TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN CHAUCER

by

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INTRODUCTION

It is axiomatic that taken together the works of Geoffrey Chaucer (1343? -- 1400) constitute the first sustained effort toward realism in fictional characterization found in English literature. This thesis examines the process whereby realism evolved in Chaucer's work and particularly the stylistic devices by which it was secured.

In order better to understand Chaucer's contribution, we may briefly outline the obvious standards by which realism in characterization has come to be judged since his time.

In the first place, fiction as we know it today rarely deals with subhuman or superhuman rather than human characters; and the latter are judged to be realistically conceived insofar as they approximate human nature and behaviour in credible situations.

Secondly, while human characters and the action in which they are involved are intended as entertaining in themselves, characters in modern fiction must also be shown as manipulating the action, or being manipulated by it, for reasons that are psychologically sound; nor may the author appear to be guiding them.

Thirdly, the characters' involvement in the action of the story must be such that it conveys the philosophic point

which it is the modern writer's fundamental purpose to express.

In order for this realism to be attained, characters must be made to dominate the narrative. The main ones, at least, must be presented completely enough and with sufficient detail to make them and their motivations seem immediate and convincing to a reader. They are not effective unless fully developed as individuals seemingly propelled by their own dynamic force, since it is upon their particular decisions and solutions that the point of a story rests. They must be given enough conflicting impulses to make these decisions and solutions philosophically significant. (For instance, the actions of a figure having only one trait of character have no place in modern fiction.) In order to achieve these aims, contemporary writers have come to express not only the outward functions of their characters, but in an effort to lay bare their innermost workings they have entered into the subconscious as well. Such a reflective portrayal of character is accepted today as the proper end of fiction, but this has not always been the case.

The modern conception of what constitutes realism in fictional characterization is a view evolved from the experimentation of centuries, during which there has been an increasing tendency to abandon literary forms and themes that

permit few possibilities for the realistic exploration of character in favour of those that permit more. There has also been a progressive evolution from the superficial and incidental use of characterization in a narrative to its extensive and deliberate use as an autotelic literary aim.

It is established fact that in English literature realistic characterization as we define it today was unknown before Chaucer;[1] and, if not in continental literature as a whole, at least in those continental works known and used by him.[2]

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[1]
Aside from early and medieval works in themselves, the surveys and studies that bear out this conclusion include Charles Sears Baldwin, Introduction to English Medieval Literature (London, 1914); Albert C. Baugh, The Middle Ages: The Middle English Period (New York, 1948); Cambridge History of English Literature (Cambridge, England, 1907), Vols. I and II; Herbert L. Creek, "Character in the 'Matter of England' Romances," JEGP, X (1911), 429-52; Walter Clyde Curry, The Middle English Ideal of Personal Beauty, as found in the Metrical Romances, Chronicles, and Legends of the XIII, XIV, and XV Centuries (Baltimore, 1916); William P. Ker, English Mediaeval Literature (London, 1912); George Herbert Palmer, Formative Types in English Poetry (Cambridge, England, 1918), pp. 44ff.; Howard Rollin Patch, "Characters in Medieval Literature," MLN, XL (January, 1925), 1-14; William H. Schofield, English Literature from the Norman Conquest to Chaucer (London, 1906); and R. M. Wilson, Early Middle English Literature (London, 1939).

[2]
Chaucer's originality in this respect has been ascertained by a study of sources and analogues in primary and secondary works too numerous to detail here, but discussed where relevant in the body of the thesis.

Even his most immediate predecessors were totally unaware
of the subtle means through which philosophic point and the
significance of action could be inferred through the kind
and quality of character.

Domestic and foreign literary genres in and about Chaucer's
time included moral allegories, in which personified
abstractions -- named for and representative of virtues and
vices -- supplied the actors of a moral conflict. In some
cases they functioned in a dreamland setting, as in
Le Roman de la Rose, perhaps the greatest germinal book of the
middle ages. While having merits as didactic works, these
allegories were lacking in psychologically or observationally
realistic elements. In other genres, including epics and romances,
aristocratic characters were used as puppets of the action and
were presented as stereotypes functioning under some theory
of behaviour such as chivalry or courtly love. Another
genre, the fabliau, employed more realistically conceived,
bourgeois characters but subordinated them to the trick upon
which the plots turned. Finally, there were fables, folk tales
and legends, which frequently dealt not with people at all
but with animals or superhuman or supernatural beings. In
all these cases the characters were constructed around a
single idea or quality and were lacking in motivated action,
ambivalence, individuality, and dynamic force. In short, the

writers who lived before and during Chaucer's time and whose
work provided his literary inheritance and inspiration did
not much supply their narratives with elements from real life.

Although Chaucer's works are written in the various
conventional genres described above, and although most of them
are actually his versions of well-known stories, he emphasizes
characterization more than did other authors and introduces
elements of realism altogether absent in their sources and
analogues. Even critics writing generally on Chaucer
inevitably comment on the superiority of his characters. For
instance, Shelly writes:

> The Knight's Tale, the Nun's Priest's Tale,
> the Merchant's Tale, the Summoner's Tale, the Clerk's Tale,
> and Troilus and Criseyde are the best narratives of their
> respective stories that we have. Though taken from this
> or that author or paralleled by this or that analogue,
> they reveal Chaucer's art and originality in the handling
> of...character. ... Though told before, they were never
> told so well.[3]

While there is no question that characterization in
Chaucer's works is superior to that in the prototypes, and
that this in itself constitutes a remarkable literary
achievement, gauged by modern standards, his powers of
realism varied from work to work.

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[3] Percy Van Dyke Shelly, The Living Chaucer (Philadelphia,
1940), p. 108.

In his earliest poem, The Book of the Duchess, and in
other love visions, as well as in some of his fables,
legends, and folk tales, Chaucer's characters scarcely escape
the conventional moulds. On the whole these works suffer
from being written in genres basically inimical to realism.
They also suffer from his hesitation to introduce innovations
in the conventionally accepted means of characterization as
practiced by other medieval writers, means that are
rhetorical and artificial. But although Chaucer's full genius
at characterization did not appear until Troilus and Criseyde --
written around the middle of his literary career -- it is
evident from his earliest works that one of his main concerns
was to infuse realism into the stock characters that he used.
Unlike other medieval writers, he managed with increasing power
to demonstrate a quality of character instead of announcing it;
to reveal individual character and motive while unfolding
a borrowed plot; and to retell a story in such a way that
the sequence of action had its reason and mainspring in character.

Progressively, he showed a tendency to discard genres
that permitted few possibilities for the use of realistic
characters in favour of those that permitted more (the
fabliau, for instance). He also learned to avoid the
generalized and abstract depictions common among medieval writers
in favour of detailed and convincing transcripts of human

appearance and behaviour; and he learned to create characters who have at least two sides instead of one. His mature works are sufficiently realistic that they may be said to anticipate fiction in the modern sense. Although Chaucer wrote in verse, his characters are of the order of prose. Especially his mature works have much in common with forms of fiction then undifferentiated. For instance, beçause of his handling of narrative and character, Troilus and Criseyde, although a poem, resembles a novel; and many of his mature shorter poems, such as the fabliaux, are executed in the manner of modern short stories.

Abundant critical writings on Chaucer frequently call attention to his originality and modernity in comparison with his sources; but while it has been generally admitted that his gifts are unexplained by anything in the literature of his own times, his art of characterization has not received the close attention and analysis that it deserves. While his later characterizations in particular are granted to be expert, scant attention has been given to the fascinating problem of how -- by what actual, stylistic methods -- Chaucer developed his masterful effects in a time when realism was no object in writing.

We have seen that Chaucer's characters, even the greatest, are built up by the deliberate use of specific techniques; and that what has been regarded as his greatest literary

contribution, realism, was dependent on his increasingly skilful handling of these techniques, just as much as on his choice of genres.

Some of these techniques Chaucer derived from the rhetoricians; some were his own. They are many and varied, and include: direct description, dialogue, monologue (as well as soliloquy), figures of speech, proverbs and sententia,[4] formal portraiture, and pseudo-scientific data. On combinations of these means all of Chaucer's characterizations depend.

That Chaucer's writing contains these stylistic elements has been recognized and much valuable work, to which this thesis is indebted, has been done in connection with them. Bartlett Jere Whiting has compiled the proverbs in Chaucer; John Matthews Manly, Louis A. Haselmayer, Nevill Coghill, Christopher Tolkien and others have explored his connection with the rhetoricians, particularly as regards formal portraiture; Walter Clyde Curry has treated the incidence of medieval scientific lore in Chaucer; Muriel Bowden has elucidated some aspects of his use of description; and Margaret Schlauch has discussed his handling of dialogue and monologue in respect to the colloquial structures in the speech of his characters. But the primary aim of these

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[4] Proverbs are taken as being sayings drawn from the folk, while the sententia clearly reveal literary origins.

writers has not always been to show the use of these elements in the art of characterization. To the knowledge of this writer no one has ever undertaken, in a single work and using the entire canon, to illustrate how Chaucer used these techniques in combination to build realistic character. Nor has anyone traced Chaucer's gradual development in handling these techniques throughout the course of his career showing how his greatest literary contribution, realism in characterization, was developed through a gradual transformation of traditional literary materials and methods as well as the inclusion of original ones, especially during the latter half of his creative period.

It is therefore the aim of this thesis to provide an analysis of Chaucer's style as it effects characterization. Starting with an examination of those works in which it is relatively poor and proceeding to those in which it is superior, it will be our purpose to show the following: first, that Chaucer's realism is immediately dependent on his skill and originality in using definite techniques -- the aforementioned direct description, dialogue, monologue (as well as soliloquy), figures of speech, proverbs and _sententia_, formal portraiture, and pseudo-scientific data.

It will be shown that by using these techniques Chaucer gave immediacy and force to his descriptions of characters, illustrated their temperaments, motivations and mental processes, and accounted plausibly for their parts in the plots of his stories. Second, we shall demonstrate that Chaucer's use of these techniques was original in reference to the materials of his sources, and that this is what secured the superiority of his characters over those in extant sources and analogues. Third, we shall place Chaucer's art in historical perspective by judging to what extent his characters may be considered realistic in terms of the modern criteria outlined at the beginning of this introduction.

The body of the thesis is divided into six chapters.

Chapter I deals with characterization in the love visions. These, inspired by allegorical fashions, include: The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame, The Parliament of Fowls, and The Legend of Good Women. Anelida and Arcite, a fragmentary poem of no one literary type, is also discussed in this chapter because in it characterization resembles that of the love visions.

Chapter II concerns characterization in a number of Canterbury Tales. These include tales having their ultimate origins in folklore: The Man of Law's Tale, The Clerk's Tale, and The Franklin's Tale; those based on classical and

Christian legends: The Physician's Tale, The Manciple's Tale, The Monk's Tale, The Second Nun's Tale, and The Prioress's Tale; and those derived from romance: The Knight's Tale and The Squire's Tale.

Chapter III constitutes a discussion of characterization in Troilus and Criseyde, a long romance remarkable for sustained characterizations in which Chaucer's originality and realistic observation achieve ascendency over traditional elements. It will be shown that this poem marks the most significant stage in his development as a portrayer of realistic character.

Chapters IV, V, and VI deal with the most original productions of Chaucer's mature years, all drawn from The Canterbury Tales.

Chapter IV deals with techniques of characterization used in the framework of The Canterbury Tales, that is, in The General Prologue and in the system of headpieces and links whereby the enclosed tales are joined together.

Chapter V treats characterization in a group of fabliaux, including: The Miller's Tale, The Reeve's Tale, The Friar's Tale, The Shipman's Tale, The Summoner's Tale, The Merchant's Tale, and The Cook's Tale.

Chapter VI is devoted to techniques of characterization in the remaining <u>Canterbury</u> <u>Tales</u>: <u>The</u> <u>Nun's</u> <u>Priest's</u> <u>Tale</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Tale</u> <u>of</u> <u>Sir</u> <u>Thopas</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Canon's</u> <u>Yeoman's</u> <u>Prologue</u> <u>and</u> <u>Tale</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Pardoner's</u> <u>Prologue</u> <u>and</u> <u>Tale</u>, and <u>The</u> <u>Wife</u> <u>of</u> <u>Bath's</u> <u>Prologue</u> <u>and</u> <u>Tale</u>. In respect to characterization, these works show indications of being the final products of Chaucer's pen. The last three productions named above are based on long dramatic monologues of extraordinary realism.

The subject matter of the thesis thus comprises the entire canon of Chaucer's works[5] with the exception of the lyrics and other very short poems, and the translations and non-fictional narratives, including: <u>A</u> <u>Treatise</u> <u>on</u> <u>the</u> <u>Astrolabe</u>, <u>Boece</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Romaunt</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Rose</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Tale</u> <u>of</u> <u>Melibee</u>, and <u>The</u> <u>Parson's</u> <u>Tale</u>.

Chaucer's progressive skill in the art of characterization dictates the order of material in the thesis. This is an arrangement which also nearly always corresponds to the order in which his works are believed to have been written. For though the works have been chronologically arranged with approximate certainty by a variety of scholarly means, not one

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[5] As represented in F. N. Robinson, ed., <u>The</u> <u>Poetical</u> <u>Works</u> <u>of</u> <u>Chaucer</u> (Cambridge, Mass., 1933). All subsequent references to Chaucer's works are based on this text, hereafter referred to as <u>Works</u>.

of Chaucer's productions can be dated with provable accuracy.
The variations here from the generally accepted chronological
order, such as the treatment of The Legend of Good Women and
certain of the Canterbury Tales in the first and second
chapters before consideration of Troilus and Criseyde, will
perhaps be justified during the course of the work.
These variations have been suggested by the findings of our
study. With respect to ascertaining the period of composition
of those of Chaucer's works about which there has always
existed the widest diversion of critical opinion, it may be
that techniques of characterization are evidence as reliable
as the nationality of his sources or supposed allegory and
historical allusion.[6]

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[6]
  There is some unreliability in assigning dates to Chaucer's
works on the basis of their interpretation as allegories on
events at the court or on the poet's supposed use of certain
literary materials. By using such means, different scholars
have adduced equally valid arguments for assigning to a
given work an early and a late date of composition. This has
been done with respect to The Knight's Tale and
The Franklin's Tale. See Works, pp. 771 and 781, and 826,
respectively.

CHAPTER I
TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN
THE LOVE VISIONS AND ANELIDA AND ARCITE

The Book of the Duchess, The House of Fame,
The Parliament of Fowls and The Legend of Good Women were
written by Chaucer at various and unfixed dates. They are
love visions inspired by the allegorical fashions so popular
in the literature of his time. Anelida and Arcite, a
fragmentary poem of uncertain date and literary type, will
be discussed with these poems because of its similarity in
characterization.

Owing to Chaucer's adoption of the framework of the
love visions, which basically inhibits realism, and to his
use also of the artificial rhetorical modes associated by
custom with such characterization as exists in this type
of literature, characterization in the modern sense is
negligible in these poems. However, they exhibit every
technique of characterization which Chaucer used during the
entire span of his literary career: here with minimal freedom,
but later on with maximal originality. Therefore, these poems
constitute the proper starting point in our discussion of
Chaucer's evolution toward realism.

Although they contain other literary echoes, Chaucer's love visions were basically influenced by Guillaume de Lorris' part of the _Roman de la Rose_,[1] the prototype of the genre. This poem features allegorical and symbolical personages which express the ideals of courtly love.[2] In brief, it

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[1]
A French poem of which the first part was written about 1230 by Guillaume de Lorris, and which was completed about forty years later by Jean de Meun. One of the greatest germinal books of the middle ages, the _Roman_ set the chief example for the genre and inspired many imitative works both in France and abroad.
The edition of the _Roman_ we examined is _Le Roman de la Rose_, by Guillaume de Lorris and Jean de Meung, ed. Georges Vertut (Paris, 1917).

[2]
The literary embodiment of the ideals of courtly love corresponds to a social philosophy pertaining to love between men and women under medieval feudal conditions.
The daughters of territorial lords were married for political reasons; accordingly, once married, they often looked for love outside of marriage. They welcomed the attentions of their husbands' courtiers, who addressed them in poetic songs of love. Since these part-time poets were usually far beneath the ladies in social status, they wrote in a guarded and abstract style. Considering the objects of their love as sovereign ladies, the courtly lovers wrote of themselves in appropriate feudal terms as humble and worshipful vassals who expected to observe certain specified rules of courtship and to endure many trials to gain their ladies' favour.
The conventions regarding the "feudalisation" of the amorous passion passed into literature and are found in the _Roman_ and much other literature of the twelfth and thirteenth centuries. In this literature, the courtly lady and lover are represented as ideals. The lover exhibits the finest accomplishments and virtues (bravery, humility, honour, loyalty, generosity, etc.) in pursuit of his lady -- a pursuit which is held to ennoble his character.
On the conventions and rules of courtly love and its connection with the love visions, see the work of the scribe, Andreas Capellanus, _The Art of Courtly Love_, trans. John Jay Parry (New York, 1941); William A. Neilson, _The Origins and Sources of the Courts of Love_ (Boston, 1899); and C. S. Lewis, _The Allegory of Love_ (London, 1951).

concerns a Lover who in a dream (vision) visits a garden
where in his attempt to capture an especially desirable Rose
he is aided or hindered by allegorical personages such as
Chastity, Shame, Pity and Welcome. Because the Rose symbolizes
a lady of rank (one actually loved by the poet) and the
dreamer or Lover a "vassal" seeking her favour, the poem
clearly celebrates courtly love, that is, the idealization of
aristocratic womanhood and of adulterous love affairs in high
society. Lorris' poem is artificial because it represents
its fiction as taking place in the dream world and because
its characters are allegorical or symbolical personages
subserving the excessive worship of woman, minute etiquette,
and artificial sentiment which are basic to the courtly
code. Its characterizations are of course highly unrealistic.

Because in them Chaucer imitated the Roman and the
genre in general, realistic characterization is wanting in
his love visions. From one-third to three-quarters of
each poem is taken up with the machinery of the genre:
a description of the dream setting, brief sketches of
allegorical or mythological characters which the dreamer
often encounters at the beginning of his dream and other
discursive materials (such as a summary of the Aeneid in
The House of Fame) bearing no connection with sustained
characterization. These initial episodes of the love visions --

in The Legend of Good Women specifically presented in a
Prologue -- finally yield to accounts of the central episodes
of the dreams that present sustained sequences in which some
newly introduced and slightly more realistic characters
function, and these are the only portions of the poems which
concern us and which we treat below in discussing the individual
poems. Even in the main episodes, the artificial influence
of the Roman and other similar literature is palpably clear.
The characters presented, while they are not allegorical, are for
the greater part neither very realistic nor original in conception.
Whether human or fabulous, they usually represent idealized
natures built up in accordance with courtly ideals as expressed in
the Roman and elsewhere. In depicting them, too, Chaucer relied
chiefly on modes of previous medieval poetry -- modes used in the
description of similar courtly types; and of all the traditional
techniques, the poet relied most heavily on formal portraiture and
conventional figures of speech, all highly rhetorical and
artificial techniques of characterization. For these reasons
the characters in Chaucer's love visions lack realism; but
because the techniques used in their execution formed the
staples of his style in respect to characterization, and in
fact constituted the basis on which his later realism evolved,

it is necessary to examine the characterization in the love visions, and in Anelida and Arcite, in some detail.

The Book of the Duchess

Characterization in The Book of the Duchess is of great importance to our study because it is almost certainly Chaucer's earliest work.[3]

The central part of this story is a monologue delivered by a bereaved husband, the Mourner, to the dreamer, who chances to meet him in a wood. The Mourner tells about his late wife and their courtship. Although adultery is not an issue in the story, the dead wife, Blanche, is depicted as a type of courtly lady and the courtship of the Mourner clearly corresponds to regula stipulated by the courts of love.

