.

As realistic portrayal the Canon's Yeoman's monologue lags far behind that of the Pardoner and even farther behind the Wife of Bath. The focus is considerably narrower than either of the others, interest in the personality of the Yeoman is likewise less, and the methods of portrayal too are less varied. The Yeoman's monologue clearly lacks the brilliance of Alison's performance, but we must remember that this is in part because he is a considerably duller figure whose experience has carried him beyond his depth. Furthermore, he is portrayed only in connection with his occupation; he lacks depth and individualization. His own flat character is mirrored in his speech; he talks as much to himself as to the pilgrims, and his lack of interest in them, indicated in the speech by his singular concern with alchemy, serves to dehumanize him. His character is completely opposite Alison's in that while he resolves to tell of alchemy's influences on himself, he becomes so caught up in alchemy that his ostensible subject is invariably submerged in a list of terminology. Alison, on the contrary, professes to speak of her husbands, but finds it impossible to speak of anything but herself. The realism of the Canon's Yeoman's monologue is not that of realistic character portrayal--he is a rather dull and ordinary man--but of the

laboratory experiment. It is the breaking of the pot and the picking up afterwards which lives in the memory. The Yeoman's dullness is not able to obscure the concern, irritation, anger, and especially his own fear--the elements from life--which make up this episode.

NOTES TO CHAPTER IV

¹W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster, eds. Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, (New York: 1958), 209. Translation from W. W. Woollcombe, "The Sources of the Wife of Bath's Prologue," Chaucer Society Publications, Series 2, No. 16, (London: 1903), 298.

²All quotations from the Roman de la rose are from the edition of Felix Lecoy, (Paris: 1966). All translations are from Charles Dahlberg, tr., The Romance of the Rose, (Princeton: 1971).

³Haldeen Braddy, "Chaucer--Realism or Obscenity?" Arlington Quarterly, 2 (1969), 121-138.

⁴Robert Hellman and Richard O'Gorman, eds. Fabliaux: Ribald Tales from the Old French, (New York: 1965).

⁵Sources and Analogues, 220.

⁶All quotations from "La Veuve" are from Charles H. Livingston, Le Jongleur Gautier le Leu, (Cambridge: 1951). Translations are from Hellman and O'Gorman.

⁷G. R. Owst, Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England, 2nd rev. ed. (Oxford: 1961), 392.

⁸Sources and Analogues, 409.

⁹J. J. Jusserand, English Wayfaring Life, 175.

¹⁰Jusserand, 176.

¹¹Alfred L. Kellogg and Louis A. Haselmayer, "Chaucer's Satire of the Pardoner," PMLA, 66 (1951), 252.

¹²Kellogg and Haselmayer, 253.

¹³Jusserand, 178-179.

¹⁴Arnold Williams, "Some Documents on English Pardoners, 1350-1400," 202.

¹⁵Kellogg and Haselmayer, 267-268.

¹⁶Kellogg and Haselmayer, 259 ff.

¹⁷Kellogg and Haselmayer, 259 n. 51.

¹⁸Jusserand, 185-187.

¹⁹George Lyman Kittredge, "Chaucer's Pardoner," Atlantic, 72 (1893), 829-833.

²⁰John Webster Spargo, "The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale," Sources and Analogues, 685.

²¹Sources and Analogues, 695-696.

²²Sources and Analogues, 691, 692.

²³Francis Petrarch, "De Alchima," Sources and Analogues, 692-693.

²⁴Gower, Confessio Amantis, IV. 2581-2599.

CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION

. . . The mimetic tendency itself, the tendency to verisimilitude and accuracy of description, is one of two poles of literature. At the other pole is something that seems to be connected both with Aristotle's word mythos and with the usual meaning of myth. That is, it is a tendency to tell a story which is in origin a story about characters who can do anything, and only gradually becomes attracted toward a tendency to tell a plausible or credible story. . . . imitation of nature in fiction produces, not truth or reality, but plausibility, and plausibility varies in weight from a mere perfunctory concession in a myth or folk tale to a kind of censor principle in a naturalistic novel. Reading forward in history, therefore, we may think of our romantic, high mimetic and low mimetic modes as a series of displaced myths, mythoi or plot-formulas progressively moving over towards the opposite pole of verisimilitude, and then, with irony, beginning to move back.