The chief personage of the poem, the duchess Blanche, is characterized solely by means of a long description given by the Mourner (BD, 817-1041) as a principal part of the monologue which he addresses to the dreamer; this description of Blanche constitutes Chaucer's earliest

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[3] The date is discussed in Works, p. 315. The Book of the Duchess is an occasional poem written in 1369 or shortly thereafter to mark the death of Blanche of Lancaster, wife of John of Gaunt.

use of one of his most important techniques of characterization: the formal portrait. The formal portrait, or feature-by-feature description of a personage, is a well-known rhetorical device in medieval writing and was widely used as a means of elaborating the personal attributes of courtly women. The portrait (or descriptio) regularly comprised an account of the personage's appearance (effectio) and one of his character (notatio). Each feature in both categories was itemized using more or less standard phraseology and set figures of speech. Rules for the composition of the formal portrait were set down by the medieval rhetoricians Geoffroi de Vinsauf, in his Poetria Nova (ca. 1210), and Matthieu de Vendôme, in his Ars Versificatoria (ca. 1175). In all probability, Chaucer was familiar with these theoretical works. And certainly he encountered specimens of formal portraiture in French poems: his portrait of Blanche has been shown by critics to have been greatly influenced by a portrait in Machaut's Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne.[4]

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[4] On the origin, definition, and method of formal portraits, and for examples of them, see Benjamin Boyce, The Theophrastan Character in England to 1642 (Cambridge, Mass., 1947), pp. 32ff.; D. S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, especially 'Harley Lyrics,' Chaucer, and some Elizabethans," MLR, L (July, 1955), 257-69; John Matthews Manly, "Chaucer and the Rhetoricians," Proceedings of the British Academy (London, 1926); Matthieu de Vendôme, Ars Versificatoria, in Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poétiques du xiie et du xiiie Siècle (Paris, 1924), pp. 119-30; and Geoffroi de Vinsauf, Poetria Nova, in Faral, pp. 214-5, ll. 563-97.
Manly suggests that Chaucer was influenced by Vinsauf in his portrait of Blanche (p. 103). Brewer (p. 263) and Robinson (Works, p. 885) point to the influence of Machaut's Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne on the portrait of Blanche.

Following is the most important content of the
description of Blanche. The portrait, which runs for over
two hundred lines, is too long to quote in full but our
omissions are unimportant as far as conveying the chief
features of the device is concerned. The Mourner is speaking:

>   "Among these ladyes thus echon,
> Soth to seyen y sawgh oon
> That was lyk noon of the route;
> For I dar swere, withoute doute,
> That <u>as the someres sonne bryght</u>
> <u>Ys fairer, clerer, and hath more lyght</u>
> <u>Than any other planete in heven,</u>
> <u>The moone, or the sterres seven</u>,
> <u>For al the world so hadde she</u>
> <u>Surmounted hem alle</u> of beaute,
> Of maner, and of comlynesse,
> Of stature, and of wel set gladnesse,
> Of goodlyhede so wel beseye --
> .   .   .   .   .
>   "I sawgh hyr daunce so comlily,
> Carole and synge so swetely,
> Laughe and pleye so womanly,
> And loke so debonairly,
> So goodly speke and so frendly,
> That, certes, y trowe that evermor
> Nas seyn so blysful a tresor.
> <u>For every heer on hir hed,</u>
> Soth to seyne, hyt was not red,
> Ne nouther yelowe, ne broun hyt nas,
> <u>Me thoghte most lyk gold hyt was.</u>
> And whiche eyen my lady hadde!
> Debonaire, goode, glade, and sadde,
> Symple, of good mochel, noght to wyde.
> Therto hir look nas not asyde,
> Ne overthwert, but beset so wel
> Hyt drew and took up, everydel,
> Al that on hir gan beholde.
> .   .   .   .   .
> She nas to sobre ne to glad;
> <u>In alle thynges more mesure</u>
> <u>Had never, I trowe, creature.</u>
> .   .   .   .   .

"But which a visage had she thertoo!
.   .   .   .   .
...whit, rody, fressh, and lyvely hewed,
And every day hir beaute newed.
And negh hir face was alderbest;
<u>For certes, Nature had swich lest</u>
<u>To make that fair, that trewly she</u>
<u>Was hir chef patron of beaute</u>
<u>And chef ensample of al hir werk....</u>
.   .   .   .   .
    "And which a goodly, softe speche
Had that swete, my lyves leche!
So frendly, and so wel ygrounded,
Up al resoun so wel yfounded,
And so tretable to alle goode
That I dar swere wel by the roode,
<u>Of eloquence was never founde</u>
<u>So swete a sownynge facounde....</u>
.   .   .   .   .
    "But swich a fairnesse of a nekke
Had that swete that boon nor brekke
Nas ther non sene that myssat.
Hyt was whit, smothe, streght, and pure flat,
Wythouten hole; or canel-boon,
As be semynge, had she noon.
<u>Hyr throte,</u> as I have now memoyre,
<u>Semed a round tour of yvoyre</u>,
Of good gretnesse, and noght to gret.
    "And goode faire White she het;
That was my lady name ryght.
She was bothe fair and bryght;
She hadde not hir name wrong.
Ryght faire shuldres and body long
She had, and armes, every lyth
Fattyssh, flesshy, not gret therwith;
Ryght white handes, and nayles rede,
Rounde brestes; and of good brede
Hyr hippes were, a streight flat bak.
I knew on hir noon other lak
That al hir lymmes nere pure sewynge
In as fer as I had knowynge.
    "Therto she koude so wel pleye,
Whan that hir lyste, that I dar seye,
That <u>she was lyk to torche bryght</u>
That <u>every man may take of lyght</u>
<u>Ynogh, and hyt hath never the lesse.</u>
.   .   .   .   .

...I dar swere wel, yif that she
Had among ten thousand be,
She wolde have be, at the leste,
A chef myrour of al the feste....

.   .   .   .   .
Trewly she was, to myn yë,
The soleyn fenix of Arabye;
For ther livyth never but oon,
Ne swich as she ne knowe I noon.
  "To speke of godnesse, trewly she
Had as moche debonairte
As ever had Hester in the Bible,
And more, yif more were possyble.

.   .   .   .   .
  "And...to speke of trouthe,
.   .   .   .   .
Therof she had so moche hyr del --
.   .   .   .   .
That Trouthe hymself, over al and al
Had chose hys maner principal
In hir, that was his restyng place.
                          (BD, 817-1005.
                          Italics added.)

Chaucer's portrait of Blanche was composed decidedly
in accordance with the theory of Vinsauf and the practice of
Machaut. The orderly presentation of the physical attributes,
gracious conduct and accomplishments, and excellencies of
character of the duchess conveys an unequivocal impression
of a perfect aristocratic woman; there is no doubt that it
is an idealized and artificial presentation. This is true
even though a study of the portrait alongside other
contemporary examples reveals in small measure Chaucer's
attempt, even in this early portrait, to break away from the
stereotyped use of effectio in the description. Chaucer's

portrait of Blanche is somewhat less laboured than most since he excludes many anatomical details regularly supplied in such accounts.[5]

Conspicuous in the portrait of Blanche are figures of speech. We have underlined examples of simile, metaphor, hyperbole, and personification in the portion of the portrait cited above. Blanche is said to surpass other ladies in beauty and virtue to the same extent that the sun surpasses the moon and stars in light. Her hair is like gold; her throat, a round tower of ivory. She is like a bright torch. She is superior to all other creatures; in fact, she is the chief example of Nature's best work. She is the resting place of Truth. In virtue, she is as good as Biblical women like Hester. Blanche is a very phoenix among women. In writing these eulogies, Chaucer was faithfully imitating the hyperbolic comparisons that were deemed necessary to convey the charms of an aristocratic woman. As Robinson shows in his notes, these figures of speech in the portrait of Blanche were commonplace. Exactly the same ones may be observed in the works of the chief French poets of Chaucer's century: Machaut, Froissart, and Deschamps; and in Lorris'

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[5]
Brewer details these omissions in "Ideal of Feminine Beauty," 263-4.

portion of the <u>Roman</u> <u>de</u> <u>la</u> <u>Rose</u>. Often, as in the description of Blanche, they formed a part of a formal portrait.[6]

This use of figures of speech was quite in accordance with the practice advocated by the rhetoricians, who recognized the value of figures of speech as a means of elucidating and elaborating narrative.[7] Vinsauf's theoretical work, for instance, includes a discussion of the <u>figurae</u> <u>verborum</u> (figures of speech) known to the medieval writers, including Chaucer, who used them in their works. The <u>figurae</u> <u>verborum</u> include: <u>similitudo</u> (simile); <u>translatio</u> (metaphor); <u>conformatio</u> (personification); <u>prosopopeia</u> (the attribution of human qualities to birds and animals); <u>superlatio</u> (hyperbole); <u>exclamatio</u> (apostrophe); <u>contrarium</u> (antithesis); <u>questio</u> (rhetorical question); <u>occupatio</u> (the abbreviation of narrative by the refusal to describe or narrate a certain episode); <u>permutatio</u> (irony); and <u>significatio</u> (innuendo).[8] For clarity,

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6
See <u>Works</u>, pp. 884-5. On the conventionality of the figures of speech used to describe aristocratic and courtly figures in love visions and romances, and often within formal portraits in such works, see Brewer, "Ideal of Feminine Beauty," 257-66, and Walter Clyde Curry, <u>The</u> <u>Middle</u> <u>English</u> <u>Ideal</u> <u>of</u> <u>Personal</u> <u>Beauty</u> (Baltimore, 1916), pp. 82-94.

7
Medieval rhetorical devices such as these actually date back to classical times.

8
From Geoffroi de Vinsauf, <u>Poetria</u> <u>Nova</u>, in Faral, pp. 211-41.

succeeding references to these figures of speech, except occupatio and prosopopeia, for which there are no present day equivalents, are made in modern terminology.

In the Mourner's monologue, Blanche as a character is entirely built up through the use of figures of speech as well as through the descriptive formal portrait. Both means of characterization are rhetorical and Chaucer's handling of them is imitative. The result is that the duchess emerges less as an individual than as a courtly abstraction whose traits are announced instead of demonstrated.[9]

In those parts of his monologue exclusive of the portrait that he gives of his late wife, the Mourner describes to the dreamer how he met Blanche, fell in love with her, served a long courtship to win her hand, and, finally, how he sorrows over her death. Through this account he too emerges as a courtly type.

In his conception of himself as a servant to the god of Love (BD, 835-7), his determination to worship and serve his lady single-mindedly (BD, 1095-1100), his bashfulness in her presence (BD, 1214-9), and the acute sorrows he experiences in the course of his love affair (BD, 1244-9), the Mourner in his monologue exemplifies the attitude and behaviour of

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[9]
However, Blanche is to some extent more human and gentle than the conventional courtly lady. See BD, 1020-2 and 1030-3.

a typical courtly lover.[10]

The Mourner's mode of expression is elegant, as befits an aristocrat, and is replete with figurative language. His speech is studded with references to personified Love, the great courtly god, and to Fortune, which he holds responsible for the shaping of his life and love. He is most extravagant when he speaks at length of Blanche's death, expressing the event obliquely by referring to his loss at a game with Fortune. He phrases his sorrow, of which he claims to have more than had Tantalus (BD, 709), in highly rhetorical terms. He particularly uses the figure of speech antithesis:

> My song ys turned to pleynynge,
> And al my laughtre to wepynge,
> My glade thoghtes to hevynesse;
> In travayle ys myn ydelnesse
> And eke my reste; my wele is woo,
> My good ys harm, and evermoo
> In wrathe ys turned my pleynge
> And my delyt into sorwynge.
>
> (BD, 599-606)

The Mourner also makes frequent use of rhetorical question: "Allas! how myght I fare werre?" (BD, 616. See lines 670, 689 and 1191 for other examples).

Both the courtly ideology and the rhetorical figures of speech that go to make up the Mourner's characterization are unoriginal. Chaucer's treatment, even in so specific a

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10
See above, p. 2, footnote 2.

respect as the kind and substance of the figures of speech employed, is paralleled in the <u>Roman de la Rose</u> and other medieval works. It is especially evident in the other work which influenced Chaucer most with respect to <u>The Book of the Duchess</u>, Machaut's <u>Jugement dou Roy de Behaigne</u>.[11]

It may be mentioned here that on the occasions where the dreamer speaks he is made to express himself as rhetorically as does the Mourner. For instance, when he advises the Mourner to temper his sorrow, the dreamer laces his speech with examples of classical, mythological and Biblical characters who had justifiable causes to exhibit unrestrained grief. They include: Medea, Phyllis, Dido, Echo and Dalila (<u>BD</u>, 725-41). Awkwardly included, and not very characteristic of realistic human discourse, these sententious examples and others like them (<u>BD</u>, 568-73 and 1244-51) show Chaucer affecting the decorative display of erudition that was so popular among medieval writers. Like the portrait and figures of speech, <u>sententia</u> or <u>exempla</u> are devices sanctioned by the rhetoricians,[12] and are found extensively in the <u>Roman</u> and the poems of Machaut. Chaucer's use of rhetoric here is almost entirely imitative.[13]

11
Robinson, <u>Works</u>, p. 884.

12
See Geoffroi de Vinsauf, <u>Poetria Nova</u>, in Faral, pp. 231-8.

13
Robinson, <u>Works</u>, p. 884.

Even while Chaucer's characters in The Book of the Duchess represent types largely built up by derived and unrealistic means, Chaucer achieved originality and realism in parts of the Mourner's monologue and in the Mourner's dialogue with the dreamer. He did this in two ways.

First, albeit composed of artificial rhetorical elements, the Mourner's monologue is put together in such a way as to illustrate a train of thought psychologically appropriate to him. The Mourner speaks of his dead wife and their courtship at random, as now one and then another recollection arises in his memory. He is overcome, at times, when he realizes anew that she is dead. The random ideas that make up his discourse and his plausible lack of inhibition as he speaks before the dreamer, who is a stranger to him, contribute perhaps the only truly realistic dimension in Chaucer's entire presentation of his character. Although the dreamer is not at all described, and in fact scarcely characterized, the manner in which Chaucer makes him function as a foil to the dreamer is also realistic. The dreamer is made to ask just enough questions about Blanche to draw out the sorrowing widower and encourage him to reminisce.

Second, in his handling of dialogue, even in this early work Chaucer showed an extraordinary ability to put natural sounding conversation into fluent verse that reads as easily

as prose. The exchanges of almost colloquial dialogue
between the dreamer and the Mourner are credible. For instance:

>   I have lost more than thow wenest."
> "Loo, [sey] how that may be?"...
> "Good sir, telle me al hooly
> In what wyse, how, why, and wherfore
> That ye have thus youre blysse lore."
> "Blythely," quod he; "com sytte adoun!
> I telle the upon a condicioun
> That thou shalt hooly, with al thy wyt,
> Doo thyn entent to herkene hit."
> "Yis, syr." "Swere thy trouthe therto."
> "Gladly." "Do thanne holde hereto!"
> "I shal ryght blythely, so God me save...."
>   (BD, 744-55)

And:

> "She ys ded!" "Nay!" "Yis, be my trouthe!"
> "Is that youre los? Be God, hyt ys routhe!"
>   (BD, 1309-10)

The long speeches of the poem, which prevail more than the
dialogue, are not natural and colloquial to the same extent.
They are in fact, as we have already indicated, rather the
reverse, since they abound in rhetorical elaborations.

Summing up Chaucer's achievements in The Book of the
Duchess, we may say that except for some aspects of his
handling of speech, characterization in this poem is unrealistic.
The two principal characters, Blanche and the Mourner,
represent wooden types conceived in accordance with the
artificial ideology of courtly love; and the poet's main
techniques for describing these characters -- the formal
portrait, figures of speech, sententia, and monologue -- are
almost wholly rhetorical in matter and spirit. In this poem,

Chaucer was not an innovator but a conventional medieval
writer. As a result, The Book of the Duchess has many merits
as a refined, elegant and fanciful piece of writing, but
scarcely any with respect to the convincing portrayal of
character.

The Legend of Good Women

The Legend of Good Women, another love vision, consists
of two parts. The Prologue describes how the dreamer, Chaucer,
is sentenced by the god of Love to write a legendary of women
celebrated for their faithfulness in love. This task is
imposed as a penance for Chaucer's having written unflatteringly
of women in Troilus and Criseyde, whose theme is a courtly
lady's infidelity.

Apart from its Prologue, The Legend of Good Women deals with
the histories or legends of nine aristocratic ladies whose lives
were shattered because of the faithlessness of their lovers.
The unhappy tales of Cleopatra, Thisbe, Dido, Hypsipyle,
Medea, Lucrece, Ariadne, Phyllis and Hypermnestra, which Chaucer
recounts one after another in The Legend, are tragic
stories inherited from classical times and are too well known
to call for explication here.

In telling these stories Chaucer handled the narrative
so as to center the interest upon the characters and their
histories of love. By the device of occupatio he discarded

from the traditional accounts many irrelevant details
(<u>LGW</u>, 616-23, 954-5, 996-7, and 1366-7).[14] By modern
fictional standards, this change was good. However, the poet's
actual treatment of the characters was injudicious. Because
in <u>The Legend</u> Chaucer provides a legendary of Cupid's Saints --
that is, a collection of stories about women who, because they
loved with passion and fidelity, were Saints according to the
standards of the religion of love -- he intentionally
medievalized the characters, depicting them as courtly ladies
and lovers. Even more specifically -- sometimes in direct
contradiction to the traditional accounts -- he emphasized
each lady's fidelity above all other traits, this being her
entrée into the Saint's life.[15] In deliberately distorting
the classical characters, Chaucer precluded any effect of
realism. The heroines, faithful in love, are presented as
entirely perfect, while the men who desert them are made into
knaves.

Chaucer built up his casts in <u>The Legend</u> by using some of
the same techniques that he employed in <u>The Book of the Duchess</u>.
Although he did not use the formal portrait in the legends,
his descriptions of physical and moral attributes are inseparable

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14
See above, p. 11.

15
On Chaucer's alterations, see Edgar Finley Shannon,
"Chaucer and the Roman Poets," <u>Harvard Studies in Comparative
Literature</u>, VII (1929), 61, and E. Bagley Atwood,
"Two Alterations of Virgil in Chaucer's Dido," <u>Speculum</u>,
XIII (October, 1938), 454-7.

from the use of other rhetorical devices which he used in his
first poem. The extent of his indifference to plausibility
and individuality is shown by his adherence to the types and
the monotony with which he applies stock figures of speech
to the descriptions. Each of the heroines of The Legend
exemplifies the ideal of courtly womanhood. Dido, for instance,
is said to be brighter than the sun, superior to all other
creatures and the chief example of Nature's work
(LGW, 1006 and 974-5); these claims are identical to those
made for Blanche. Cleopatra is as fair as a rose in May,
Dido is as fair as the morrow, and Hypermnestra is as true as
steel (LGW, 613, 1202 and 2582 respectively). In comparing
Philomela in the hands of her ravisher to a lamb in the power
of a wolf, Chaucer repeats the same stock simile that he
draws in reference to Lucrece in a similar situation
(LGW, 2316-20 and 1797-8 respectively). The men, too, are
drawn according to the conventional mode. At least, no matter
how ill they are later shown to serve their ladies, Antony,
Pyramus, Aeneas, Jason, Tarquin, Theseus, Tereus, Demophon
and Lyno are flattered at the outset as possessing or
simulating those qualities of appearance, personality, and
behaviour that distinguish the courtly lover. Thus, the men
in The Legend impressed their susceptible mistresses as
noble people endowed with gentility, discretion, courage,
fidelity, and other courtly virtues becoming to men wishing
to serve equally ideal women.

While Chaucer used stock rhetorical techniques for description in The Legend, he was no more original when it came to setting down speech. As in The Book of the Duchess, his creations talk for the most part in a very rhetorical fashion. The ladies express their intense suffering and bemoan the falseness of their paramours in soliloquies calculated to arouse pity. Too often these speeches, which are scarcely distinguishable from one another, produce an effect of bathos. Chaucer goes beyond the classical authorities by capitalizing on the pathetic degradation of his heroines, often exaggerating their complaints and adding more frequent occasions for them. This is especially true in the cases of Thisbe, Dido, Medea, Ariadne, Philomela and Hypermnestra.[16] When the ladies speak in the company of others, they are usually quoted directly with the answers of friend or lover given indirectly, or vice versa. Moreover, what the characters say is more often given in Chaucer's words than their own. Although by means of his role as narrator in Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer provided a valuable method of characterization, here his intervention in the narrative serves no good purpose and in fact destroys the immediacy of the accounts.

Immediacy is also destroyed through the introduction of

16

See Shannon, "Chaucer and the Roman Poets," 207-8 and 297.

the poet's rhetorical questions, for he breaks into the
narrative to call attention to the ladies' lack of judgment
and unhappy condition:

> O sely wemen, ful of innocence,
> Ful of pite, of trouthe, and conscience,
> What maketh yow to men to truste so?
>   (LGW, 1254-6)

The use of this rhetoric is irritating because it disturbs
the continuity of the narrative and diverts a reader's
attention from the fictional world. Chaucer later used
rhetorical questions in a more effective manner, allowing his
characters to show their rationalizations and other mental
processes by means of them.

In only two minor ways did Chaucer achieve original,
realistic effects in The Legend. First, he occasionally
made an attempt at originality and realism in a figure of
speech. In depicting wounded Pyramus he wrote: "The blod
out of the wounde as brode sterte / As water, whan the condit
broken is" (LGW, 851-2). Although ugly, this is an
indisputably realistic figure. Sometimes an effective and
original and an ineffective, stock figure of speech are found
joined in what today would be considered a mixed figure:
"And lik the wawes quappe gan hire herte, / And pale as box
she [Thisbe] was" (LGW, 865-6). Mixed similes are just
another instance of Chaucer's amateurism at this period.
Nevertheless, these figures indicate his attempt at realism
and, more significantly, the beginning of the similes drawn
from nature which he was later to develop with great effect.

Second, in the legend of Hypermnestra Chaucer attempted
to explain the heroine's motivation within the ready-made
plot. To explain why she alone of the fifty daughters of
Danaus failed to slay her husband at command, Chaucer
included an outline of her astrological horoscope (LGW, 2576ff.),
which showed that the position of the stars at her birth
destined her always to be pitiful and true. This horoscope
is Chaucer's original addition to the legend.[17] Although it
is only a few lines long, it heralds what he was later to
develop into an effective technique: the use of
pseudo-scientific data (particularly that drawn from astrology,
physiology, and physiognomy) to explain according to medieval
lights the personalities, motivations and destinies of his
characters. It may be mentioned here that as far as it is
known Chaucer was the only medieval writer who motivated
narrative action and explained character by reference to such
"scientific" materials.[18] In doing so, he presented characters
as realistic embodiments of inescapable astrological and other
"scientific" forces which the middle ages universally credited
as affecting man but which no other medieval writer exploited
in fiction. Although a modern reader may not be convinced by

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[17]
The content, originality, and meaning of Hypermnestra's
horoscope is discussed by Walter Clyde Curry,
Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1926), pp. 164-6.

[18]
See Curry, Mediaeval Sciences, p. 193.

such explanations of character, the modernity of Chaucer's intention must be allowed. It is no different in kind from that of writers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries who explain character in terms of impelling sociological and environmental factors which to us still seem significant.

These minor innovations are slight but significant evidence of originality, although at this stage they had no great effect. Built up according to courtly ideology, and described by the most standard and rhetorical means, the characters in The Legend of Good Women are artificial creations. They have little in common with Chaucer's later personages, nor even with those in Troilus and Criseyde.

The Legend has been looked upon as a work written long after The Book of the Duchess. Conclusive historical evidence is lacking here, as it is in reference to the dates of composition of nearly every one of Chaucer's works. The reason for assigning a relatively late date resides in the fact that Chaucer mentions his Troilus and Criseyde in the Prologue to The Legend, and the Troilus has been dated with fair certainty.[19] Some critics believe that Chaucer's

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[19] On the reasons for dating the Troilus rather positively between 1382 and 1386, see Works, p. 922.

Prologue and Legend were composed in natural order while others hold that the Prologue was composed much later than the Legend.[20] By the evidence of characterization, certainly, the latter possibility is more likely. Because Chaucer's techniques in The Legend are so similar to those used in The Book of the Duchess and so different, as will be shown, from those used in Troilus and Criseyde, it seems certain to us that The Legend is an early work. With the addition of the appropriate Prologue it may have been used later by Chaucer as a wry answer to critics who condemned his cynical treatment of courtly womanhood in the Troilus.[21] But, as far as the concept and techniques of characterization may serve as a guide, there can be little doubt that the legends themselves were composed long before the Troilus, as well as before the Prologue which introduces them.

Anelida and Arcite

This poem, a fragment of three hundred and some lines, is of no discernible type. It starts like an epic, with

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[20]
The various critical opinions as to the dates of The Legend of Good Women and its Prologue are conveniently summarized in Works, pp. xxv and 952-3.

[21]
That The Legend was used to fill such a function is suggested in Works, p. 566.

invocations to Mars, Bellona, and the Muses; but, unlike an
epic, it goes on to recount a romantic situation in which a
queen, Anelida, is abandoned for another lady by Arcite, a
lover false to the courtly code.

Chaucer's brief portrayal of Anelida closely resembles
his characterizations in The Book of the Duchess and
The Legend of Good Women. The description of the queen
(Anel, 71-84) yields the same stock modes of depicting a
courtly lady's physical and moral attributes as are found in
The Book of the Duchess and The Legend. Many specific details
and the figures of speech used to express them are strikingly
similar to those in the other works:

Anelida

> ...fairer was then is the sonne shene.
>
> (Anel, 73)

Dido

> ...fayrer was than is the bryghte sonne....
>
> (LGW, 1006)

In her steadfastness, Anelida

> ...passed hath Penelope and Lucresse....
>
> (Anel, 82)

Blanche

> ...was as good...
> As ever was Penelopee of Grece,
> Or as the noble wif Lucrece.... [22]
>
> (BD, 1080-2)

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[22]
  Also compare Anel, 73 to BD, 821-9; Anel, 76 to BD, 1002-5;
Anel, 79-80 to BD, 908-11 and LGW, 974-5.

Here, as in the love visions, the concept and means of
description are thoroughly conventional; Anelida does not
emerge as an individual.

Introduced at line 211, and occupying almost the entire
remainder of the short poem, is "The compleynt of Anelida the
quene upon fals Arcite." This complaint is conventional and
reveals the same devices of rhetoric used in similar ones
previously mentioned. Like the abandoned ladies of The Legend,
Anelida gives way to unrestrained grief; her comments,
presumably intended by Chaucer to be pathetic, are overwhelmingly
sentimental. With no great originality (since the simile is
common and is in fact used to describe Dido's lament in
LGW, 1355-7), Chaucer has the heroine liken her complaint to
the death-song of a swan (Anel, 346-8). In rhetorical
fashion, Anelida addresses her false and absent lover:

> My swete foo, why do ye so, for shame?
> And thenke ye that furthered be your name
> To love a newe, and ben untrewe?
>
> (Anel, 272-4)

Similar rhetorical questions occur in lines 238-40, 247-54,
275-7, 281-3, 299-301, 311-6, and 317-8 of the "compleynt."

The characterization of Anelida is, therefore, conventional
in concept and execution, and very similar to Chaucer's
characterizations of faithful courtly ladies elsewhere.
Nothing new is added. It is reasonable to assume

that _Anelida and Arcite_ was probably composed around the time of _The Book of the Duchess_ and _The Legend_, or at least very early in his literary career, as is generally agreed.[23]

The House of Fame

The House of Fame, like _The Parliament of Fowls_, is another poem written in the tradition of the love visions. Although conclusive evidence is lacking, both poems are thought to have been written some ten to fifteen years later than _The Book of the Duchess_.[24] Certainly they show elements of characterization absent in the earlier love visions and in _Anelida and Arcite_: principally a more sophisticated handling of speech, and the introduction of proverbs and _sententia_, effectively used, as part of speech. However, an examination of these poems need not detain us long, since, aside from the dreamer in _The House of Fame_, their chief characters are birds. While Chaucer showed great skill in suggesting -- and perhaps even satirizing -- aspects of human character in these poems through the rhetorical device of _prosopopeia_,[25] his use of non-human personages cannot be considered very realistic in the light of modern fictional concepts.

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[23]
Works, p. 897.

[24]
On the dates of _HF_ and _PF_ see _Works_, pp. 886-8 and 900-1 respectively. The _HF_ is the earlier poem of the two.

[25]
See above, p. 11.

The central part of The House of Fame is a long monologue delivered to the dreamer (Chaucer) by an eagle, a fabulous guide sent by Jove to fetch him to the houses of 'Fame' and 'Rumour', where he is to hear tidings of love. While carrying the dreamer to his destination, this eagle overwhelms him with a long, sententious monologue. Characterizing the eagle as garrulous and supercilious, this monologue is responsible for the superiority of the guiding bird over any other character of his kind in the middle ages. (Guiding animals that could talk were common in popular medieval story.)[26]

The eagle at the outset explains to Chaucer that at his lofty destination he will hear tidings of all earthly loves. It is when the poet expresses disbelief that he unwittingly submits himself to the first part of the eagle's educational monologue, a long discourse on the theory of sound which the bird designs to prove his point (HF, II, 765-852). The eagle's discourse on sound is a brilliant piece of writing, for it reveals him to be a pedant. His lore, we have observed, is arranged into a scholarly argument consisting of announcement of thesis, enunciation of basic assumptions, inferences (with illustrations), synthesis of facts, and conclusion.

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[26]
George Lyman Kittredge, Chaucer and his Poetry (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), p. 87.

All the foregoing parts he expresses in a fluent, learned, and only at times colloquial fashion, punctuating his discourse with the patronizing injunctions of an overweening intellectual: "...this caas that betyd the is, / Is for thy lore and for thy prow...."; "Now herkne what ye wol the lere"; "I preve hyt thus -- take hede now"; and "loo!" -- which he exclaims no less than fourteen times.

Most of the eagle's *exempla* and *sententia*, or learned subject matter drawn from Boethius and Dante (Works, p. 892), represents a decorative display of erudition extremely popular in medieval poetry -- the kind of display that Chaucer had imitated in The Book of the Duchess (see above, p. 14). Here, however, the erudition is not conspicuously ornamental, but is dramatically used to bring out the pedantic character of the eagle, and perhaps even gently and humourously to satirize scholars as well. This is the first of two instances where Chaucer employs a previously used technique in a fruitful way.

The second instance in the eagle's monologue of a rhetorical technique's transformation into a realistic means of characterization is provided in Chaucer's use of hyperbole. Hitherto, this figure of speech was employed in conventional descriptions of the attributes of courtly ladies and the woes of courtly lovers. Here, it assists in underlining the eagle's garrulity. He describes the kind of

stimulating verbal fare in which the house of 'Fame' abounds;
the poet may expect to hear, at his destination

> Mo murmures, and moo novelries,
> And moo dissymulacions,
> And feyned reparacions;
> And moo berdys in two houres
> Withoute rasour or sisoures
> Ymad, then greynes be of sondes;
> •   •   •   •   •
> And eke of loves moo eschaunges
> Then ever cornes were in graunges....
> (HF, II, 686-98)

As well as making these advances in the use of rhetoric
in The House of Fame, Chaucer also used dialogue to good
effect to show personalities in conflict. Here is a passage
where the eagle, patronizing, persistent, and ready to
embark on a second lecture, belabours the dreamer with his
scholarship -- even though the latter makes his boredom quite
clear:

> Wilt thou lere of sterres aught?"
> "Nay, certeynly," quod y, "ryght naught."
> "And why?" "For y am now to old."
> "Elles I wolde the have told,"
> Quod he, "the sterres names, lo,
> And al the hevenes sygnes therto,
> And which they ben." "No fors," quod y.
> "Yis, pardee!" quod he; "wostow why?
> For when thou redest poetrie,
> How goddes gonne stellifye
> Bridd, fissh, best, or him or here,
> As the Raven, or eyther Bere,
> Or Arionis harpe fyn,
> Castor, Pollux, or Delphyn,
> Or Athalantes doughtres sevene,
> How alle these arn set in hevene;
> For though thou have hem ofte on honde,
> Yet nostow not wher that they stonde."
> "No fors," quod y, "hyt is no nede...."
> (HF, II, 993-1011)

Of Chaucer's means of characterization in The House of Fame, sententia and figurative language in the eagle's monologue are perhaps the most important. By imaginatively handling these rhetorical techniques Chaucer convincingly characterized the bird. He was later to use these devices with equal skill, but with greater realism in the modern sense, in fashioning human characters.

The Parliament of Fowls

The Parliament of Fowls is the last love vision. The central part of the story is a debate between representatives of various social classes of birds as to which of three tercel eagles best deserves to win a formel eagle which Nature has decreed shall be mated to one of them. Here, no less than in Chaucer's early love visions and Anelida and Arcite, characterization of the aristocratic figures depends upon courtly ideology.

The three suitors for the formel's "hand" begin the debate by stating their respective claims; and, as might be expected, the tercel first in rank, and therefore the most deserving of the aristocratic formel, illustrates his worth by uttering a speech appropriate to an ideal courtly lover (PF, 414-41). Speaking with "humble cheere," he recognizes the formel as his "lady sovereyne" and promises to serve her single-mindedly to the death. His vow to offer himself to be

torn to pieces by the birds of the parliament should he prove
unworthy of her love is an extravagant but gallant gesture
truly befitting a lover and knight of highest degree. In
fact, the entire speech might have been appropriately uttered
by the Mourner in The Book of the Duchess, so entirely does it
conform to Chaucer's mode of depicting the courtly type.

While the second rival for the formel's favour is also
an aristocrat, his speech (PF, 450-62) individualizes him as
a forceful and assertive lover. He expresses the same courtly
sentiments as the first tercel, but is more brusque, and
decidedly unpoetic in his choice of diction:

> "I dar ek seyn, if she me fynde fals,
> Unkynde, janglere, or rebel any wyse,
> Or jelous, do me hangen by the hals!"
>
> (PF, 456-8)

The third tercel is even more practical and forthright in
character; in fact, his speech clearly betrays a contempt of
courtly ideology and phraseology (PF, 464-83).

Thus we see that not all of these courtly lovers are
ideal. The speeches of the last two differentiate their worth
by reference to the only ideal lover, the first tercel. This
is new in Chaucer's treatment of courtly figures and is really
ingenious, for it amounts to his use of an unrealistic device,
courtly ideology, for a realistic purpose.

Even more remarkable in the light of the poet's former
productions is the introduction of characters drawn from the

lower classes. These characters are the representatives of lower orders of fowl, who debate the worth of the rival claims put in by the three tercels after they have finished their speeches.

The duck, goose and other common fowl agree that the debates of the tercels are useless, time-consuming processes. To them a mating is a simple matter. But they come to blows over their assessments of the tercels, and the debate degenerates into a barrage of sharp colloquialisms (PF, 494-602). The vulgarity of their outlooks and the utilitarian nature of their standards are quite evident in their manner of justifying their individual opinions and discrediting those of their fellows. The "sperhauk" says to the goose:

> "...yit were it bet for the
> Han holde thy pes than shewed thy nycete.
> It lyth nat in his wit, ne in his wille,
> But soth is seyd, 'a fol can not be stille.'"
>
> (PF, 571-4.
> Italics added.)

Said the goose:

> ..."Al this nys not worth a flye!"
>
> (PF, 501. Italics added.)

And:

> "Wel bourded," quod the doke, "by myn hat!
> That men shulde loven alwey causeles,
> Who can a resoun fynde or wit in that?
> Daunseth he murye that is myrtheles?
> Who shulde recche of that is recheles?
> Ye quek!...
> There been mo sterres, God wot, than a payre!"
>
> (PF, 589-95.
> Italics added.)

(See also lines 514-8.)

As is evident in the underlined material, proverbs are
the distinguishing badge of what the first tercel terms the
"donghil" philosophy of these birds.[27]   Both in modern life and
literature vulgar people habitually express themselves in
hackneyed popular maxims, often invoking them to lend a
spurious authority to their own prejudiced opinions. The same
was evidently true among medieval people in real life; but
in employing sayings of the folk as a literary technique of
characterization, Chaucer was, as far as we can determine,
strictly original in his time. Although proverbs appear in
the writings of other medieval authors they are not used
to build up fictional personalities but solely for decorative
and didactic purposes. A good example of the superficial
way other medieval writers used proverbs may be found
in Chaucer's close translation of a French work,
The Tale of Melibee. To use proverbs as a means of
characterization seemingly never occurred to any other medieval
author. One looks in vain for a similar technique among the

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[27]
   We take the sayings above and others cited throughout the
thesis as being proverbs on the authority of Robinson's
explanatory notes in Works and on that of Bartlett Jere Whiting,
who compiled the proverbs in the canon in "Chaucer's Use of
Proverbs," Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature,
XI (1934).

poems that rank as antecedents to Chaucer's (for bird
parliaments were well known in literature by the poet's time).[28]

Therefore, although characterization in The Parliament of
Fowls is basically unrealistic by modern standards because it
deals in non-human personages, the poem significantly marks
Chaucer's initial introduction of personages from the lower
classes as well as the use of proverbs, one of his most
important techniques.

Summary

Although Chaucer's genius carried him beyond the
limitations of the practice of his time in applying his stylistic
devices, in the early works considered in this chapter he did
not entirely remedy the deficiencies common in medieval
characterization.

In his first poem, The Book of the Duchess, in The Legend
of Good Women, and in Anelida and Arcite, his characters are
idealized aristocratic figures, built up according to courtly
ideology and by the largely unoriginal application of rhetorical
modes. The portrait and figures of speech serve merely as

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[28]
Not only in this respect but in general Chaucer made more
of an effort at characterizing his debators realistically than
had either Alain de L'Isle or the anonymous author of
The Owl and the Nightingale. On de L'Isle's De Planctu Naturae,
see Thomas R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer, his Life and
Writings (New York, 1892), vol. II, p. 345. On
The Owl and the Nightingale, see Charles Sears Baldwin,
Three Medieval Centuries of Literature in England (Boston, 1932),
p. 211.

vehicles of idealization; and the speech of the characters often consists of stilted laments containing rhetorical apostrophe, antithesis, and sententia, which are palpably ornamental. However, evidence of Chaucer's originality appears in some aspects of his handling of monologue and dialogue; in his skilful use of occupatio; and in his application of astrological lore in the horoscope of Hypermnestra.

While in many ways similar to the aforementioned poems, the other love visions, The House of Fame and The Parliament of Fowls, taken together, reveal the introduction of characters of the lower classes, an improved handling of speech, and the effective use of proverbs and sententia as realistic means of characterization.

It must be remembered that the characters in the love visions do not always dominate the narrative in each production as a whole. In accordance with the genre, Chaucer included descriptions of the dream settings and much other material not directly concerned with characterization, material which we omitted from our discussion. Chaucer was to abandon this literary form, which permitted few possibilities for the realistic exploration of character, in favour of forms that permitted more; and he was to develop all his techniques of characterization further in various later works.

CHAPTER II

TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN

THE EARLY <u>CANTERBURY</u> <u>TALES</u>

Among the collection of separate narratives that
comprise <u>The</u> <u>Canterbury</u> <u>Tales</u> are a number that contrast
sharply to others generally recognized as being of late
composition. These earlier tales include those which have
their ultimate origins in folklore: <u>The</u> <u>Man</u> <u>of</u> <u>Law's</u> <u>Tale</u>,
<u>The</u> <u>Clerk's</u> <u>Tale</u>, and <u>The</u> <u>Franklin's</u> <u>Tale</u>; those based on
classical and Christian legends: <u>The</u> <u>Physician's</u> <u>Tale</u>,
<u>The</u> <u>Manciple's</u> <u>Tale</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Monk's</u> <u>Tale</u>, <u>The</u> <u>Second</u> <u>Nun's</u> <u>Tale</u>,
and <u>The</u> <u>Prioress's</u> <u>Tale</u>; and those derived from romance:
<u>The</u> <u>Knight's</u> <u>Tale</u> and <u>The</u> <u>Squire's</u> <u>Tale</u>.

These early tales have in common to a greater or lesser
extent three main features which distinguish them from later
productions. First, their general themes are not conducive
to realism; indeed, in some cases these are such that even
the greatest artist could not, using them, have produced
convincing fiction. The supernatural elements attached to
the folk tales and saints' legends, for example, are
particularly artificial. As yet Chaucer did not seem to
be looking for media through which to express realism.

Secondly, these tales contain characters who function according to a prescribed theory of behaviour, religious, chivalrous, or courtly; as in the love visions they thus lack the complexity which is a <u>sine qua non</u> of realism. Thirdly, as in the love visions, Chaucer executed these characterizations by the use of the techniques -- figures of speech, dialogue, <u>exempla</u>, and others -- in an extremely rhetorical, imitative way.

The characters in these tales, therefore, number among Chaucer's least excellent creations. They represent an advance over those in the love visions only insofar as they and their actions occupy the full narrative. They are not included as one factor among others; the settings in dreamland and other accompaniments not concerned with character no longer burden the reader.

Tales based on folklore

The first group of tales we shall examine are those based on folklore: <u>The Man of Law's Tale</u>, <u>The Clerk's Tale</u>, and <u>The Franklin's Tale</u>. The outlines of these stories are as follows.