Like Erich Auerbach and art historian Max Dvořák, Northrup Frye sees in literature a spectrum which stretches from myth, or the ideal, to the mimetic, or imperfect. The mythic tale is characterized by a complete lack of earthly limitations which we know, and has scant concern with the lifelike or credible. Mimetic or realistic fiction encompasses a wide range of literature which evidences at least fragmentary concern for verisimilitude. As mimetic literature becomes more and more the vehicle of irony, it approaches once again the idealistic concerns of the mythic mode. Because he allows no work to stand in isolation from its mythic archetype, Frye's theory has much in common with the medieval mind which views life and literature in a figural way. Auerbach, we must remember, states that

. . . an occurrence on earth signifies not only itself but at the same time another, which it predicts or confirms, without prejudice to the power of its concrete reality here and now. The connection between occurrences is not regarded as primarily

a chronological or causal development but as a oneness within the divine plan, of which all occurrences are parts and reflections.²

Similarly, Dvořák writes of Gothic art:

For Gothic art is not based on the principle of antithesis; it rests rather upon the concept of union, and that which it encloses (without isolating it) is a section of the infinite universe, which was to be transformed into an artistic medium, a source of artistic sensation and significance, by filling it with relationships of a transcendent legitimacy within the area of sense perception.³

Thus our examination of the mimetic aspects of Chaucer's art deals with only a part of the aesthetic principles which governed the artistic expression of the Middle Ages. In this chapter we shall attempt to draw some conclusions concerning the mimetic aspects of the "frame" portion of the Canterbury Tales and to evaluate Chaucer's mimesis in terms of the figural spectrum of which it forms a part.

While many scholars have expressed reservations concerning the term "Chaucerian realism," none has questioned the vivid, lively qualities which have made Chaucer a favorite for so many centuries. The problem at hand is not to prove that these qualities exist, but to analyze them with as much precision as possible and to formulate a description, based upon those qualities, which will define this typically Chaucerian vividness and liveliness with some exactitude. The dangers into which imprecision of terminology can lead us were outlined in Chapter One, but bear repeating at this point. Obviously the use of the term realism--or even worse, naturalism--is of little help without careful definition or qualification. Definition according to modern standards is extremely misleading, since modern and medieval poetics diverge in purpose and form. Yet the fact that modern realism is not applicable to the Middle Ages should not cause us to deny the existence

of a medieval realism. Realism has all too often been viewed as a niche into which entire works must fit. But as Frye remarks, "plausibility varies in weight from a mere perfunctory concession in a myth or folk tale to a kind of censor principle in a naturalistic novel." Mimetic and miraculous or fairy-tale elements often exist side by side in medieval literature, and we must resist the temptation to categorize entire works. Medieval realism is not isolated from other varieties of characterization, narrative management, or description. Moreover, realism cannot be viewed apart from convention and idealization. Scholars have fallen prey to the idea that if it's realistic, it can't be conventional and vice versa. Convention, though not quite so widely abused a term as realism, has served as a sort of catch-all for characteristics which are typical of a given character or situation. Yet conventions are frequently distillations or summary formulations of those very things which constitute "realistic" images. Convention too has profited from few careful examinations whose aim is to point out truly conventional elements and to distinguish them from what we might call "convention-like" details which are really variations on conventions. Lastly, it is far too easy to view either the mimetic or the idealized--mythic, as Frye would have it--aspects of literature with an insularity which, in concentrating on either the exegetical or the transitory, ignores the vital figural aspects of medieval society, art, and religion. In this study I have tried to avoid these many pitfalls.