<u>The Man of Law's Tale</u> recounts the story of Constance, daughter of a Roman emperor, who over the years marries

two foreign rulers converted to Christianity because of her
piety. Both mothers-in-law show astonishingly similar taste
with respect to Constance and set her adrift on the high seas.
Miraculously preserved after years of drifting, she is
delivered from her trials and restored to her kin after a
highly coincidental meeting in mid-ocean with her uncle.

The Clerk's Tale concerns Griselda, a girl of peasant
stock, taken from her humble home to be the bride of a marquis.
Her husband is gratified to find his strange choice justified
by Griselda's popularity and by her dignity in her lofty
position. Then, for some reason that is not explained, he
carries out fiendish tests of his wife's patience and
obedience. She endures these humbly and lives up to her
obligations as his wife and vassal. With unquestioning
obedience, she suffers her children to be taken away and
herself to be supplanted by an unknown rival. After twelve
or so years of suffering her children are restored and she
is grateful to find herself at last fully acceptable to the
marquis.

The Franklin's Tale is about a lady, Dorigen, who during
the absence of her husband, Arveragus, is importuned by an
amorous squire, Aurelius. To pacify him, Dorigen promises
her love when he has removed all the rocks from the country's

coast. With the help of a practicer of magic, the squire fulfils this condition. For a time Dorigen considers suicide instead of dishonour, but when Arveragus returns he insists she should keep her promise. Impressed by the gentility of Arveragus, the squire frees her from it.

Chaucer's indebtedness to medieval sources in these tales has been established. The Clerk's Tale is a close paraphrase of Le Livre Griseldis by an anonymous French author, who found the tale in Petrarch. In The Man of Law's Tale, Chaucer used the story of Constance as he found it in Nicholas Trivet's Anglo-Norman Chronicle. The Franklin's Tale, which is thought to have been primarily influenced by a lost Breton lay, resembles the story of Menedon in Boccaccio's Il Filocolo.[1]

The ultimate influences for these stories were folk tales replete with improbable plots, supernatural and illogical happenings, villainous persecutors and virtuous heroines, which medieval writers did very little to

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[1]
On the sources, see Margaret Schlauch, "The Man of Law's Tale," Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941), pp. 155-61, and the citation of Trivet in pp. 165-81; J. Burke Severs, "The Clerk's Tale," Sources and Analogues, pp. 289-95, and the citation of Le Livre Griseldis in pp. 296-331; and Germaine Dempster and J. S. P. Tatlock, "The Franklin's Tale," Sources and Analogues, pp. 377-94. Il Filocolo is cited in pp. 377-83.

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alter. Nor did Chaucer much enhance realism in his handling
of the borrowed stories; nevertheless, unlike his precursors,
he tries to provide plausible motivations.

For example, Chaucer explains that Griselda's power to
endure the adversities inflicted upon her by her husband,
the marquis, was owing to her birth as "a povre fostred"
creature; that Constance's misfortunes were linked with
astrological conditions at her birth (compare the horoscope of
Hypermnestra, pp. 22-3 above); and that the feat involving the
removal of the rocks by the squire in The Franklin's Tale was
performed by astrological magic, which to people in the
3
middle ages was credible. These are admittedly minor changes.

On the whole, Chaucer retained the improbable plots,
and his main change in characterization consisted in
exaggerating the contrasts between the virtue of the heroines
and the iniquity of their persecutors and expanding situations
that afforded opportunities for emotionalism.

2
On the origins of The Man of Law's Tale and The Clerk's Tale,
see Margaret Schlauch, Chaucer's Constance and Accused Queens
(New York, 1927), pp. 22-75.

3
On the esteem in which astrology was held, and its profound
influence on the medieval mind, see Florence M. Grimm,
"Astronomical Lore in Chaucer," University of Nebraska
Studies in Language, Literature, and Criticism, II (1919), 53ff.

(This is exactly what he did with the legends that formed his basic material in The Legend of Good Women.) The heroine of each tale is presented as a dominant, pathetic figure placed by fate and human machinations in positions where she must suffer grievous physical and mental anguish. This was according to the prescribed plots. Chaucer, however, makes his heroines more lovely and virtuous than those of his predecessors and describes them in greater detail. While he scarcely alters the portrayal of the persecutors, he is more vituperative in condemning them. These elaborations and the techniques used to accomplish them are absent in the poet's sources.

From the outset, the heroines of The Man of Law's Tale, The Clerk's Tale, and The Franklin's Tale -- Constance, Griselda and Dorigen respectively -- are given utterly transparent, perfect natures built up according to criteria of excellence determined by religious values. Humility, faith, hope, charity, patience, and wifely constancy are the virtues that they possess in facing their trials. Like the heroines of the love visions, they are stereotypes representing no complexities of nature to fascinate the intellect and yielding no change of character under circumstances.

To describe these heroines, Chaucer once again uses figurative language. Of Constance, he writes:

To rekene as wel hir goodnesse as beautee,
Nas nevere swich another as is shee.

> .   .   .   .   .
> "In hire is heigh beautee, withoute pride,
> Yowthe, withoute grenehede or folye;
> To alle hire werkes vertu is hir gyde;
> <u>Humblesse hath slayn in hire al tirannye.</u>
> <u>She is mirour of alle curteisye;</u>
> <u>Hir herte is verray chambre of hoolynesse,</u>
> <u>Hir hand, ministre of fredam for almesse.</u>"
>
> (<u>MLT</u>, 158-68.
> Italics added.)

Similarly, Griselda is termed a "flour of wyfly patience"
(<u>ClT</u>, 919). As for Dorigen, "she was oon the faireste under
sonne" (<u>FranklT</u>, 734). Such description is merely a vehicle
of idealization; it is clearly rhetorical. The underlined
figures of speech correspond closely to those used in the
love visions and <u>Anelida</u> <u>and</u> <u>Arcite</u> (see above, pp. 10-11,
19 and 25).

Beside providing these descriptions, Chaucer further
stresses the ideal natures of his heroines through their
speeches. Exploiting every possibility for emotional appeal,
he actually added to his sources. Not found in Trivet's
<u>Chronicle</u> is the filial lament that Constance makes on leaving
home, and her pious prayer to the cross (<u>MLT</u>, 273-87 and
451-62). Not found in <u>Le</u> <u>Livre</u> <u>Griseldis</u> is the heroine's
maternal plea to the sergeant to let her bid farewell to her
child prior to its seemingly imminent death, as well as the
actual devoted farewell in which she commends the child into
Christ's keeping (<u>ClT</u>, 550-67). Also absent from Chaucer's
source is her speech to the marquis, in which she reproaches

him for his mistreatment of her but expresses her firm
intention to remain obedient (ClT, 851-61); new, too, is her
humble speech in their reconciliation (ClT, 1088-98).
Conspicuous in The Franklin's Tale is the lament in which
Dorigen resolves to sacrifice her life for the sake of her
honour (FranklT, 1355-1456).

Generally, these speeches are rhetorical and sentimental.
Here, for instance, is part of the stilted speech that Constance
makes before leaving home prior to her first marriage:

> "Fader," she seyde, "thy wrecched child Custance,
> Thy yonge doghter fostred up so softe,
> And ye, my mooder, my soverayn plesance
> Over alle thyng, out-taken Crist on-lofte,
> Custance youre child hire recomandeth ofte
> Unto youre grace, for I shal to Surrye....
>
> "Allas! unto the Barbre nacioun
> I moste anoon...."
>
> (MLT, 274-82)

Another example is the aforementioned lament of Dorigen, in
which she cites over a score of classical virgins and widows
who chose death instead of dishonour. Although Dorigen
supposedly uses these sententious exempla to bolster her
determination to end her own life, the tenor of the speech in
which they appear has nothing in it to suggest a state of
emotion. The exempla are instead recalled as though by rote.
In fact, the order in which they are given corresponds to
the order in which they appear in Jerome's Adversus Joviniam,

the source from which Chaucer apparently borrowed them to use
in Dorigen's speech.[4] He probably wrote the lament with the
Latin text on his desk.

On the other hand, the speech which Constance addresses
to the cross before being forced out to sea by her first
mother-in-law is an example, rare in these stories, of the
right use of rhetoric. It goes as follows:

> "O cleere, o welful auter, hooly croys,
> Reed of the Lambes blood ful of pitee,
> That wessh the world fro the olde iniquitee,
> Me fro the feend and fro his clawes kepe,
> That day that I shal drenchen in the depe.
>
> Victorious tree, proteccioun of trewe,
> That oonly worthy were for to bere
> The Kyng of Hevene with his woundes newe,
> The white Lamb, that hurt was with a spere,
> Flemere of feendes out of hym and here
> On which thy lymes feithfully extenden,
> Me kepe, and yif me myght my lyf t'amenden."
>
> (MLT, 451-62)

Here the figurative language and other rhetorical elements
are natural and appropriate to the character because she is
saying a prayer. Evidently at this stage in his career
Chaucer was incapable of discriminating between the realistic
and unrealistic applications of rhetoric.

As in the earlier poems, there is little consecutive
dialogue, and Chaucer generally uses indirect discourse
to relate what the characters say. A reader therefore feels that

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[4] The exempla from Jerome's Adversus Joviniam are cited
in Sources and Analogues, pp. 395-7.

the poet and not the characters is in control of the story.
This intrusiveness on the part of the narrator is one of the
marks of medieval fiction, which Chaucer was later to transcend.

Chaucer is especially intrusive when, bent on emphasizing
his concepts of the heroines as paragons of virtue unjustifiably
besieged by the agents of evil, he adds to the borrowed accounts
what might be called editorial apostrophes. The tale of
Constance is particularly rich in rhetoric of this form:

> Allas! what wonder is it thogh she wepte....
> <div align="right">(<u>MLT</u>, 267)</div>

And:

> Allas! Custance, thou hast no champioun
> Ne fighte kanstow noght, so weylaway!
> <div align="right">(<u>MLT</u>, 631-2)</div>

Here, Chaucer apostrophizes the heroine's first wicked
mother-in-law:

> O sowdanesse, roote of iniquitee!
> Virago, thou Semyrame the secounde!
> O serpent under femynynytee,
> Lik to the serpent depe in helle ybounde!
> O feyned womman, al that may confounde
> Vertu and innocence, thurgh thy malice,
> Is bred in thee, as nest of every vice!
> <div align="right">(<u>MLT</u>, 358-64)</div>

Other apostrophes underline the iniquity of Constance's
second mother-in-law, her father, Satan, a drunken messenger,
an assailant, and abstract forces like lust and fortune.
(See <u>MLT</u>, 268-71, 365-71, 421-3, 652-8, 771-7, 778-9,
and 925.) Similarly, in The <u>Clerk's</u> <u>Tale</u> Chaucer remarks on
Griselda's patience (<u>ClT</u>, 622-3) and provides a vehement
condemnation of her persecutors (<u>ClT</u>, 457-62 and 995-1001).

Chaucer's use of such asides diverts the readers' attention from the fictional scene and stereotypes the characters.

Thus we see, by way of summary, that although in writing these tales Chaucer showed his interest in characterization by expanding the descriptions and speeches of the major characters as he found them in his sources, he did not succeed in making these persons real. He failed in this because his means of elaboration are rhetorical, and serve merely to typify and idealize the figures. His treatments here thus represent a misguided attempt to enhance the effect of the characters in borrowed plots. Even while the poet attempted to develop his pathetic heroines into articulate, sentient human beings one feels only the more that their personalities and actions are beyond human limits. Actually, any mode of treatment would probably have been equally unsatisfactory as long as he followed the plots of the stories. Residual elements from folklore, like the trials of the heroines, are an affront to belief. It was possible for Chaucer to attain realism only when he avoided stories, like these, fundamentally incredible. Here, we see him as a medieval writer struggling toward something new -- realistic dominance of character in fiction -- but by the wrong way.

Considering Chaucer's performance in these tales, and particularly considering the subtlety and realism of later characters, it is difficult to believe that they are not very early works. Critics offer different opinions as to their dates, some believing them to have been written expressly for the places they occupy in The Canterbury Tales, and some considering them earlier works taken over for the Tales.[5] In our opinion, The Man of Law's Tale, The Clerk's Tale, and The Franklin's Tale, because of those aspects of characterization discussed above, were written long before the Canterbury period, and even before Troilus and Criseyde. The difference in Chaucer's techniques will of course be more apparent in the light of material given in subsequent chapters.

Tales based on classical and Christian legends

A second group of Canterbury Tales whose personages are poorly developed include those based on classical and Christian legends: The Monk's Tale, The Manciple's Tale, The Physician's Tale, The Second Nun's Tale, and The Prioress's Tale. Although widely different in content, these stories have in common tragic themes, a close derivation from known sources, and casts of figures whose characterizations Chaucer did little or nothing to alter. The outlines of the stories are as follows.

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[5] Diverse opinions as to the dates of MLT, ClT, and FranklT are summarized by Robinson in Works, pp. 795, 815, and 826 respectively.

The Monk's Tale is really little more than a series of
concise summaries of the lives of men famous in legend and
history who once enjoyed greatness but came to tragic ends.
These men include Lucifer, Adam, Sampson, Hercules, Nebuchadnezzar,
Balthasar, King Pedro of Spain, King Peter of Cyprus,
Barnabo Visconti, Ugolino, Nero, Oloferno, Antiochus, Alexander,
Julius Caesar, and Croesus.

The Manciple's Tale recounts the classical Ovidian story
about a legendary knight, Phebus, who, learning that his wife
Coronis has been unfaithful, slays her and punishes the
informant, a talking crow, by blackening his white feathers.

The Physician's Tale concerns Virginia, a young Roman
maiden, who is slain by her father to preserve her honour
and chastity from the lustful machinations of a false judge.

The Second Nun's Tale is Chaucer's version of the legend of
Saint Cecilia. It describes the pious life, conversions, traffic
with angels, and martyrdom traditionally ascribed to her.

The Prioress's Tale tells about a little Christian
schoolboy whose singing of the Alma Redemptoris through the
streets of a ghetto on his way to and from school causes the Jews
to murder him, and how as a result the Virgin praised in his
anthem works a miracle by letting him continue to sing after death.

The stories are brief and, except for The Monk's Tale,
average a little over two hundred lines. There is consequently
little handling of character. In The Monk's Tale, each
account of the great men is merely a sketch permitting small

scope for characterization.

The characters in all these tales were fixed by tradition.[6]
Chaucer provided additional descriptions for most of the
personages but these correspond closely to his elaborations in
the love visions. Thus, hyperbolic and conventional epithets
are applied to the chief figures of The Monk's Tale: Nero is
said to be the proudest of emperors; Oloferno the most renowned
and pompous of kings; Hercules, the flower of strength

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In The Monk's Tale, Chaucer drew his accounts of the
legendary and historical characters from the Biblical
scriptures and from classical and medieval authors such as
Ovid, Boethius, Boccaccio, and Jean de Meun. Robert K. Root,
"The Monk's Tale," Sources and Analogues, pp. 615-44, gives
a discussion and citation of the sources.

The material of The Manciple's Tale is closely Ovidian
and was drawn by Chaucer either from Ovid's Metamorphoses
or from the anonymous Ovide Moralisé or some other medieval
translation or imitation of Ovid. For discussion and
citations of Ovid and Ovidian sources, see James A. Work,
"The Manciple's Tale," Sources and Analogues, pp. 699-709.

The story of Virginia, also, was popular from classical
times, and in retelling it Chaucer followed versions of it
made by Livy and Jean de Meun. These sources are cited by
Edgar Finley Shannon, "The Physician's Tale,"
Sources and Analogues, pp. 398-408.

In retelling the Christian legend of Saint Cecilia in
The Second Nun's Tale, Chaucer again closely followed the
traditional materials. He used Jacobus' Legenda Aurea for
the tale up to line 357 and the Passio of Mombritius for its
latter part. Gordon Hall Gerould cites these sources in
"The Second Nun's Prologue and Tale," Sources and Analogues,
pp. 664-84.

The Prioress's Tale is based on medieval legends on the
theme of Jewish persecution of Christian children. Chaucer's
immediate source is thought to be lost, but his Tale yields
a close resemblance to a number of versions cited by
Carleton Brown in "The Prioress's Tale," Sources and Analogues,
pp. 447-85.

(<u>MkT</u>, 2472-3, 2551-6, and 2096-7). Chaucer apostrophizes these and other figures rhetorically:

> O worthy, gentil Alisandre, allas,
> That evere sholde fallen swich a cas!
> Empoysoned of thyn owene folk thou weere;
> Thy sys Fortune hath turned into aas,
> And yet for thee ne weep she never a teere.
>
> (<u>MkT</u>, 2658-62)

And:

> O Lucifer, brightest of angels alle,
> Now artow Sathanas, that mayst nat twynne
> Out of miserie, in which that thou art falle.
>
> (<u>MkT</u>, 2004-6)

Other such apostrophes are found in <u>The Monk's Tale</u>, lines 2052-4, 2075-8, 2136-42, and 2679-85. Specific references, usually in the form of rhetorical apostrophe, to the characters' lives having been shaped entirely by perfidious Fortune are frequent, and occur among other places in lines 1995-8, 2001, 2347, 2367, 2376, 2397-8, 2445-6, 2669, and 2686. These rhetorical embellishments, while absent from the traditional accounts,[7] are not in themselves original; furthermore they typify the characters. What is worse, all individual characterization is lacking because motivation is merely thrown in an ostentatious way upon the manipulations of personified destiny.

   <u>The Prioress's Tale</u> shows similar elaborations. The little Christian schoolboy is described as "This gemme of

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[7]
   See <u>Sources and Analogues</u>, pp. 615-44.

chastite, this emeraude, / And eek of martirdom the ruby bright" (PrT, 609-10). The Jews who murder him are complete villains, whose evil the narrator apostrophizes in rhetorical style (PrT, 574-8). As well as stereotyping through these means, Chaucer exploited the opportunity for pathos in the story by reducing the age of the "clergeon" from that given in extant versions of the legend,[8] thus making him more pitiable and helpless.

In The Manciple's Tale Chaucer deliberately idealized the chief figures. The wronged husband, Phebus, is described in a portrait, and said to be the flower of chivalry, the handsomest man in the world, and, in short, "the semelieste man / That is or was, sith that the world bigan" (MancT, 107-29). This flattering description is wholly absent from the classical sources.[9] On the other hand, Phebus' wife, Coronis, is blackened in comparison with the traditional figure. Chaucer adds to her description unflattering figures of speech that liken her to wild, self-seeking creatures. These he took from the Roman de la Rose.[10] In these and other respects,

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[8] See Sources and Analogues, pp. 447-85.

[9] See Sources and Analogues, pp. 699-709.

[10] MancT, 163-86. On Chaucer's indebtedness here to the Roman, see Works, p. 871.

Chaucer exaggerated the contrasts between the faithful
husband and his unfaithful wife.[11]   As a consequence, Phebus
and Coronis emerge as plaster figures. In this tale there is
also a considerable amount of digressive material, which is
not found in the traditional story, having to do with
admonitions against excessive speech. This material,
ornamental and sententious, was drawn by Chaucer from the
Roman and Biblical scriptures.[12]   It has only the loosest
connection with the character to whom it ultimately refers,
that is, the loquacious crow.

In The Physician's Tale, Chaucer dealt with a popular
stock figure, the virgin martyr. The story of Virginia's
sacrifice is found in Livy and Jean de Meun, and Chaucer's
artistic intention is obvious when one compares his version
with their accounts.[13]   Livy and Meun gave chief emphasis to
the unjust judge and his eventual punishment; Chaucer
subordinated this element to the sacrifice of Virginia's
life and thus exploited the emotions inherent in the plot.

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[11]
     For alterations in plot, see J. Burke Severs,
"Is the Manciple's Tale a Success?" JEGP, LI (January, 1952),
1-16, and Sources and Analogues, p. 701.

[12]
     See Works, p. 872 and Sources and Analogues, p. 700.

[13]
     Cited in Sources and Analogues, pp. 398-408.

And, unlike the Roman and French authors, Chaucer provided a long personal description of Virginia. Livy, for instance, had dismissed her by mentioning, in passing, her "forma excellentem."[14] Chaucer, on the other hand, characterized her as the best and most beautiful of all Nature's creatures and devoted a long hyperbolic passage (PhysT, 7-120) to her maidenly loveliness and virtues. Part of the portrait goes as follows:

> Fair was this mayde in excellent beautee
> Aboven every wight that man may see;
> For Nature hath with sovereyn diligence
> Yformed hire in so greet excellence,
> As though she wolde seyn, "Lo! I, Nature,
> Thus kan I forme and peynte a creature,
> Whan that me list; who kan me countrefete?
>
> • • • • •
>   This mayde of age twelve yeer was and tweye,
> In which that Nature hadde swich delit.
> For right as she kan peynte a lilie whit,
> And reed a rose, right with swich peynture
> She peynted hath this noble creature....
>
> • • • • •
> And if that excellent was hire beautee,
> A thousand foold moore vertuous was she.
> In hire ne lakked no condicioun
> That is to preyse, as by discrecioun.
> As wel in goost as body chast was she;
> For which she floured in virginitee
> With alle humylitee and abstinence,
> With alle attemperaunce and pacience,
> With mesure eek of beryng and array.
>   (PhysT, 7-47)

This typical description of Virginia continues for some length. It is immediately followed by a digression, addressed to

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[14]
Sources and Analogues, p. 402.

governesses, on the care and upbringing of young women in the ways of virtue and temperance. Chaucer was being medieval in including this digressive material. It is irrelevant to the action and has the effect of lessening the dramatic unity of the tale.[15]

In The Second Nun's Tale the characterization is again typical. In this case Chaucer so closely followed his sources that it is unnecessary to discuss the work here in any detail. It is mainly unoriginal.[16]

So far we have discussed the ways in which Chaucer conceived and described his characters in this group of tales. His methods are very similar to those used in the love visions and in the group of folk tales previously examined in this chapter.

As far as his handling of speech is concerned, the poet does not approach the skill and originality he evinced in The House of Fame, nor even in The Book of the Duchess. Rather, speech in these tales (and there is little of it) most closely resembles that used in The Legend of Good Women and the folk tales. Most dialogue is included at points that provide chances for sensationalism. Cecilia's speech to the

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15
The material for the expansion of Virginia's character and the digression on the rearing of girls was probably borrowed by Chaucer. The De Eruditione Filiorum Nobilium of Vincent of Beauvais is suggested as its source by Karl Young in "Maidenly Virtues of Chaucer's Virginia," Speculum, XVI (July, 1941), 340-9. See Sources and Analogues, pp. 407-8, for an analogue to Chaucer's passage from the De virginibus of St. Ambrose.

16
See footnote 6 above.

judge who condemns her to death is given (SecNT, 424-511).
The "clergeon," speaking after death, explains the miracle of
his singing to an abbot (PrT, 649-69). Virginia, learning
her father's intention to kill her and faced with immediate
death, acquiesces and thanks God that she will die a maid
(PhysT, 231-53).[17] Phebus makes a speech of regret after he
murders his wife in a jealous rage (MancT, 271-90).

Only a few of these speeches are realistic. That of the
little schoolboy is appropriately sweet and simple:

> "My throte is kut unto my nekke boon,"
> Seyde this child," and, as by wey of kynde,
> I sholde have dyed, ye, longe tyme agon.
> But Jesu Crist, as ye in bookes fynde,
> Wil that his glorie laste and be in mynde,
> And for the worship of his Mooder deere
> Yet may I synge O Alma loude and cleere.
>
> (PrT, 649-55)

Another example occurs in The Second Nun's Tale, where
Cecilia slangs the judge, Almachius, in an exchange of dialogue
that is Chaucer's own addition to the traditional accounts.
It is the most realistic characterizing passage in his
otherwise unoriginal and unrealistic work. Part of it goes
like this:

> "What maner womman artow?" tho quod he.
> "I am a gentil womman born," quod she.
> "I axe thee," quod he, "though it thee greeve,
> Of thy religioun and of thy bileeve."

_____

17
The speech is another of Chaucer's original additions to
the story. Virginia does not speak at this point in the
French and Latin sources. See Sources and Analogues, pp. 400
and 406, for the relevant passages in the sources.

> "Ye han bigonne youre questioun folily,"
> Quod she, "that wolden two answeres conclude
> In o demande; ye axed lewedly."
> Almache answerde unto that similitude,
> "Of whennes comth thyn answeryng so rude?"
> "Of whennes?" quod she, whan that she was freyned,
> "Of conscience and of good feith unfeyned."
>
> Almachius seyde, "Ne takestow noon heede
> Of my power?" And she answerde hym this:
> "Youre myght," quod she, "ful litel is to dreede,
> For every mortal mannes power nys
> But lyk a bladdre ful of wynd, ywys.
> For with a nedles poynt, whan it is blowe,
> May al the boost of it be leyd ful lowe."
>
> "Ful wrongfully bigonne thow," quod he,
> "And yet in wrong is thy perseveraunce...."
>
> (SecNT, 424-43)

For a few moments Chaucer captures the scene here. The passage is good because it is fluent and natural. It is also good because it reflects a genuine interaction and conflict between the characters. This passage is, however, a rarity.

The speeches in the tales are for the most part not evocative of real human beings, but are stilted and rhetorical. Part of Phebus's speech, which he gives after he has killed his wife, may serve as an example:

> O rakel hand, to doon so foule amys!
> O trouble wit, o ire recchelees,
> That unavysed smyteth gilteles!
> O wantrust, ful of fals suspecion,
> Where was thy wit and thy discrecion?
> O every man, be war of rakelnesse!
>
> (MancT, 278-83)

Thus in these tales Chaucer shows us no advance in the art of realistic characterization; instead, as in the works previously examined, he produces the same idealization of

derived types and the same stock rhetorical techniques for depicting them. Because of this it is reasonable to assume that they were composed early. Critics generally agree that The Second Nun's Tale is very early work;[18] but opinions differ as to whether The Monk's Tale, The Manciple's Tale, and The Prioress's Tale were written expressly for The Canterbury Tales, or, as in the case of The Second Nun's Tale, were early works adapted for that purpose. (The Prioress's Tale seems actually to have been revised.)[19] And The Physician's Tale has been thought to have been written as late as the beginning of the Canterbury period, although conclusive evidence is lacking.[20] Nevertheless, as far as Chaucer's techniques of characterization may be taken as a reliable indicator of the approximate time of composition, this group of tales belongs to his apprenticeship.

Here, again, Chaucer was handicapped by his material. Most of the characters and their actions are legendary and implausible. There are also many supernatural elements connected with them, a few being the magical transformation of the colour of the

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18
Works, p. 862.

19
On the dates of MkT, MancT, and PrT, see Works, pp. 852, 870, and 839 respectively.

20
Works, p. 832.

crow's feathers by Phebus, the exploits of strength by
Hercules, and the miraculous maintenance of life in the two
Christian martyrs. Aspects of character like these make the
figures in the stories fundamentally unrealistic by modern
standards.

Tales based on romance

Two stories in The Canterbury Tales, The Knight's Tale
and The Squire's Tale, are romances dealing with chivalry
and adventure. Like the other works examined in this chapter,
they are deficient in realistic characterization.

The Squire's Tale consists of a series of episodes, all
of which deal with the type of fantasy characteristic of
The Arabian Nights, and these episodes were apparently derived
from known tales.[21] The only episode that deals with character
in any sense at all is the complaint of a peregrine falcon to
a princess, Canacee, who possesses a ring which enables her to
understand the language of birds. This complaint, which is
not unlike Anelida's, is thin and conventional, and of course
the speaker is not human. Nothing further can be said here
about The Squire's Tale. Except in the complaint of the bird,

[21] See H. S. V. Jones, "The Squire's Tale," Sources and
Analogues, pp. 357-76.

no attempt is made to develop character. Of course, the
subject matter and theme of the story scarcely lend themselves
to the development of realistic characters; and Chaucer's
artistic intention is not clear since the tale is unfinished.
Because of these circumstances, scholars may still be right in
holding this tale of late composition.[22]

On the other hand, the second romance, The Knight's Tale,
is a more successful production in terms of realistic
characterization than any of the other tales we have examined
in this chapter.

The plot concerns two friends and Theban knights,
Palamon and Arcite. While imprisoned as war hostages at
Athens by Theseus, duke of the city, these men both fall in
love with the duke's sister-in-law, Emily. Although they are
cousins, Palamon and Arcite become rivals and enemies in
pursuing the beautiful maiden's love. Arcite is seemingly
given the opportunity to win her by being ransomed, but
his ransom is given on pain of exile. Arcite goes away and
then, risking a death penalty, returns to Athens in
disguise, taking a menial position in the duke's household
in order to gain access to Emily. This enviable situation
is brought to an end when Palamon escapes from prison.
Arcite is surprised to encounter his erstwhile friend in the

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[22] The date is discussed in Works, p. 822.

woods of the ducal estate and the knights fight. Theseus then
discovers them, separates them, learns the cause of their
strife, and promises them a chance to compete for Emily in
the lists. The ensuing tournament is a colourful spectacle in
which Palamon is championed by Lygurge, king of Thrace, and
Arcite by Emetreus, king of Inde. Arcite wins the tournament,
only to die of an illness contracted from his wounds; so the
ultimate victor is Palamon, to whom Theseus gives the hand of
Emily in marriage after Arcite is mourned.

This is a routine romance having the usual chivalric
motifs and courtly characters. Indeed, the story was not of
Chaucer's invention but was borrowed from Boccaccio's
Il Teseida, which it closely follows.[23] Conventional and
derivative though The Knight's Tale admittedly is, Chaucer
introduced significant changes. Not solely interested in the
story qua story, nor even with presenting the pageant of
chivalry, he revised the narrative in order to emphasize
character and motivation and improve the plot. These changes
differentiate his account from Boccaccio's and, for that matter,
from other medieval romances in general.

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[23] The source is discussed by Robert Armstrong Pratt in
"The Knight's Tale," Sources and Analogues, p. 82.

Boccaccio had explained the essential point of the story, Palamon's ultimate victory over Arcite, as the result of an arbitrary decree made by pagan deities. But in Chaucer's version Arcite's defeat is the consequence of astrological influences, whereby the stars determined his fatal illness.[24] This motivation would have been considered more realistic than Boccaccio's in Chaucer's time, since it was more "scientific." (We have already pointed out Chaucer's originality in using astrology in the horoscopes of Hypermnestra and Constance. See above, pp. 22-3 and 41.) Naturally, moderns are no more convinced of the realism of astrological agency than they are of decrees of pagan deities, but this alteration at least shows that Chaucer was attempting to improve on the original version.

Furthermore, Palamon's ultimate victory over Arcite seems just and artistically satisfying because Chaucer presents Palamon as the better man. Boccaccio did not take the trouble to make this distinction. Chaucer gives Palamon a gentler character than Arcite and shows him in a more sympathetic light. For instance, it is not Palamon but Arcite who uses harsh, utilitarian proverbs to justify his right to Emily

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[24]
The role of medieval astrology in KnT, operative in this major instance and in other minor ones, is interpreted in detail by Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1926), pp. 119-63.

although -- and this is another of Chaucer's changes in
Boccaccio's story -- Palamon saw her first.[25]   Like those
spoken by the debators in The Parliament of Fowls (see above,
pp. 33-4), the proverbs uttered by Arcite illustrate a
utilitarian and somewhat vulgar attitude. He says to Palamon:

> I pose that thow lovedest hire biforn;
> Wostow nat wel the olde clerkes sawe,
> That "who shal yeve a lovere any lawe?"
> > (KnT, 1162-4)

And:

> Ech man for hymself, ther is noon oother.
> > (KnT, 1182)

And again:

> What, verray fool, thynk wel that love is free,
> And I wol love hire maugree al thy myght!
> > (KnT, 1606-7)

It is significant that Chaucer has seen the value of proverbs
in underlining animal as well as human character; in the
latter case they become truly effective, since proverbs, after
all, are appropriate to man.

Finally, in an effort to limit the action to the main
characters and their conflict, Chaucer leaves out unessential

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[25]
    On Chaucer as less sympathetic to Arcite than to Palamon,
and on the originality of their difference in temperament
compared with Boccaccio's knights, see H. N. Fairchild,
"Active Arcite, Contemplative Palamon," JEGP, XXVI (July, 1927),
285-93. However, we should like to point out that the
observations on proverbs as a key method of Chaucer's
distinction between the knights is, as far as we know, our
original contribution.

descriptions in Boccaccio pertaining to the warlike exploits
of Theseus, the entertainment of the visitors to the knights'
tournament, and Arcite's funeral. He does this by invoking the
rhetorical figure occupatio (KnT, 885, 2197, and 2919 respectively).

Aside from the alterations of character that we have
specified, Chaucer does not depart very much from his source
or from general convention. Both Palamon and Arcite are
proper, chivalrous knights; both manifest the same symptoms and
sufferings of the typical courtly lover, and these are expressed
by similar figures of speech. When Arcite loves Emily,

> His slep, his mete, his drynke, is hym biraft,
> That lene he wex and drye as is a shaft;
> His eyen holwe, and grisly to biholde,
> His hewe falow and pale as asshen colde....
> > (KnT, 1361-4)

Palamon

> ...lyk was to biholde
> The boxtree or the asshen dede and colde.
> > (KnT, 1301-2)

The description of their emotional states is trite and
their speeches are rhetorical in tone and filled with
cumbersome apostrophes to Love, Fortune, and the pagan
deities. Their physical appearance is scarcely described.
Chaucer's indifference to realism on this score is illustrated
by his depiction of them in combat, where he likens them
interchangeably to lions, tigers, hunters, boars, and hounds.
(The mixture of figures of speech in the confines of one
part in particular, KnT, 1656-8, is almost ludicrous.)[26]

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[26]
Compare the mixed figure in LGW, p. 21 above.

Emily is little more than a pawn of the plot. A static figure, she is described by occasional stock epithets and comparisons common to the descriptions of courtly women; her initial portrait is similarly conventional:

> ...Emelye, that fairer was to sene
> Than is the lylie upon his stalke grene,
> And fressher than the May with floures newe --
> For with the rose colour stroof hire hewe,
> I noot which was the fyner of hem two --
>
> Yclothed was...fressh, for to devyse:
> Hir yelow heer was broyded in a tresse
> Bihynde hir bak, a yerde long, I gesse.
> And in the gardyn, at the sonne upriste,
> She walketh...
>
> And as an aungel hevenysshly she soong.
>
> (<u>KnT</u>, 1035-55)

(She is briefly described again in <u>KnT</u>, 1686.)

Emily next appears in a temple where, before the tournament between her suitors, she prays to the goddess Diana.

> Chaste goddesse, wel wostow that I
> Desire to ben a mayden al my lyf,
> Ne nevere wol I be no love ne wyf.
>
> ...sende love and pees betwixe hem two,
> And fro me turne awey hir hertes so
> That al hire hoote love...
>
> Be queynt, or turned in another place.
>
> (<u>KnT</u>, 2304-21)

Despite her apparent indifference to the knights, Theseus later has to bear her, shrieking with grief, away from the corpse of Arcite (<u>KnT</u>, 2816-25). It is added that she wept day and night for the dead knight, whom she hardly knew. Both her attitudes are typical, but the change in her attitudes is unexplained and shows Chaucer's lamentable lack of interest in

psychology at this point.

Among the lesser figures, in fact, only Theseus is given
a measure of true individuality. Chaucer develops this
character more than does Boccaccio, particularly by adding two
monologues (KnT, 1785-1869 and 2987-3093), in which qualities
of cynicism, compassion, and common sense are mingled, giving
him realistic complexity. Here is part of the first monologue:

> "The god of love, a, benedicite!
> How myghty and how greet a lord is he!
> Ayeyns his myght ther gayneth none obstacles.
> .   .   . .   .   .
> Lo heere this Arcite and this Palamoun,
> That quitly weren out of my prisoun,
> And myghte han lyved in Thebes roially,
> And witen I am hir mortal enemy,
> And that hir deth lith in my myght also;
> And yet hath love, maugree hir eyen two,
> Broght hem hyder bothe for to dye.
> Now looketh, is nat that an heigh folye?
> Who may been a fool, but if he love?
> Bihoold, for Goddes sake that sit above,
> Se how they blede! be they noght wel arrayed?
> Thus hath hir lord, the god of love, ypayed
> Hir wages and hir fees for hir servyse!
> And yet they wenen for to been ful wyse
> That serven love, for aught that may bifalle.
> But this is yet the beste game of alle,
> That she for whom they han this jolitee
> Kan hem therfore as muche thank as me.
> She woot namoore of al this hoote fare,
> By God, than woot a cokkow or an hare!
> But all moot ben assayed, hoot and coold;
> A man moot ben a fool, or yong or oold,--
> I woot it by myself ful yore agon,
> For in my tyme a servant was I oon.
> And therfore, syn I knowe of loves peyne,
> And woot hou soore it kan a man distreyne,
> As he that hath ben caught ofte in his laas,
> I...foryeve al hoolly this trespaas...."
>
> (KnT, 1785-1818)

Two other lesser figures, Lygurge and Emetreus, the
foreign potentates who champion the young knights in the

lists, are briefly drawn. (KnT, 2128-54 and 2155-78.)

Here is part of one of the formal portraits:

> The grete Emetreus, the kynge of Inde,
> Upon a steede bay trapped in steel,
> Covered in clooth of gold, dyapred weel,
> Cam ridynge lyk the god of armes, Mars.
> His cote-armure was of clooth of Tars
> Couched with perles white and rounde and grete;
> His sadel was of brend gold newe ybete;
> A mantelet upon his shulder hangynge,
> Bret-ful of rubyes rede as fyr sparklynge;
> His crispe heer lyk rynges was yronne,
> And that was yelow, and glytered as the sonne.
> His nose was heigh, his eyen bright citryn,
> His lippes rounde, his colour was sangwyn;
> A fewe frakenes in his face yspreynd,
> Bitwixen yelow and somdel blak ymeynd;
> And as a leon he his lookyng caste.
>
> (KnT, 2156-71)

Though colourful, the portraits of the foreign kings were

undoubtedly included by Chaucer as a conventional bit of

rhetoric in line with previous practice. The purpose seems

fulfilled in this, since the characters are not otherwise

significantly developed.[27]

In The Knight's Tale as a whole, the instances of realism

described in the preceding pages and the fact that the story

itself is basically more credible than those tales having

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[27]
Curry claims that the details of the potentates'
appearance have a pseudo-scientific significance that ties
in with Arcite's astrologically determined character and
destiny (Mediaeval Sciences, pp. 120ff.). The inconsistencies
in Curry's argument are pointed out by P.F. Baum,
"Characterization in the Knight's Tale," MLN, XLVI (May, 1931),
303.

fantastic, supernatural and fabulous elements combine to make it more successful in terms of character than the others discussed in this chapter. Still, by modern standards, and by the standards of others of Chaucer's works, it is a primitive production. The main figures are too greatly idealized, and in view of this and other failures in originality, the tale, although perhaps composed somewhat later than the others, does not appear to us to be a product of the Canterbury period, as has sometimes been thought. (See Works, p. 771.)

Summary

The tales examined in this chapter are inferior in realistic characterization to the other Canterbury tales. This is partly because, like the love visions, they are types of tales basically inimical to realism; and partly because, although Chaucer emphasized character more than did his precursors, he generally failed to make his personages realistic. As in the love visions, he employed rhetorical means that resulted in typification and idealization.

The characters offer few variations from the conventional patterns. They are usually superficial types representing what amount to embodiments of religious, chivalric, and courtly ideals. Villains are marked by the absence of such ideals; heroes and heroines have too many. Aside from Theseus, they

have no complexity.

In these tales, Chaucer, not the characters, manipulates the narrative. He does not let them speak for themselves. He announces their traits and actions instead of letting the characters demonstrate them. In addition, he repeatedly destroys the immediacy of the narrative by including indirect discourse and his own apostrophic observations. Although the poet makes some good use of occupatio, medieval science, proverbs, and monologue, his figures of speech and portraits are largely conventional and rhetorical, and so is the dialogue.

Neither in these works nor in the love visions is there much realism in Chaucer's characterization if we judge it by modern criteria. Nevertheless, by using the same basic techniques that have been adumbrated in this and the previous chapter, Chaucer fashioned individual rather than typical and ambivalent rather than ideal characters in other parts of The Canterbury Tales and in Troilus and Criseyde.