My attempts to define Chaucerian realism have proceeded along an inductive path. The General Prologue and pilgrimage have been analyzed in an attempt to discover exactly what combinations of techniques produce the vividness and liveliness which constitute mimesis. The two major

divisions which compose the frame of the Canterbury Tales--the General Prologue and the end-links--are dominated by descriptive and dramatic modes, respectively. It is Chaucer's announced intention in the General Prologue to describe the pilgrims--how they looked, what they did, and what he thought of them, although he does little on the last point. In the end-links we view the pilgrimage from a relatively objective point of view. The portrayal is dramatic insofar as the pilgrims themselves provide the narration with little comment from the narrator. The General Prologue and end-links both contribute to the characterization of the pilgrims, the one through the narrator's descriptions, the other through dramatic techniques which allow the characters to act out parts suggested by the portraits of the General Prologue. Within the "dramatic" parts of the Tales we find yet other subdivisions of dialogue and monologue. The short end-links are controlled by action and dialogue, the longer confessional prologues by narration and self-revelation. Within these categories we find a wide range of poetic techniques by means of which Chaucer draws pictures which are entertaining, lifelike, meaningful, yet also individualized.

Chaucer's portraiture, like that of all good writers, is built on a foundation of descriptive detail. Concrete, visual images are used to convey information concerning the appearance, occupation, and social status of the pilgrims. A lifelike atmosphere is evoked by local references--the background of the pilgrimage--and terms borrowed from various occupations--the catalogues of the portraits of the Man of Law, Cook, and Reeve, and the alchemical terminology of the Canon's Yeoman. The degree of mimetic realization which a personage manifests is determined by the poet's focus in the portrait. Vivid, concrete details

are one of Chaucer's main concerns in the sketches of the pilgrims who are portrayed primarily in terms of occupation, such as the Yeoman and Physician. Such characterization is primarily external, but is essential to the subsequent creation of a mimetic character. Starting with this base of descriptive detail, Chaucer creates figures of varying degrees of mimetic realization; the realism of each figure is dependent upon the type and extent of other characterizational material added to the portrait. Evidence of the character's attitudes and values is probably the most important element, in addition to concrete description, in the portrayal of a mimetic character. The figures which are most mimetic, which strike the reader more than any others as complex and complete characterizations, are portrayed in several contexts. Values and beliefs are usually expressed through skillful adaptation or modification of conventions. Chaucer chooses conventional attributes of the occupation of which the pilgrim is a generic representative, then varies them; he almost never leaves a convention unchanged, and because of this constant variation his fundamentally conventional material strikes the reader as concrete, brilliant, and fresh, never dull or trite. The convention brings with it a set of accumulated attitudes, habits, and customary actions that it has acquired through the centuries, which can be counted upon to produce almost stock responses. Through it the pilgrim acquires personality traits which are the fulfillment (or frustration) of reader expectations also built up through generations.

Other facets of Chaucer's characterization are more subtle and can best be expressed as the poet's complex manipulation of levels of humor and irony. The heart of Chaucerian irony is the naive narrator persona. This unassuming figure provides a slightly obtuse but

extremely personal view of the pilgrims. Through the narrator's naïveté Chaucer can manipulate many levels of irony with a seeming innocence, often at the expense of subject, narrator, and reader alike. The unpretentiousness of the self-appointed chronicler contributes to verisimilitude in almost a negative way: the narrator seems so sincere in his careful attempts to get everything right that we see no reason to doubt him. These careful attempts, sometimes ostentatiously careful, contribute heavily to the plausibility topos. By often recalling to his reader's minds that he is merely recording what happened, Chaucer keeps us constantly aware of the verisimilitude he seeks to establish. The naive narrator contributes to both the illusion of reality and the characterization of the pilgrims in the seemingly haphazard arrangement of his comments. This apparent disorganization produces an informality of tone which is in keeping with the narrator's personality and with the illusion of chronicle; it is one of the most characteristic attributes of Chaucerian narrative. It also provides a field for the innocent ironies which spring from odd juxtaposition and contrasts, of which we suspect the narrator himself is unaware. A great deal of the information concerning the pilgrims' moral and spiritual conditions is conveyed in this non-explicit manner through implication or seemingly innocent allusion. Allusion and irony often supply the final mimetic touches to a figure who is fully described in terms of externals, but who lacks the "life" which information concerning his beliefs and attitudes imparts to the personation.