CHAPTER III

TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN

TROILUS AND CRISEYDE

Around 1385 Chaucer wrote his longest sustained narrative, Troilus and Criseyde, a verse romance in five Books comprising a total of more than eight thousand lines.[1] This work was written at the central point of Chaucer's literary career, which spanned from The Book of the Duchess, written around 1369, to 1400, the year of his death. Troilus and Criseyde constitutes the half-way mark in Chaucer's writing in more than that sense alone, for in it he shows an unprecedented skill at characterization, and new originality in his development and application of those stylistic techniques upon which his characterizations depend. We shall examine these changes in Chaucer's writing after briefly outlining the plot and sources of this pivotal work.

Troilus and Criseyde is set in Troy during the time of the Trojan wars. Its plot concerns a love affair between the king of Troy's son, Troilus, with Criseyde, the widowed daughter of a Trojan sooth-sayer. It describes how the prince falls in love with the charming and beautiful widow; how he procures an audience with her through her uncle Pandarus, his friend; and

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[1] On the date of Troilus, see Works, p. 449.

how, with the aid of Pandarus as a go-between, a clandestine
and happy affair develops between him and Criseyde. The
happiness of the pair is shattered when Criseyde is sent
to the Greek camp as a hostage in exchange for a Trojan
warrior. Although Criseyde promises to be faithful to
Troilus and even assures him that by chance, force or guile
she will escape and return to Troy, she becomes the mistress
of a Greek nobleman. Troilus eventually learns of her
infidelity; reckless and in despair because of this news, the
betrayed prince soon afterwards meets his death in battle.

In its basic form, this story had existed from ancient
times, and Chaucer made some use of the early accounts; but
he chiefly based his version on that of Boccaccio, who,
in Il Filostrato, had revived the tale, greatly expanded
it, and medievalized it as a courtly love romance.[2]
Although in Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer follows the plot
of Boccaccio's story almost step by step, he does not do so as
a mere adaptor. As a work of art, Chaucer's account is in all
ways superior to Boccaccio's, and in no respect more than in
characterization. Criseyde and Pandarus, whom Boccaccio left
thin and conventional, became life-like through Chaucer's

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[2] The edition we studied is The Filostrato of Giovanni
Boccaccio, trans. Nathaniel Edward Griffin and
Arthur Beckwith Myrick (Philadelphia, 1929).

treatment; in fact, it is a commonplace that in his version
Chaucer transformed the characters practically beyond
recognition. Although basically derived, because of Chaucer's
skill the story may be considered an original work.

Following Boccaccio, the _Troilus_ is based on the ideology
of courtly love. (Although it is not adulterous, the love
between Troilus and Criseyde is extra-marital, and no thought
of marriage occurs.) Chaucer's poem is faithful to the
tradition of courtly love as it was expressed in Boccaccio
and in other medieval authors.[3] But while it yields much of
the form, it is in the end critical of courtly love. Although
in other poems Chaucer willingly imitated the artificial
courtly ethos, the shallow and idealized courtly personages
and the rhetorical modes employed to delineate them, in
Troilus _and_ _Criseyde_ his purpose was to bring about the
ironic contrast between the ideals and real human behaviour.
The characters are fully enough drawn to make the irony most

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[3]
    On courtly love and _Troilus_ _and_ _Criseyde_ as a work on
courtly love, see the references above in Chapter I, p. 2,
footnote 2; Alexander J. Denomy, "Courtly Love and Courtliness,"
Speculum, XXVIII (January, 1952), 44-63; Amy Kelly,
Eleanor _of_ _Aquitaine_ _and_ _the_ _Four_ _Kings_ (New York, 1957);
Thomas A. Kirby, _Chaucer's_ _"Troilus"_: _A_ _Study_ _in_ _Courtly_ _Love_
(Louisiana, 1940); and Ann Novotny, "Criseyde as a Courtly Lady"
(unpublished Master's thesis, McGill University, Montreal, 1960).
    On Chaucer's transformation of Boccaccio's story, see
Sanford B. Meech, _Design_ _in_ _Chaucer's_ _Troilus_ (Syracuse
University Press, 1959).

effective. (It may be mentioned here that Boccaccio presented the principal characters of the conflict as little more than puppets. He told of the love of an average knight for a shallow and wanton woman and of her faithlessness. The simple recital of the action is entertaining but is without significance because the characters are not complex.)

In his initial presentation of the characters of Troilus and Criseyde Chaucer used his accustomed concepts and techniques of characterization. He enhanced the portrayal of the Trojan prince as a beau ideal of the courtly lover. Troilus' attributes are accordingly described in idealized, hyperbolic terms (Tr, I, 473-6, 481-3 and 1074-85). From the time he meets Criseyde in a temple, his attitudes, actions and symptoms of love are all typically courtly. A few instances are his penchant for solitude, preoccupation with his lady, and desire to serve her; his sighs, love pains and suffering (like that of Ixion in hell); a plenitude of tears, in which he nearly drowns; and his sleeplessness, pallor, and lack of appetite (Tr, I, 358-74, 441-8, 463-9 and 543). When he speaks, it is nearly always in exalted language. His soliloquies, particularly, are ornamented with rhetorical antitheses and with decorous apostrophes to Love, the great courtly god, who he feels is shaping his life. Troilus is thus drawn in the full colours of rhetoric according to the courtly pattern.

At the outset, Criseyde is also presented as a courtly
paragon and is described by the appropriately hyperbolic and
figurative language which Chaucer used wherever he dealt with
the type:

> Criseyde was this lady name al right.
> As to my doom, in al Troies cite
> Nas non so fair, for passynge every wight
> So aungelik was hir natif beaute,
> That lik a thing inmortal semed she,
> As doth an hevenyssh perfit creature,
> That down were sent in scornynge of nature.
>
> (Tr, I, 99-105)

And:

> Right as oure firste lettre is now an A,
> In beaute first so stood she, makeles.
> Hire goodly lokyng gladed al the prees.
> Nas nevere yet seyn thyng to ben preysed derre,
> Nor under cloude blak so bright a sterre....
>
> (Tr, I, 171-5)

Therefore, in his initial treatment of Troilus and
Criseyde Chaucer shows them in one dimension -- a dimension in
keeping with the courtly tradition. In this respect they
resemble the characters in The Book of the Duchess, his first
poem. However, by a free application of rhetorical and
original techniques Chaucer gradually gives depth to his
characterizations.

Complex characterization enters the story with Pandarus.
Visiting Troilus at the beginning and finding him depressed,
Pandarus sarcastically comments "'Han now thus soone Grekes
maad yow leene?'" (Tr, I, 553). Troilus is stung by the remark,
denies it, and adds that he does not want to talk about his

trouble. Guessing that he has fallen in love, Pandarus is at once curious and so heaps up arguments to persuade his friend to confide in him. Part of his conversation is as follows:

> I have myself ek seyn a blynd man goo
> Ther as he fel that couthe loken wide;
> A fool may ek a wis-man ofte gide.
>
> "A wheston is no kervyng instrument,
> But yet it maketh sharppe kervyng tolis.
> . . . . .
> Thus often wise men ben war by foolys.
> . . . . .
> "Sith thus of two contraries is o lore,
> I, that have in love so ofte assayed
> Grevances, oughte konne, and wel the more,
> Counseillen the of that thow art amayed.
> . . . . .
> "The wise seith, 'Wo hym that is allone,
> For, and he falle, he hath non helpe to ryse';
> . . . . .
> "Men seyn, 'to wrecche is consolacioun
> To have another felawe in hys peyne.'
>
> (Tr, I, 628-709)

Then, while Troilus continues to express the stipulated love pains with dignity worthy of the Mourner and blames them on Fortune, Pandarus contradicts him. Pandarus derides the prince's despairing attitude and suggests that everything has a practical solution, even if it be love for an aloof, sovereign lady. He says:

> "I graunte wel that thow endurest wo
> As sharp as doth he Ticius in helle,
> . . . . .
> But I may nat endure that thow dwelle
> In so unskilful an oppynyoun
> That of thi wo is no curacioun.
>
> (Tr, I, 785-91)

And:

> Unknowe, unkist, and lost, that is unsought.
> What! many a man hath love ful deere ybought
> Twenty wynter that his lady wiste,
> That nevere yet his lady mouth he kiste.
> (Tr, I, 809-12)

And again:

> ..."Than blamestow Fortune
> For thow art wroth; ye, now at erst I see.
> Woost thow nat wel that Fortune is comune
> To everi manere wight in som degree?
> (Tr, I, 841-4)

When Pandarus finally succeeds in discovering that

Troilus is in love with Criseyde, he is delighted. He says:

> "Ne I nevere saugh a more bountevous
> Of hire estat, n'a gladder, ne of speche
> A frendlyer, n'a more gracious
> For to do wel...
> .   .   .   .   .
> In honour, to as fer as she may strecche,
> A kynges herte semeth by hyrs a wrecche.
> (Tr, I, 883-9)

His next reaction is to spur Troilus on to a concrete, but

discreet, course of action in winning her love:

> "Now loke that atempre be thi bridel,
> And for the beste ay suffre to the tyde,
> Or elles al oure labour is on ydel....
> (Tr, I, 953-5)

He tells Troilus that he will do his utmost to help him.

As he leaves he says:

> Adieu! be glad! God spede us bothe two!
> Yef me this labour and this bisynesse,
> And of my spede be thyn al that swetnesse."
> (Tr, I, 1041-3)

The minute he is out the door, Pandarus thinks of how to

proceed, and decides that thoughtful planning and skill are

necessary. Founding a love affair, he believes, is a
practical matter. He actually compares it to raising a house:

> For everi wight that hath an hous to founde
> Ne renneth naught the werk for to bygynne
> With rakel hond, but he wol bide a stounde,
> And sende his hertes line out fro withinne
> Aldirfirst his purpos for to wynne.
> <div align="right">(<u>Tr</u>, I, 1065-9)</div>

This scene between Troilus and Pandarus is filled with
irony and realism. Never before had Chaucer written about a
situation that pointed up such contrasts in character. What
is even more remarkable, Pandarus is built up almost entirely
by means of Chaucer's sensitive use of <u>sententia</u>, proverbs, and
figures of speech, devices long used by him though in a less
fruitful way. In a sense Pandarus is the product of a number of
earlier experiments in the use of these techniques for the
development of character.

To name some examples, Pandarus is anticipated by the
racy dialogue in <u>The Parliament of Fowls</u>; by the sententious
and garrulous discourse of the pedantic eagle in
<u>The House of Fame</u>; by the proverbial rationalizations of Arcite,
the opportunistic lover in <u>The Knight's Tale</u>; and by an
abundance of figurative language studding the earlier poems.
As the poem progresses, we discover that Pandarus almost <u>never</u>
speaks without using figurative, proverbial, or sententious
language.

This language is a mark of his individuality. It gives
him an air of wit and charm. In embroidering arguments even
of the most obvious purport, Pandarus shows that he delights

in displaying wisdom for his own satisfaction; but since Pandarus is the manipulator of the story, his sententious arguments are necessary to motivate action. In line with his previous practice, Chaucer uses proverbs to show Pandarus' practical nature. The imagery which Chaucer uses for Pandarus serves the same purpose. In the example given above, Pandarus is made to compare building a love affair to raising a house. The poet took the figure almost literally from a rhetorician's guidebook which he had utilized respectfully, even slavishly, when writing The Book of the Duchess;[4] here, he uses rhetoric to serve new ends. Pandarus' comparison of love to a mundane and practical craft would have sounded like sacrilege to the medieval ear accustomed to hearing courtly affairs referred to in a more abstruse and exalted fashion -- and it is only one example of his heresy.

This man's existence side by side with a knight like Troilus, who is patently subservient to ideals, heralds a distinct change in Chaucer's outlook, and a new artistic intention. It may be added here that in Boccaccio's version of the story, Troilo's friend is, like him, another conventional knight. Chaucer has introduced the figure of Pandarus as a

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[4] The figure is in Geoffroi de Vinsauf, Poetria Nova, in Edmond Faral, Les Arts Poétiques du xiie et du xiiie Siècle (Paris, 1924), p. 198, ll. 43-5.

contrast -- as a character functioning according to his own
lights, earth-bound perhaps, but true to life.

In fact, Chaucer's realistic and ironic effects in
Troilus and Criseyde depend on his method of opposing qualities
between characters, and, in the case of Criseyde, within a
character.

Criseyde is by far the most complex character in Chaucer's
story. Described as an ideal both by Chaucer and Pandarus,
she is first given another dimension through her lively and
witty dialogue with Pandarus in the "paved parlour" when he
comes to plead on Troilus' behalf.

> Quod Pandarus, "Madame, God yow see,
> With al youre fayre book and compaignie!"
> "Ey, uncle myn, welcome iwys," quod she;
> And up she roos, and by the hond in hye
> She took hym faste, and seyde, "This nyght thrie,
> To goode mot it turne, of yow I mette."
> And with that word she doun on bench hym sette.
>
> "Ye, nece, yee shal faren wel the bet,
> If God wol, al this yeer," quod Pandarus;
> "But I am sory that I have yow let
> To herken of youre book ye preysen thus.
> For Goddes love, what seith it? telle it us!
> Is it of love? O, som good ye me leere!"
> "Uncle," quod she, "youre maistresse is nat here."
>
> With that thei gonnen laughe....
> .   .   .   .   .
> Quod Pandarus...
> .   .   .   .   .
> Do wey youre book, rys up, and lat us daunce,
> And lat us don to May som observaunce."
>
> "I? God forbede!" quod she, "be ye mad?
> Is that a widewes lif, so God yow save?

By God, ye maken me ryght soore adrad!
Ye ben so wylde, it semeth as ye rave.
It sate me wel bet ay in a cave
To bidde and rede on holy seyntes lyves;
Lat maydens gon to daunce, and yonge wyves."

"As evere thrive I," quod this Pandarus,
"Yet koude I telle a thyng to doon yow pleye."
"Now, uncle deere," quod she, "telle it us
For Goddes love; is than th'assege aweye?
I am of Grekes so fered that I deye."
"Nay, nay," quod he, "as evere mote I thryve,
It is a thing wel bet than swyche fyve."

"Ye, holy God," quod she, "what thyng is that?
What! bet than swyche fyve? I! nay, ywys!
 .   .   .   .   .
...telle us what it is...."
<div align="right">(<u>Tr</u>, II, 85-131)</div>

Pandarus does not satisfy Criseyde's curiosity at once.
Because he knows that he has to arouse her admiration and
sympathy for Troilus, and to fight her fear for her honour,
much of his conversation from this point is taken up with a
long, eulogistic description of the prince (<u>Tr</u>, II, 156-210).
He finally tells his niece that Troilus loves her; and, before
she speaks, he anticipates her possible objections and counters
them with his characteristically figurative and sententious
logic. He says:

I sette the worste, that ye dreden this:
Men wolde wondren sen hym come or goon.
Ther-ayeins answere I thus anoon,
That every wight, but he be fool of kynde,
Wol deme it love of frendshipe in his mynde.

"What? who wol demen, though he se a man
To temple go, that he th'ymages eteth?
<div align="right">(<u>Tr</u>, II, 367-73)</div>

He also says:

> Lat this proverbe a loore unto yow be:
> 'To late ywar, quod beaute, whan it paste'
>
> (Tr, II, 397-8)

This provokes a reproachful outburst from Criseyde; Pandarus therefore tempers his argument, and manages, before he leaves, to gain her agreement to "maken hym [Troilus] good chere" while saving her honour.

Criseyde no sooner sits down in private to consider what her uncle has said than Troilus, splendid and chivalrous, rides by in the street. Her pity is aroused at the sight. She then engages in an introspective soliloquy (Tr, II, 687-812) in which she weighs Troilus' courtly qualities against the possible disadvantages of accepting his suit. In this delicate soliloquy, in which Chaucer shows the process of Criseyde's mind at work, much of her character emerges.

In the hopeful phase of her argument, Criseyde proceeds very gradually from assuming that she will give Troilus no more than friendship to considering that she may grant him her love. Nevertheless, Chaucer says, as a cloud may overspread the sun, so a cloudy thought dims her bright hopes. She recognizes and weighs the negative possibilities: the loss of independence, the uncertainty of love, and the notoriety that might result from the disclosure of an affair. Then she manages to give herself courage by using the kind of

sententious arguments to which her uncle is addicted:

> ...who may stoppen every wikked tonge,
> Or sown of belles whil that thei ben ronge?"
>
> •   •   •   •   •
> ..."He which that nothing undertaketh,
> Nothyng n'acheveth, be hym looth or deere."
>
> <div align="right">(<u>Tr</u>, II, 804-8)</div>

These remarks suggest that Criseyde's nature may be in part
practical. As she is a widow living alone in a beseiged city,
the daughter of a traitor, an object of suspicion to the
townsfolk, and a woman whose very property is in jeopardy, it
is not impossible that the desire to gain Troilus' protection
may be among her motivations.[5] In any case, Criseyde decides
to risk the possible pitfalls and to accept Troilus in the
hope that he will safeguard her honour and acknowledge her as
his "sovereign" despite their disparity in rank.

With the help of Pandarus, who bears letters and arranges
their meeting, the love between Troilus and Criseyde develops
in the traditional courtly form.

Through the early stages to the consummation of the love
affair, Chaucer's characterizations of the three principal
actors remain consistent.

While Pandarus takes care of the practical details of the

5
Criseyde's thought (<u>Tr</u>, II, 711-4) of the political
danger to which she might expose herself if she angered Troilus
by refusing his suit is an uncourtly consideration. See
Novotny, "Criseyde as a Courtly Lady," p. 194.

lovers' tryst, Troilus apostrophizes the deities and calls on
their aid in his romance. Chaucer contrasts the characters
by making Troilus express himself in exalted figures and
Pandarus in ones folkishly crude:

> Quod Pandarus, "Ne drede the nevere a deel,
> . . . . .
> ...this nyght shal I make it weel,
> Or casten al the gruwel in the fire."
> "Yet, blisful Venus, this nyght thow me enspire,"
> Quod Troilus, "As wys as I the serve,
> And evere bet and bet shal, til I sterve.
>
> . . . . .
> "O Jove ek, for the love of faire Europe,
> The which in forme of bole awey thow fette,
> Now help! O Mars, thow with thi blody cope,
> For love of Cipris, thow me nought ne lette!
> O Phebus...
>
> . . . . .
> ...help now at this nede!
>
> "Mercurie, for the love of Hierse eke,
> . . . . .
> Now help! and ek Diane, I the biseke...."
> . . . . .
> Quod Pandarus, "Thow wrecched mouses herte,
> Artow agast so that she wol the bite?
> Why, don this furred cloke upon thy sherte,
> And folwe me...."
>
> (Tr, III, 708-39)

In his subsequent description of the lovers' union,
Chaucer again uses imagery. Exploiting rhetoric with ingenuity,
he draws similes from nature to link the love of the couple
with authentic forces and at the same time to recount their
intimate scenes with delicacy:

> Right as an aspes leef she gan to quake,
> Whan she hym felte hire in his armes folde.
>
> (Tr, III, 1200-1)

And as aboute a tree, with many a twiste,
Bytrent and writh the swote wodebynde,
Gan ech of hem in armes other wynde.

And as the newe abaysed nyghtyngale,
That stynteth first whan she bygynneth to synge,
Whan that she hereth any herde tale,
Or in the hegges any wyght stirynge,
And after siker doth hire vois out rynge,
Right so Criseyde...
Opned hire herte....
                        (Tr, III, 1230-9)

This is the time of Troilus' greatest joy. In his proem
(Tr, III, 1-49), Chaucer wrote that he intended to recount the
happiness of Troilus in praise of Venus. Having done so, he
ends Book III by telling how, under the influence of the
prospering affair and according to the courtly pattern,
Troilus becomes still more noble in character and courageous in
battle than he was before (Tr, III, 1716-1820). Thus, Chaucer
as narrator brackets the intimate scenes between the lovers
with his commentaries, and makes it clear that at this time
Troilus' earthly love is his paramount delight.[6]

At this point, Criseyde loves Troilus to perfection.
Chaucer says that the prince is to her "a wal / Of stiel,
and sheld from every displesaunce" (Tr, III, 479-80).
It is this very weakness and gentleness in Criseyde

6
    On Chaucer's role as narrator, see Morton W. Bloomfield,
"Distance and Predestination in Troilus and Criseyde," PMLA,
LXXII (March, 1957), 14-26, and Robert M. Jordan,
"The Narrator in Chaucer's Troilus," ELH, XXV (1958), 235-57.

that ultimately belies her sincerity as a practitioner of the art of courtly love.[7]

Later, the lovers learn that Criseyde is immediately to be sent to the Greek camp. Pandarus doubtless realizes the influence that her departure will have on her love affair with Troilus. Wishing to help his friend, he uses sententious arguments to convince him that he should forget his sorrow by finding a new love:

> ..."as writ Zanzis, that was ful wys,
> 'The newe love out chaceth ofte the olde;'
> And upon newe cas lith newe avys.
> .   .   .   .   .
> "For also seur as day comth after nyght,
> The newe love, labour, or oother wo,
> Or elles selde seynge of a wight,
> Don olde affecciouns alle over-go...."
>
> (Tr, IV, 414-24)

Troilus is incapable of taking this advice. In fact, Pandarus' objectivity is a contrast to the lovers' turmoil -- turmoil which Chaucer demonstrates with powerful psychological insight.