We have observed throughout our survey that the least mimetic figures are characterized in idealized terms; their portrayal is prescriptive rather than descriptive, and though still present, concrete detail in

the idealized portraits is kept to an absolute minimum. The most life-like of Chaucer's creations are those portrayed in their faults, shortcomings, and transitory earthliness. Chaucer never makes them figures of vices, however; his view is always generous, and though it is humorous, it is not condemnatory. The Chaucerian irony of which we so often speak forms the bridge between the earth-bound mimetic figures and the idealized touchstones. In irony we find the implicit comparison of what man is with what he potentially can be. Each figure contains a potential for perfection, and Chaucer's irony forever reminds us of that fact. As Frye says,

The ironic fiction-writer, then, deprecates himself and, like Socrates, pretends to know nothing, even that he is ironic. Complete objectivity and suppression of all explicit moral judgements are essential to his method. Thus pity and fear are not raised in ironic art: they are reflected to the reader from the art. When we try to isolate the ironic as such, we find that it seems to be simply the attitude of the poet as such, a dispassionate construction of a literary form, with all assertive elements, implied or expressed, eliminated. Irony, as a mode, is born from the low mimetic; it takes life exactly as it finds it. But the ironist fables without moralizing, and has no object but his subject.⁴

Irony, Frye says later, "passes through the dead center of complete realism." "The ironic . . . is a vision of what in theology is called the fallen world, of simple humanity, man as natural man and in conflict with both human and non-human nature."⁵ Similarly Chaucerian irony is rooted in Chaucerian realism while at the same time contributing to it, for realism too is a portrayal of "man as natural man." Moral judgment is very much a part of the total effect of irony, but, as we have seen, Chaucer is usually careful to avoid judgment while nevertheless giving the reader evidence upon which to draw his own conclusions. This too is at the heart of Chaucerian realism. The lifelike character is a

combination of character traits, moral faults, and occasional virtues which prompt in the reader no single reaction, such as moral condemnation, but a mixed response to a personage's varied characteristics. When Chaucer achieves this, he is at the height of mimetic portrayal.

I have consistently used the drama as a metaphor to describe Chaucer's handling of the pilgrimage. The drama, more than any other literary form, creates the illusion that the spectator apprehends actual life; that same illusion is produced by the action and dialogue of the end-links. The unassuming narrator shrinks in stature to near nonentity, leaving the characters and scenario of the Tales seemingly autonomous under the rather inept control of the Host. The events which follow, like the narrator's descriptive techniques, appear haphazard yet do contain a number of unifying themes. Like the General Prologue, the end-links are crafted so as to seem lifelike--as if they actually occurred that way--yet are all the while controlled by a high degree of artistry. Typical of this is the drawing by which the pilgrims select the first tale-teller; the Knight is chosen seemingly by chance, yet it is only right that he be first. Chaucer allows the end-links likewise to develop in a seemingly haphazard way so that many tales--no doubt all, had he finished--are motivated by chance reactions to the previous tale. The resultant rivalry in the pilgrims' aim to tell the tale of best "sentence" and most "solas" produces unifying themes which may be themes of subject--the Marriage Group--or of literary mode--satire of occupations. The consistent and obtrusive presence of the Host further unifies the pilgrimage through the humor and ironies which revolve around that figure.

Technically the soul of the pilgrimage is dialogue. Chaucer gives every indication that he possessed an outstanding ear for the speech of

all kinds of people in the busy world around him, for he captures so many varieties of expression. He is a master at indicating social position, geographical antecedents, and emotions of all kinds through his transcription of dialogue. Comparison with almost any contemporary serves to put his skill in a golden light. His talent is not merely that of transcription, however. He is not a member of the "grunt, scratch, and belch" school of dramatists who faithfully portray every human or animal-like sound. His selectivity is precise and wonderfully accurate in the ability to include enough of the hems and haws of life to convey a realistic tone. Yet he never surfeits the reader with a plethora of exclamations, lost trains of thought, or line-fillers.

Much as in the descriptions of the General Prologue Chaucer utilizes focus to point up the important. Avoiding the "field full of folk" panorama, he is free to concentrate on individuals, producing yet another realistic effect. He does not exclude background, however. When used, references to the pilgrimage locale are always specific and belong much to the actual world; background too becomes a means to plausibility.

It is perhaps in the dramatic monologues--especially in that of the Wife of Bath--that Chaucer is at his artistic summit. The techniques of the end-links are all still utilized but are supplemented by what has often been called a "psychological realism." Chaucer, of course, was no more psychologist than any other great author, but through his superb handling of mimetic techniques and characterization he has created passages which may indeed be said to partake of "psychological realism." As with the mimetic descriptions of the General Prologue, the realism of the monologues is heavily dependent upon illusion. Chaucer handles

his materials in such a way as to give the illusion that we are seeing into the mind, heart, and soul of his characters. In such a creation even actual faithfulness to humanity is irrelevant, for the passages appear lifelike to the reader who is induced to shed every trace of disbelief.

The materials from which the monologues are constructed, it has been long noted, are highly derivative. Most of the Wife of Bath's speech, much of the Pardoner's, and at least some of the Canon's Yeoman's materials are conventional; antecedents may be found in the satires, fabliaux, and documents of the Middle Ages. Much of this material has also been used by other medieval poets in whose hands it is singularly unmimetic. Chaucer's mastery of the techniques of the confessional monologue is the key to the realism of these passages. As in some of the portraits of the General Prologue, satirical material is adapted, varied, and greatly changed in impact by the confessional mode. When a complex character mouths satirical commonplaces the reader is required to examine those commonplaces in the light of the fully-characterized speaker. The continued use of the techniques of dialogue furthers the illusion that the speaker tells an informal tale among friends; the presence of an interested, even intense, audience contributes to the illusion of realism. And very importantly, the use of the haphazard technique--most notably in Alison's monologue--likewise reinforces the impressions of informality, spontaneity, and the careful mirroring of the thought process.

The idealized members of the pilgrimage rarely participate in the action-oriented portions of the Canterbury Tales. Only an occasional reference brings them to mind, reasserting, when it does appear, the

implicit comparison of actual and ideal which is pointed up in the General Prologue by the poet's irony. The idealized figures are not easily dramatized with plausibility, however. As in saints' legends, the reader must be persuaded or enticed, rather than convinced, to surrender his disbelief, with the result that saints' legends are more fairy tale than realistic fiction. The end-links and monologues concentrate on the more earthly of the pilgrims. The reader is all the more likely to concur with the poet's portrayal when the figures involved are many-sided, fraught with faults and personality quirks, than when they are depicted as static ideals who offer little potential for action.

Thus the realism of the "frame" portion of the Canterbury Tales may be seen to consist of several major elements: vivid concrete descriptive detail creates characters and surroundings which seem life-like and plausible to the reader; conventions are freely used and habitually varied to present the personalities and values of the figures depicted; lifelike interaction of the pilgrims accompanied by natural dialogue, seemingly unstilted and unprogramed by literary or scholarly precepts, produces an informal you-are-there atmosphere in which characterization is substantiated and developed; consistent use of haphazard organization and juxtaposition adds to the chronicled-from-life topos; irony and humor, based on the naive narrator persona, contribute an implicit level of characterization and moral judgment which serves to set pilgrims and pilgrimage in the context of the medieval world--in a world in which all actions are in a figural way, part of the divine plan.

In seeking to place Chaucer's art in the context of medieval

aesthetics, one finds most enlightening parallels in the plastic and visual arts. There is of course a danger in drawing analogies between the essentially different arts of literature and sculpture, but I believe that certain parallels exist which shed light upon the question of a medieval realism. The art historians of the past half century have devoted considerable attention to the aesthetics of the representation of reality: Emile Mâle,⁶ Erwin Panofsky,⁷ Max Dvořák, and Otto von Simson⁸ have all contributed useful interpretations of the relationships between the actual and spiritual worlds and art and architecture. While this study cannot possibly present a comprehensive history of the development of medieval art, a few comments on that development may aid in assessing Chaucer's place among those creative artists who mirror the actual world in their works.