He presents Troilus debating with himself on the subjects of fate and predestination, and this soliloquy provides an index of the knight's desperation and sorrow (Tr, IV, 958-1082). He presents Criseyde surrounded by her friends, and shows the

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[7] Criseyde's inclination to lean on her lover is an uncourtly quality and a mark of her individuality. Traditionally, courtly ladies were self-reliant women. See Novotny, "Criseyde as a Courtly Lady," p. 193.

heaviness of her heart in contrast to the lightness of their
conversation:

> Quod first that oon, "I am glad, trewely,
> Bycause of yow, that shal youre fader see."
> Another seyde, "Ywis, so nam nat I;
> For al to litel hath she with us be."
> Quod tho the thridde, "I hope, ywis, that she
> Shal bryngen us the pees on every syde,
> That, whan she goth, almyghty God hire gide!"
>
> Tho wordes and tho wommanysshe thynges,
> She herde hem right as though she thennes were;
> For, God it woot, hire herte on othir thyng is.
> Although the body sat among hem there,
> Hire advertence is alwey elleswhere;
> For Troilus ful faste hire soule soughte;
> Withouten word, on hym alwey she thoughte.
>
> Thise wommen, that thus wenden hire to plese,
> Aboute naught gonne alle hire tales spende.
> Swich vanyte ne kan don hire non ese,
> As she that al this mene while brende
> Of other passioun than that they wende,
> So that she felte almost hire herte dye
> For wo and wery of that compaignie.
>
> For which no lenger myghte she restreyne
> Hir teeris, so they gonnen up to welle....
> .   .   .   .   .
> And thilke fooles sittynge hire aboute
> Wenden that she wepte and siked sore
> Bycause that she sholde out of that route
> Departe, and nevere pleye with hem more.
> .   .   .   .   .
> And ech of hem wepte eke....
>   (Tr, IV, 687-721)

When Troilus and Criseyde meet before her departure, he
offers to abandon the honour of his estate and flee with her
to a foreign country and so save their love. Criseyde
attempts to dissuade him from this plan, saying that

the disclosure of their flight would blemish his honour as
well as hers. She reminds him that his courtly virtues first
won her love. In stressing her view that dilatory tactics are
better than flight, she uses proverbs and sententious
observations to bolster what she doubtless considers her
practical wisdom:

> "Lo, Troilus, men seyn that hard it is
> The wolf ful, and the wether hool to have;
> This is to seyn, that men ful ofte, iwys,
> Mote spenden part the remenant for to save.
>
> (Tr, IV, 1373-6)

> Beth naught to hastif in this hoote fare;
> For hastif man ne wanteth nevere care.
>
> (Tr, IV, 1567-8)

> Men seyn, 'the suffrant overcomith,' parde;
> Ek 'whoso wol han lief, he lief moot lete.'
> Thus maketh vertu of necessite
> By pacience....
>
> (Tr, IV, 1584-7)

> "And thynketh wel, that somtyme it is wit
> To spende a tyme, a tyme for to wynne.
>
> (Tr, IV, 1611-2)

Criseyde is also sententious when she suggests some of
the means by which she may be able to return to Troy. First,

> My fader, as ye knowen wel, parde,
> Is old, and elde is ful of coveytise....
>
> (Tr, IV, 1368-9)

Her idea is that she may be able to persuade her father to
permit her return in the interests of securing their property.
Secondly, Criseyde suggests that there may be a truce in the
war, in which case she would be able to travel freely back to
Troy. This may very well happen, she says, "As alday happeth,
after anger, game...." (Tr, IV, 1562-3).

Troilus is not persuaded by Criseyde's pathetic little arguments. He himself uses proverbs in an effort to convince:

> ...trewely, myn owne lady deere,
> Tho sleghtes yet that I have herd yow stere
> Ful shaply ben to faylen alle yfeere.
> For thus men seyth, 'that on thenketh the beere,
> But al another thenketh his ledere.'
> Youre syre is wys; and seyd is, out of drede
> 'Men may the wise atrenne, and naught atrede.'
> <div align="right">(Tr, IV, 1450-6)</div>

Chaucer stepped in as choric narrator to stress the sincerity of Criseyde's schemes to return and the grief that she feels at parting (Tr, IV, 1415-21). Now, he gives her a beautiful, rhetorical speech in which she swears to remain faithful. Chaucer gives Criseyde a mixed style in speech, which approaches now her uncle's and now her lover's; for hers is a range of thinking from the one man's practicalness to the other's idealism. He is careful to preserve for her the same divided character throughout. She says:

> "For thilke day that I for cherisynge
> Or drede of fader, or of other wight,
> Or for estat, delit, or for weddynge,
> Be fals to yow, my Troilus, my knyght,
> Saturnes doughter, Juno, thorugh hire myght,
> As wood as Athamante do me dwelle
> Eternalich in Stix, the put of helle!
>
> .   .   .   .   .
> "And thow, Symois, that as an arwe clere
> Thorugh Troie rennest ay downward to the se,
> Ber witnesse of this word that seyd is here,
> That thilke day that ich untrewe be
> To Troilus, myn owene herte fre,
> That thow retourne bakward to thi welle,
> And I with body and soule synke in helle!
> <div align="right">(Tr, IV, 1534-54)</div>

Criseyde departs. Chaucer describes the reactions of his characters. Pandarus waxes sententious, this time in an effort to help Troilus to bear his sorrow. Friends cannot be always together; time cures all sorrows (Tr, V, 342-50). He takes him on a visit to Sarpedon, but the attempt to divert him fails.

Troilus' suffering is expressed in plaints and in ubi sunt apostrophes in which he recalls Criseyde's loveliness and perfection of nature. He so idealizes her that he imagines that the very wind to Troy is her sigh lamenting their separation. Rhetoric is thus a measure of his idealism as well as a means of conveying his passionate feeling.

Chaucer makes a great point of Criseyde's fear of isolation and nostalgia in the Greek camp. In a soliloquy (Tr, V, 731-65) she expresses her regret that she did not go away with Troilus -- that she lacked foresight, an eye of "Prudence." Although her other plans have failed, she determines to steal away.

Chaucer describes Diomede's advances to Criseyde, and he emphasizes this Greek warrior's determination to win her. He then introduces three formal portraits: of Criseyde, Diomede [8] and Troilus.

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[8]
Boccaccio had included a portrait of Diomede at the point where he began to be operative in the story, but Chaucer consulted the earlier accounts and added portraits of Troilus and Criseyde as well. On the traditional materials of these portraits, see D. S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, especially 'Harley Lyrics,' Chaucer, and some Elizabethans," MLR, L (July, 1955), 257-69; Robinson, Works, p. 947; and Archibald A. Hill, "Diomede: the Traditional Development of a Character," Essays and Studies in English and Comparative Literature, by Members of the English Department of the University of Michigan, VIII (1932), 1-25.

These portraits (<u>Tr</u>, V, 799-840) sum up the superficial resemblances and the fundamental disparities between the characters of the victor, Diomede, and of the loser, Troilus. Both men are brave warriors and are aristocrats by birth. Troilus exhibits good character and courtly virtue; but Diomede's portrait clearly reveals contrary qualities of aggressiveness, selfishness and opportunism. Now, before Criseyde is about to fall from courtly ranks by yielding to Diomede, Chaucer describes her again. This time, he mentions a flaw in her beauty: "hire browes joyneden yfere."[9] He also explicitly refers to her timid and fearful nature: she is "slydynge of corage."

While the opinion has been expressed that these portraits are irrelevant to the action and were included only because Chaucer wished to give his story the air of a traditional romance,[10] we believe that while the formal air of the sketches admittedly impedes the flow of narrative this effect was intended by the poet. Chaucer wanted to startle his readers

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[9] Eyebrows of the ideal courtly lady were not too close together. See Thomas Wright, <u>Womankind in All Ages of Western Europe</u> (London, 1869), pp. 238-41.

[10] See Louis A. Haselmayer, Jr., "The Portraits in <u>Troilus and Criseyde</u>," <u>PQ</u>, XVII (April, 1938), 223.

with the coldly formal descriptions and the ironic contrasts

that they provide, thereby enabling readers to achieve an

objective point of view from which to witness the inevitable

denouement of this tragic romance and its significance in terms

of the courtly tradition.

Criseyde's last plan of stealing away is frustrated, for

Troy is doomed. Now her gentle, fearful and dependent nature

combines with fate to make her infidelity inevitable. While

Troilus still plays the part of a perfect courtly lover,

Criseyde commits the greatest possible sin according to the

courtly code by accepting Diomede as his successor and her

protector. Criseyde's sense of guilt is conveyed by a stirring

soliloquy:

> ..."Allas! for now is clene ago
> My name of trouthe in love, for everemo!
> For I have falsed oon the gentileste
> That evere was, and oon the worthieste!
> .   .   .   .   .
> But syn I se ther is no bettre way,
> And that to late is now for me to rewe,
> To Diomede algate I wol be trewe.
>
> "But, Troilus, syn I no bettre may,
> And syn that thus departen ye and I,
> Yet prey I God, so yeve yow right good day,
> As for the gentileste, trewely,
> That evere I say, to serven feythfully,
> And best kan ay his lady honour kepe"; --
> And with that word she brast anon to wepe.
>
> (<u>Tr</u>, V, 1054-78)

In yielding to Diomede, Criseyde did not change
                11
character.   She is the same dividedly motivated person

11

Some critics, notably Kirby, have affirmed that she did
change character and have taken this as an artistic flaw.
See Kirby, <u>Chaucer's "Troilus,"</u> p. 232.

throughout. From the beginning Chaucer shows her soft
but weak nature[12] and even its admixture of practicalness.
The poet balances the recital of her acts with his sympathetic
comments as narrator. He refers to the binding power of his
sources. He will not commit himself to her reputed yielding
of affection to Diomede, but he stresses her remorse. He
would obscure the possibility that she may have yielded
easily. He says that because of pity he would excuse her;
the facts prevent (Tr, V, 1050-3 and 1086-99).

Ignorant of the situation, Troilus still hopes that
Criseyde will keep her promise to return. Although Pandarus is
helpless now, fate, fortune, and the vicissitudes of war
having outwitted him, he still, out of friendship, does all he
can to comfort Troilus. He walks on the walls of Troy with
him, helps him to interpret an ominous dream, and advises him
to write a letter to Criseyde. However, his maxims and his
forceful imagery are now turned into the first instrument of
Chaucer's irony. When Troilus says that Criseyde will

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[12]
Ann Novotny, "Criseyde as a Courtly Lady," pp. 193-5,
points out that Criseyde's fear and weakness are not typical
of conventional courtly ladies but are individual traits.

yet come,

> Pandare answerde, "It may be, wel ynough,"
> And held with hym of al that evere he seyde.
> But in his herte he thoughte, and softe lough,
> And to hymself ful sobreliche he seyde,
> "From haselwode, there joly Robyn pleyde,
> Shal come al that that thow abidest heere.
> Ye, fare wel al the snow of ferne yere!"
>
> > (Tr, V, 1170-6)

Criseyde sends Troilus first one and then another
equivocal letter, which he "thoughte...lik a kalendes of chaunge"
(Tr, V, 1634). Finally, he has conclusive proof of the
alteration in her affection.

> Than spak he thus, "O lady myn, Criseyde,
> Where is youre feith, and where is youre biheste?
> Where is youre love? where is youre trouthe?" he seyde.
> "Of Diomede have ye now al this feeste!
> Allas! I wolde han trowed atte leeste
> That, syn ye nolde in trouthe to me stonde,
> That ye thus nolde han holden me in honde!
>
> .   .   .   .   .
>
> ...clene out of youre mynde
> Ye han me cast; and I ne kan nor may,
> For al this world, withinne myn herte fynde
> To unloven yow a quarter of a day....
>
> > (Tr, V, 1674-98)

Troilus seeks to slay Diomede in battle, but fate does
not allow him this revenge. Instead, he himself is slain.
When his spirit ascends to the eighth sphere he looks down at
the earth and laughs. The point is made that only love of the
divine -- and not the earthly love so lauded in Book III --
endures.

In this poem, Chaucer builds his characterizations by means of the same techniques that he used in previous works. Here, he handles them in such a way as to provide contrasts between the characters and to imply the subtlety of Criseyde's motivation. In this work the nature of Chaucer's intervention in the narrative is different from that in earlier works. His comments provide an objective contrast to the turmoil of the inner story; and, in the case of Criseyde, help to explain character.

Chaucer's use of courtly ideology as a concept of characterization has changed. His completely new aim in presenting the story as a whole and the character of Criseyde in particular was partly to show that the art of love cannot remain divorced from the ethos of the less noble but more practical human craft which love, realistically speaking, so frequently is and always is in some ways. He revealed the artificiality of the courtly code by creating a courtly lady who is psychologically realistic. In future works, he was to draw on courtly ideology chiefly for satirical purposes.

Thus, _Troilus_ _and_ _Criseyde_ is no routine courtly romance. In Boccaccio's version the infidelity of the heroine is _pro_ _forma_ in the light of the shallow nature that is ascribed to her. In greatly expanding Boccaccio's slight romance,

and particularly in introducing into it psychological conflict, Chaucer provided what might be called a novel in verse.

Complex characterization and the infusion of realism into the types sets <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u> apart from those of Chaucer's writings examined in our first two chapters. In the Canterbury period, the poet entered into a new phase of experimentation and development of his means for expressing realism.

CHAPTER IV

TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN

THE FRAMEWORK OF THE CANTERBURY TALES

The Canterbury Tales, Chaucer's masterpiece, consists of
two dozen separate stories. These stories are included within
a framework which comprises two parts: first, a General Prologue
in which the tellers of the tales, a group of pilgrims on a
journey to the shrine of Saint Thomas a Becket in Canterbury,
are introduced; and second, the talks on the road which
develop the characterizations of the pilgrims further and
serve to link their tales together.

All parts of The Canterbury Tales were not composed at
the same time. Certain tales (dealt with in Chapter II)
appear to be of earlier composition than the other parts of the
production. Discussed in Chapters V and VI of this work are
a group of fabliaux and certain other tales generally
considered to be of late composition. The material of this
chapter deals with the framework of The Canterbury Tales,
that is, The General Prologue, and the system of links whereby
the tales are joined together, writings which also show
literary maturity.

The General Prologue to The Canterbury Tales

The General Prologue introduces a group of twenty-nine
pilgrims that Chaucer imagines to have assembled at the

Tabard inn in Southwark, where Harry Bailly was host. They include a Knight, a Squire (the Knight's son), and their Yeoman; a Prioress (called Madame Eglentyne), a Monk (called Dan Piers), a Friar (named Huberd), an Oxford Clerk, a Parson, and two disreputable hangers-on of the church, a Summoner and a Pardoner, who are already acquainted;[1] a Sergeant of the Law and a Doctor of Physic; a Franklin, Merchant, Shipman, Miller, Manciple, Reeve, Plowman (the Parson's brother) and a Wife of Bath (named Alisoun); five Gildsmen and their Cook; a Nun and three Priests (who are in attendance on the Prioress);[2] the Host, Harry Bailly; and a fictional Chaucer.

In form, The General Prologue is simply a consecutive list of portraits characterizing these figures. There are twenty-two portraits, as there are no portraits for the Nun, the Priest, or Chaucer, and as the Gildsmen are described together. The General Prologue thus consists of description: of the accumulation, in the portraits, of details

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[1] A summoner was an officer who cited delinquents to appear before the ecclesiastical court. A pardoner was a layman authorized by the pope to make a living by the sale of indulgences to the public.

[2] As only one of these priests is developed later and as the others increase by two the total number of pilgrims that Chaucer specifies, it is likely that the "preestes thre" mentioned in Gen Prol, 164 is a scribal addition. This is suggested by Robinson, Works, p. 756.

about the physical endowments, dress, personalities, tastes
and customary actions of the personages. There is no dialogue
or direct discourse until near the end, where the Host proposes
that the pilgrims should tell tales while they ride to
Canterbury and pledges each of them to tell four tales, two on
the outward journey and two on the return journey. Actually,
this scheme was never completed.

The portraits of The General Prologue are approximately
equivalent in form and execution. For the purpose of
discussion and illustration, we cite that of the Prioress,
as follows:

> Ther was also a Nonne, a PRIORESSE,
> That of hir smylyng was ful symple and coy;
> Hire gretteste ooth was but by Seinte Loy;
> And she was cleped madame Eglentyne.
> Ful weel she soong the service dyvyne,
> Entuned in hir nose ful semely,
> And Frenssh she spak ful faire and fetisly,
> After the scole of Stratford atte Bowe,
> For Frenssh of Parys was to hire unknowe.
> 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.
> Ful semely after hir mete she raughte.
> And sikerly she was of greet desport,
> And ful plesaunt, and amyable of port,
> And peyned hire to countrefete cheere
> Of court, and to been estatlich of manere,
> And to ben holden digne of reverence.
> But, for to speken of hire conscience,
> She was so charitable and so pitous
> She wolde wepe, if that she saugh a mous

> Kaught in a trappe, if it were deed or bledde.
> Of smale houndes hadde she that she fedde
> With rosted flessh, or milk and wastel-breed.
> But soore wepte she if oon of hem were deed,
> Or if men smoot it with a yerde smerte;
> And al was conscience and tendre herte.
> Ful semyly hir wympul pynched was;
> Hir nose tretys, hir eyen greye as glas,
> Hir mouth ful smal, and therto softe and reed;
> But sikerly she hadde a fair forheed;
> It was almoost a spanne brood, I trowe;
> For, hardily, she was nat undergrowe.
> Ful fetys was hir cloke, as I was war.
> Of smal coral aboute hire arm she bar
> A peire of bedes, gauded al with grene,
> And theron heng a brooch of gold ful sheene,
> On which ther was first write a crowned A,
> And after _Amor_ _vincit_ _omnia_.
>
> (_Gen_ _Prol_, 118-62)

This passage about the Prioress is far removed from any personal description in the love visions, the early Canterbury tales, or even _Troilus_ _and_ _Criseyde_. There had never been a portrait like it before. Chaucer's usage of the rhetorical device has changed in the direction of greater realism and flexibility, and differs markedly from his more restricted and less powerful usage in earlier works. More abundant details are included concerning the customary actions, penchants and preoccupations of the subject, and a more extensive elaboration is provided of physical appearance in terms of dress. This particular portrait actually appears to be a burlesque of traditional ones like those of Blanche, Emily, Virginia, and others in earlier writings. While the Prioress' _effectio_ and _notatio_[3] are conventional enough,

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[3] Discussed above, p. 6.

these qualities are more becoming to a courtly heroine of romance than to a cloistered nun.

The Prioress is inappropriately made to be "estatlich," "symple and coy." Her singing -- a fine accomplishment of the courtly heroine -- is nasal. Her lovely features -- small red mouth, gray eyes, and "tretys" nose[4] -- contrast oddly with her big build and vast forehead. Her self-chosen name is that of at least two beautiful and worldly heroines in well-known romances.[5] She swears by St. Eloy -- a man who had cut a dashing, worldly figure before turning religious.[6] Like any coquette, she gives particular attention to her clothes; but the elaborately pleated wymple and fashionable cloak, the prayer beads "gauded al with grene," and their pendant brooch with its suggestive motto "Love conquers all" were vanities expressly forbidden to nuns of the time. So were the "smale houndes" on which she lavished the finest white bread.[7]

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[4] These traits were typical of romantic heroines. See D. S. Brewer, "The Ideal of Feminine Beauty in Medieval Literature, especially 'Harley Lyrics,' Chaucer, and some Elizabethans," MLR, L (July, 1955), 259.

[5] Muriel Bowden, A Commentary on the General Prologue to the "Canterbury Tales" (New York, 1948), p. 94.

[6] Gordon Hall Gerould, Chaucerian Essays (Princeton, 1952), p. 15.