Emile Mâle, writing shortly after the turn of this century, was the first to attempt to temper the prevailing nineteenth century trend which saw all elements of every kind of medieval art in a purely symbolic or exegetical way. The great minds of the Middle Ages, writes Mâle,⁹ did see the world as a symbol of a higher reality. But those critics who persist in seeing all things medieval as symbols ignore, among other things, the reaction of St. Bernard to the grotesques of the cloisters:

As he walked in the magnificent cloisters of his order St. Bernard also had reflected on the beasts and monsters carved on the capitals, and like us had asked himself what they might mean. "What are these fantastic monsters doing in the cloisters," he said, "under the very eyes of the brothers as they read? . . . What is the meaning of these unclean monkeys, these savage lions, and monstrous centaurs? To what purpose are here placed these creatures, half-beast, half-man, or these spotted tigers? I see several bodies with one head and several heads with one body. Here is a quadruped with a serpent's head, there a fish with a quadruped's head, there again an animal half-horse, half-goat. . . Surely if we do not blush for such absurdities we should at least regret what we have spent on them!" . . . It seems that Bernard had less penetration than our ingenious [contemporaries]

. . . Here the great mystic, the interpreter of the Song of Songs, the preacher who spoke only in symbols, confessed that he did not understand the fantastic creations of his own day. . . . Such testimony settles the question. It is evident that the fauna and flora of mediaeval art, natural or, ¹⁰fantastic, has in most cases a value that is purely decorative.

Mále proceeds to point out the almost botanical accuracy of the flora of thirteenth century sculpture. The botanist may find in the cathedrals scientifically accurate representations of plantain, arum, ranunculus, fern, clover, celandine, hepatica, columbine, cress, parsley, strawberry, ivy, snapdragon, the flower of the broom, and the oak leaf. These plants have sometimes been "simplified but not distorted,"¹¹ a characteristic which corresponds to the careful selection and arrangement of details by the literary realist.

Nor was the actual world despised as a model by artists to the degree which some exegetes imply. The sketchbook of thirteenth century architect Villard de Honnecourt abounds with studies of animals and even includes a grasshopper, a cat, a fly, a dragonfly, and a lobster, as well as bears, swans, parrots, and a chained lion, resident of some great lord's menagerie. Villard wished it to be known that the lion was done from life: "Eh bien sachiez que cil lion fut contrefais al vif."¹²

The nonsymbolic, purely decorative figures constitute only a portion of medieval art, however, corresponding to the vivid, external, yet nonessential details in Chaucer, such as the hole for the cat in the Miller's Tale. Such decorative material is highly entertaining--the fanciful borders of illuminated manuscripts are only one other example--but would be meaningless without a more serious text. We must look, as does Auerbach, to the degree and manner in which realistic subjects are treated seriously. And again we turn to Dvořák's seminal work which traces the changing relationship between idealized and realistic

portrayals in Gothic art:

In the medieval view nothing in the universe is without significance, even the most seemingly inconsequential object stands in some relationship to the wisdom of the eternal Weltordnung which governs all. The degree of significance, however, varies and unfolds in a hierarchical order of precedence from the lower limited and objectively differentiated material objects of ever higher beings, the higher rank characterized by the measure of universality and permanence possessed by each being as opposed to individuality and transitoriness. It is in this universality of the higher beings, that the ascending simplification of reality resides--temporally and materially conditioned discrepancy is replaced by the unity of the all-encompassing idea in an unknown ascent to the very highest idea of the eternal divine Being who is above every form of differentiation.¹³

This, of course, is nothing other than a manifestation of the figural cast of mind which Auerbach sees as dominant in the Middle Ages. The ultimate embodiment of the figural principle in literature is Dante's Commedia: souls in hell are remarkably individual; those in heaven possess only the human voice. We have seen the same idealistic non-individualization in Chaucer's portrayal of Parson and Plowman. The less perfect the pilgrim, the more individualized he becomes, within limits, of course. (We certainly cannot rank the pilgrims morally or spiritually on the basis of the degree of mimesis in their portrayals.)

Dvořák bases his interpretations upon the writings of St. Thomas Aquinas. He sees a development in Gothic art which he likens to the philosophical movement from Platonism and Aristotelianism, a movement which is reflected in the gradual shift in emphasis from idealism to artistic naturalism. The change is a gradual one; this "discovery of the world as a reflection of individual consciousness"¹⁴ takes place in the hundred years from the mid-fourteenth to the mid-fifteenth centuries--precisely in Chaucer's lifetime. It is perhaps not surprising to find a parallel change in Chaucer's literature. Dvořák writes:

Medieval spiritualism whose significance for art one at the present time can only surmise rather than actually know formed the vast basis for the return to nature and the sensible world formally as well as objectively. As I have already indicated, this process was based upon a new universal, spiritual compromise with finite reality that was considered to be a type of stage for the actualization of meritorious deeds; even more, it was recognized as a necessary prerequisite for the external life of the elect. In art this compromise was expressed by a new perspective vis-à-vis nature; it utilized an approach which no longer considered nature as something axiomatically meaningless in the interpretation of artistic tasks and goals--it was rather to be counted among the very means for the realization of these goals.¹⁵

The reality--or even super-reality--of the spiritual, in other words, is unquestioned; but what we learn, we learn through the senses from individual experiences. The ultimate exemplar of the compromise of the natural and the spiritual is Jan van Eyck (d. 1441), whose individuals glow with a light which adds spirituality to very evident portraiture. This "compromise" typifies the guiding concept of unity which, in opposition to any kind of antithesis of realism and idealism, is a prime characteristic of figural Gothic art. Realism does not yet supplant the symbolic or the exegetical; it rather supplements them. In time, of course, the ideal is replaced by what Dvořák calls an "extreme empirical anti-idealism."¹⁶ But at that point the movement away from the figural conception of the world passes to philosophy, not literature:

This is the very same path taken almost contemporaneously in epistemology by the neonominalists and terminists Durand, William of Ockham and John Buridan when they attempted theoretically to reduce all knowledge and all truth, attainable by man by means of his own power, to isolated data of sense experience. "Science is concerned with external phenomena and since in the world of reality there are no universals, knowledge cannot have its origin in the universal but only in the particular"--this in essence is the teaching of Ockham, the great precursor of Bacon and Spinoza; these theories can likewise serve as a commentary on what soon thereafter became a fait accompli primarily in France, the actual ideal center of these new epistemological theories.¹⁷

Literature and the sciences part company; neither Chaucer nor his

immediate followers went the way of Ockham, Buridan, and Durand. The poets occupy rather a middle ground, that of the compromise visually manifested by Jan van Eyck, and not far from the Thomistic position of "Moderate Realism." They are concerned still with universals, but find the particular a most effective way to lead the reader to a truth which is beyond the visible externals.

Chaucer's work encompasses these changing aesthetic currents of the Middle Ages. He offers, through the sensations of this earthly life, a spiritual lesson concerning the individual pilgrimage of every soul to the Celestial Jerusalem. The eternal verities are vivified by exacting and artistic choice of particulars and lifelike actions and dialogue. The fabric of the Canterbury Tales is composed of carefully interwoven stylized and mimetic materials. Chaucer's realism is not of the "common-or-garden" variety which produces a faithful copy of life around him; his art selects, combines, and transforms the materials of both life and literature, convention, and individuality. The resultant poem is much like the flowery branches of the medieval artist: individual parts--the leaves, the blossoms--are almost photographically true to life, but are arranged in flowing, stylized patterns to fulfill the purpose of their being, whether it be to fill the corner of a page or provide the border of a mosaic. Medieval realism is a complex combination of apparent faithfulness to life as we know it and to truth as the poet perceives it. Careful attention to realistic detail and to the artistic effect of the whole, together with the artist's awareness of the figural relationship of his earthly creation and the heavenly reality produce the illusion which we call mimesis--the lifelike, vivid work of art which also possesses meaning, or "sentence." This is Chaucer's mimesis, perhaps the most striking Western form of medieval realism.

NOTES TO CHAPTER V

¹Northrup Frye, Anatomy of Criticism, (New York: 1967, orig. pub. 1957), 51-52.

²Auerbach, 555.

³Dvořák, 70.

⁴Frye, 40-41.

⁵Frye, 285.

⁶Emile Mâle, The Gothic Image: Religious Art in France of the Thirteenth Century, trans. Dora Nussey, (New York: 1958, orig. pub. 1913).

⁷Erwin Panofsky, Gothic Architecture and Scholasticism, (New York: 1958).

⁸Otto von Simson, The Gothic Cathedral, (New York: 1956).

⁹Mâle, 48.

¹⁰Mâle, 48-49.

¹¹Mâle, 52.

¹²Mâle, 55.

¹³Dvořák, 86, 113.

¹⁴Dvořák, 46.

¹⁵Dvořák, 77.

¹⁶Dvořák, 108.

¹⁷Dvořák, 132.

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