[7] Bowden, A Commentary, p. 98.

Her table manners are finical and her French is provincial.

All the details given about the Prioress -- her dress, possessions, customary speech and actions -- point to the vanity and affectation that are the main traits of her character. Far from being presented as an ideal, the Prioress is an individual, and her portrait deals in a kind of irony that is the essence of realism. Her traits amount to aberrations in a person of her calling, and the incongruity between her portrait and the stereotypes on which it is based yields a subtle and gentle satire. Nothing like it can be found in Chaucer's earlier works, nor in the works of any of his contemporaries or precursors.

When one compares the portrait of the Prioress with other descriptions of clerical figures in medieval literature Chaucer's achievement appears even more original. Through the creation of a slightly ludicrous personage, Chaucer succeeds in conveying a realistic vignette from his actual environment as well as a criticism immeasurably more compelling than the obvious moralizing about the clergy and the unimaginative use of allegorical Virtues and Vices in the works of Langland and Gower. In short, in the portrait of the Prioress Chaucer approximates the modern writer's mode of describing individual people and a moral viewpoint as well. Traits of character are suggested obliquely, rather than by statements. Chaucer was able to achieve the preceding results through the use of the traditional portrait.

Within the portrait Chaucer includes another of his
techniques of characterization, medieval "scientific" lore.
The choice of data, however, has become more practical, for
he deals not in astrological nativities, but in the more
credible physiognomical parallels between body and mind.
According to the medieval pseudo-science of physiognomy -- a
"science" which claimed to determine character from outward
appearance -- the Prioress' very broad forehead is indicative
of a shallow and frivolous nature.[8]   Thus a bodily characteristic
is included not merely for photographic effect, but to reveal
the inner person at the same time.   Even today, the Kretschmer
and Sheldon somatotypes, or classifications relating
personality to types of body build, show that this "science"
is still being seriously considered.   And, on a popular level,
the use made by writers of certain bodily characteristics to
suggest aspects of character is too common to need discussion.
It is interesting that Chaucer seized upon this enduring
device in building up his fictional creation.[9]

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[8]
Thomas Blake Clark, "Forehead of Chaucer's Prioress,"
PQ, IX (July, 1930), 312-4.

[9]
Beside using details drawn from physiognomy, in certain
portraits Chaucer also drew from the physiological knowledge
of his day; thus, he describes the Reeve as choleric and the
Franklin as sanguine. (Depending on which of four humours
or elements, blood, phlegm, choler and black bile, was
preponderant in a man's body, he was held to be of sanguine,
phlegmatic, choleric, or melancholic temperament respectively.
(See Works, p. 761.))

Above all, the portrait of the Prioress shows that the
poet has come upon a way of discovering the whole person by
means of highly particularized and selective aspects of
appearance and behaviour; he fuses these details together in
a deceptively casual fashion, seeming to present them almost
at random. But, although they are highly specific in
themselves, and arranged with apparent casualness, the separate
elements of the portrait unite to form a harmonious whole.
The portrait of the Prioress conveys the unequivocal general
impression of a charming but worldly nun, though the inherent
satire is discoverable only through an accurate interpretation
of the details provided. In short, by all his methods, Chaucer
no longer announces qualities of character -- he demonstrates
them. Through the use of specific details, some of which have
meaning on more than one level, he succeeds in conveying
indirectly what his character is, mentally, physically,
emotionally, and morally. The portrait so handled is very
different from that in the early writings where Chaucer dealt
in unambiguously ideal and stereotyped attributes.

The foregoing applies to nearly all the portraits of
The General Prologue, which are composite accumulations of
descriptive details that reveal the outer characters in
crystal clarity and their inner qualities as well. To

achieve these sketches Chaucer actually welded together his
techniques of characterization in a manner similar to that
employed for the Prioress. An outline of these sketches is
herewith provided.

In the portrait of the Friar (Gen Prol, 208-69),
characterization again depends upon the inferences a reader
may make on the basis of the effectio and notatio which
Chaucer provides. The Friar's physical appearance and clothes
are made vivid through similes such as the following:

> His nekke whit was as the flour-de-lys;
> Therto he strong was as a champioun.
>
> > (Gen Prol, 238-9)
>
> ...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.
>
> > (Gen Prol, 259-63)
>
> His eyen twynkled in his heed aryght,
> As doon the sterres in the frosty nyght.
>
> > (Gen Prol, 267-8)

Details concerning the Friar's way of life are also supplied:
his begging of alms and his generosity in giving easy penances
for the confessions he hears in his limit; his interests, the
singing of ballads one of the chief; his associations, not,
Chaucer says, with "sike lazars," but with "wommen of the toun,"
barmaids, and wealthy franklins or landowners; and his deeds,
such as providing weddings for young women at his own expense.
But while these descriptive details add a strong measure of

realism, it is the irony inherent in them which gives the characterization its chief force. The Friar's bell-shaped cloak was a vanity forbidden the clergy of the time. He neglects the lepers -- but care of the sick was the special duty of Franciscan friars such as he. He gives his attention to barmaids and franklins to obtain money as well as carnal delights. When he hears the confessions of these people he ignores the fact that the absolution of sins is conditional upon repentance rather than on the alms and favours which he demands. And, finally, his provision of weddings for young women at his own cost is not so much an illustration of his generosity as an innuendo that he is notorious for seducing the girls in his limit.[10]

In view of this collective evidence, the hyperbolic praise accorded to the Friar by Chaucer becomes unbearably ironic: "Unto his ordre he was a noble post"; "Ther nas no man nowher so vertuous"; "This worthy lymytour"; "A ful solempne man." The Friar is a rogue; but Chaucer says so indirectly and thus, as in the case of the Prioress, anticipates the modern method of characterizing a personage by allowing the reader to gather inferences from the way he looks and acts.

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[10] For the evidence that this was not a purely fictitious fault but was known among friars, see Karl Young, "A Note on Chaucer's Friar," MLN, L (February, 1935), 83.

The Monk, Dan Piers, is another pilgrim whose roguery is brought out in this oblique way (Gen Prol, 165-207). Casual bits of information make up his portrait. His dress is given in great detail; and Chaucer says he likes roast swan and that he owns dogs and horses for the hunt, which he prefers to working in the monastery. When one knows that rich food as well as the possession of hunting dogs and horses were specifically forbidden to the monks of the time;[11] that gowns trimmed with fur, intricate jewellery and soft leather boots such as he wore were considered signs of sinful worldliness inappropriate to men of God;[12] and that the religious disciplinarians further insisted upon claustration and manual labour,[13] which the Monk scorns, one appreciates the ironic meaning of the hyperbolic praises heaped on him by the poet: "a fair for the maistrie," "a manly man, to been an abbot able," and "a fair prelaat."

Finally, the portrait derives much of its effectiveness

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[11]
G. G. Coulton, The Medieval Village (Cambridge, England, 1925), pp. 215-6.

[12]
Bowden, A Commentary, p. 114, and H. S. Bennett, "Medieval Literature and the Modern Reader" in Essays and Studies by Members of the English Association, XXXI (1946), 11.

[13]
G. G. Coulton, Medieval Panorama (Cambridge, England, 1949), p. 270.

from the figures of speech that combine to imply the man's
sensuality:

> 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;
> .   .   .   .   .
> He was nat pale as a forpyned goost.
>
> (Gen Prol, 198-205)

In the portrait of the Pardoner (Gen Prol, 669-714)
Chaucer gives the picture of another venal ecclesiastical
character. The Pardoner is not merely a rogue but an actual
impostor.

> His walet lay biforn hym in his lappe,
> Bretful of pardoun, comen from Rome al hoot.
>
> (Gen Prol,
> 686-7)

But since he is also described as carrying fake relics to
impress his ignorant customers (a fragment of pillow case
which he claims to be from the Virgin's veil and saints'
relics that are actually "pigges bones") the pardons which he
sells to the superstitious populace are likely to be
fraudulent as well. Using hyperbolic and ironic language as
in the other clerical portraits, Chaucer terms him
"a noble ecclesiaste."

A precise depiction of the Pardoner's dress and appearance
is given by means of similes and metaphors. The man's hair
is as straight and smooth as flax and as yellow as wax. His

eyes are wide and "glarynge...as an hare"; his voice, thin,
and "as smal as hath a goot." Altogether, he is compared to
"a geldyng or a mare." Such is the man who, with scornful
jests and trickery, "made the person and the peple his apes."
Nor does Chaucer stop here. One might ponder about the kind
of personal quirk or frustration that would lead this
individual into a life of vice. A definite clue is provided
in these details on the Pardoner's physical appearance.
Unattractive as they are taken in themselves, they have a
further and deeper significance according to medieval
physiognomy: they reveal that the Pardoner is a
eunuchus ex nativitate, a eunuch from birth.[14] This is
supported by the indications given in the portrait that he is
carrying on a depraved relationship with the Summoner, his
friend on the pilgrimage. It is also supported later by his
empty boasts about his sexual prowess with women, both in his
Prologue and where he interrupts the Wife of Bath during her
Prologue.

The other disreputable hanger-on of the church is the
Summoner (Gen Prol, 623-68). He is described as given to
excesses in food and drink and as being as "hoot...and

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[14]
Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences
(New York, 1926), p. 64. This work provides the definitive
discussion of the part played by physiognomy and other
pseudo-sciences in Chaucer's work.

lecherous as a sparwe." His "fyr-reed cherubynnes face" is
a badge of this depravity, for he suffers from a real
medieval disease called "alopicia" (a form of leprosy), the
causes of which were drunkenness and lasciviousness.[15]   Of
this depraved character, whom he draws with such realism,
Chaucer remarks: "A bettre felawe sholde men noght fynde."

Just as Chaucer attacked the clergy, so he presented
satirical pictures of the professional men on the pilgrimage.
Permeating the portrait of the Sergeant of the Law
(Gen Prol, 309-30), a man whom he describes as being
"ful riche of excellence," is the insinuation that the lawyer
has more "fees and robes" than can be honestly explained.
The Doctor of Physic in his portrait (Gen Prol, 411-44) is
also hyperbolically praised: "In al this world ne was ther
noon hym lik," and "He was a verray, parfit praktisour."
But these praises are ironic in the light of the few carefully
selected details which Chaucer uses in the Doctor's portrait,
including his expensive robe, his collusion with the
apothecary, and the profits that he made during the plague.

Pilgrims of the middle class also come in for their share
of satire and abuse. The best known of these figures is a

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[15]
The Summoner's disease is discussed by Curry,
Mediaeval Sciences, pp. 41ff.

weaver called Alisoun, the Wife of Bath (Gen Prol, 445-76).
The Wife's main physical and temperamental characteristics as
well as her background, way of life and interests, are
described in her portrait. The description is aided here as
elsewhere by the use of figures of speech (hyperbole, irony,
innuendo, simile) and by physiognomical scientific detail.

As a successful business woman -- Chaucer says that
Alisoun's talent at weaving surpasses that of the Dutch -- she
is well able to afford extravagant clothing, trips to distant
shrines, and may even insist on being the first to make her
offering in church. However, the Wife's attire, which
includes a ten-pound coverchief, red hose, obtrusively new
shoes and a hat "brood as is a bokeler or a targe," constitutes
the kind of tasteless and conspicuous costume assumed by
members of the newly-rich middle class. Moreover, pilgrimages
in medieval times were well known occasions for indulgence in
sexual vice. Finally, strife over precedence at the offering
was a stock medieval illustration of the sin of pride.[16]
Chaucer also mentions that the Wife is "gat-tothed," which means,
according to the physiognomists, that she is bold and
lascivious[17] -- qualities self-evident in the fact that she
had married five times and had had "oother compaignye in youthe."

16
  Works, pp. 764-5.

17
  Works, p. 765.

Among the churls on the pilgrimage is the Miller
(Gen Prol, 545-66). By the use of similes and metaphors,
Chaucer gives a strong impression of his powerful, thick-set
physique, wide black nostrils and enormous mouth. The exact
red of the Miller's beard is evoked because its colour is
compared to that of a fox. In shape and size it is compared
to a spade. The top of the Miller's nose features a wart, and,
on top of the wart, a tuft of hairs. These, too, are red; not
as red as a fox, for that is too furry a texture to be
realistic, but as red as bristles in a sow's ear. These
infinitesimal details render the impression of the Miller
unforgettable because it is almost photographic. The Miller's
features, according to medieval physiognomy, denote a
shameless, loquacious, quarrelsome and lecherous nature.[18]
The impression of lechery is further stressed in his playing
the bagpipes. Innocent and trivial as this detail may seem
to a modern reader, a medieval reader would have grasped
Chaucer's ulterior meaning, for bagpipes at that time were a
common symbol of lechery.[19]

The portraits in The General Prologue are too numerous
to permit a detailed discussion of each. Other pilgrims

[18]
    Curry, Mediaeval Sciences, pp. 79-90.

[19]
    Because of their resemblance to male genital organs.
See Edward A. Block, "Chaucer's Millers and their Bagpipes,"
Speculum, XXIX (April, 1954), 239-43.

include the elegant and chivalrous Squire, the irascible
Reeve, the cunning Manciple, and many more. They are portrayed
by the same descriptive method that we have illustrated in the
examples above, their appearances being evoked with startling
immediacy and their vices and vanities obliquely revealed.
A few pilgrims -- the Knight, the Plowman, the Clerk,
the Yeoman and the Parson -- are represented somewhat differently.
Chaucer sincerely praises these men, and their devotion to their
work, without the slightest trace of irony. Their portraits,
in fact, remind one of the idealized descriptions in Chaucer's
early work. Here, however, the ideals are not unrelieved; the
good characters provide a needed contrast to the others.

Considering the sketches of the Prologue in general, we
may say that they differ from Chaucer's earlier characterizations
in three main ways. First, many of the characters are clerical,
or of the middle and lower classes, in contrast to the largely
aristocratic figures that the poet previously employed. Why
he started to use these figures so extensively is a mystery;
perhaps the change may be attributed to his political
appointments, which removed him from the court and threw him
in with the common people. In any event, Chaucer certainly had
gained confidence in his own observation of human nature as
literary inspiration, for, secondly, unlike earlier figures,
the characters in The General Prologue have few literary
antecedents. Only three of them -- the Friar, Pardoner, and
the Wife of Bath -- have any verifiable indebtedness to past

literature, and that debt is slight. The poet doubtless
derived inspiration for his sketches of The General Prologue
from Jean de Meun's continuation of Lorris' Roman de la Rose,
which satirizes women, monastic orders, and mendicants; but
Meun's influence for the most part is unspecific.[20]

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[20]
    Chaucer's Friar and Pardoner were probably modeled in
part on Faux-Semblant and the Wife of Bath on La Vieille,
characters in Meun's part of the Roman. How insignificant
this influence is may be seen, for instance, by comparing
a pertinent passage on Faux-Semblant to the portrait of
Chaucer's Friar. In this connection we cite the following
passage (quoted in Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury
Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster [Chicago, 1941],
pp. 410-11):

        Si ne querraie ja cessier
        Ou d'empereeurs confessier,
        Ou reis, ou dus, ou bers, ou contes...
        Je n'ai cure de povres genz:
        Leur estaz n'est ne beaus ne genz...
          E pour le sauvement des ames,
        J'enquier des seigneurs e des dames,
        E de trestoutes leur maisnies
        Les proprietez e les vies...
        E pour aveir des genz loenges,
        Des riches omes, par losenges,
        Empetrons que letres nous doignent
        Qui la bonté de nous tesmoignent,
        Si que l'en creie par le monde
        Que vertu toute en nous abonde.

The basic idea, that the cleric confesses not the poor but the
rich, from whom advantage may be gained, is similar to the
underlying idea in the portrait of Chaucer's Friar.
Faux-Semblant exposes himself directly. Chaucer reveals his
Friar obliquely by using subtle techniques such as irony and
innuendo, which are absent in the characterization of
Faux-Semblant. The same is true in the other instances of the
poet's indebtedness.
    Chaucer's originality in subject matter has been
emphasized by many scholars and critics. For example, see
Howard Rollin Patch, "Characters in Medieval Literature,"
MLN, XL (January, 1925), 2-3.

Thirdly, there is the technical change in the art of
characterization which we have demonstrated, that is, the
transformation of rhetorical devices in reference to realistic
experience and psychology.

At the end of The General Prologue, a reader fully
understands the characters and is prepared to enjoy the part
played by these colourful and varied figures in the subsequent
narrative, that is, in the stories that they tell, and in the
links or pauses where they act and speak along the road to
Canterbury between the stories.

The Links of The Canterbury Tales

In preparing his dramatis personae with such care and
exactitude in The General Prologue, Chaucer showed his
intention of making The Canterbury Tales an entirely integrated
production, unified by character. His was an ambitious and
original plan, quite unlike that underlying the conventional
framed stories (stories within stories) in which the tellers
of the tales were of no intrinsic importance and were not
much described.[21]

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[21]
    Robert A. Pratt and Karl Young, "The Literary Framework
of the Canterbury Tales," Sources and Analogues, pp. 1-81,
cite and discuss the analogous framed stories. Including the
two having the most in common with Chaucer's work, Sercambi's
Novelle and Boccaccio's Decameron, none of them contains
characterizing portraits or such extensive dramatic
interaction between the characters in the links.

In carrying out his scheme, Chaucer further expands the characterizations of the pilgrims through the speeches which he gives to them in the links between the tales. He reveals them through what they themselves say and by the descriptive viewpoint of the others, particularly that of the Host. This dialogue serves to strengthen or to modify the impressions of the characters as he presented them in The General Prologue.

The Clerk shows himself a scholar indeed when he prefaces his tale by giving his literary sources. The degenerate Pardoner quite understandably insists on stopping at a tavern before giving his tale. To show that people are not always what they seem, Chaucer modifies some impressions of the characters. The Reeve, who, according to his portrait in The General Prologue, has spent his life slyly accumulating wealth at his employer's expense, shows that his intense fear of death probably spoils his pleasure in money. The prosperous and seemingly self-satisfied Merchant of The General Prologue tells, in the links, of his recent marriage and his disillusionment. The rich but uneducated Franklin, when congratulating the Squire on the eloquent delivery of his tale, says rather sadly that he wishes that his son had accomplishments like the Squire's;

and, before telling his own tale, explains that he knows
no colours of rhetoric, but only those colours
"as growen in the mede."

The pilgrims reveal their attitudes toward one another.
The Reeve and Miller, Friar and Summoner, and Cook and
Manciple do so when they quarrel. The pilgrims treat the
Prioress with respect. They show very well that they know
what the Pardoner is like, for when the Host asks him to tell
a merry tale they cry: "Nay, lat hym telle us of no ribaudye!"

Further description of the pilgrims is provided by the
Host, who often uses apt figures of speech to depict them.
He says of the Clerk:

> "Ye ryde as coy and stille as dooth a mayde
> Were newe spoused, sittynge at the bord....
> <div align="right">(<u>Prol</u> <u>ClT</u>, 2-3)</div>

Of Chaucer he says:

> "Thou lookest as thou woldest fynde an hare,
> For evere upon the ground I se thee stare.
>
> 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'enbrace
> For any womman, smal and fair of face.
> He semeth elvyssh by his contenaunce,
> For unto no wight dooth he daliaunce."
> <div align="right">(<u>Prol</u> <u>Thop</u>, 696-704)</div>

The Monk he describes thus:

> Thou art...
>
> ...of brawnes and of bones,
> A ful farynge persone....
> I pray to God, yeve hym confusioun
> That first thee broghte unto religioun!
> Thou woldest han been a tredefowel aright.
> <div align="right">(<u>Prol</u> <u>MkT</u>,
> 1938-45)</div>

The pilgrim most characterized through dialogue in the links is the Host himself. In arbitrating in the disputes that break out, and in otherwise ordering the proceedings, he shows organizational ability and authoritarianism. When a tale has been told, he plays the literary critic, and his comments reveal the limitations of his education and tastes. He loves sentimental tales like those of Constance and Virginia, and the Shipman's crude fabliau, but he spurns Chaucer's sophisticated burlesque. When he has heard Chaucer's Tale of Melibee, about a virtuous woman, Prudence, he is bitterly struck by the contrast between her and his own wife, Goodelief. He then embarks on a description of his miserable life back home and, with the repetition of Goodelief's domineering qualities, one understands that the innkeeper is not always so self-possessed as he is when alone in public.

It may be added that in many cases the tales themselves are a further reflection of the pilgrims' personalities. While a number of the tales (those examined in Chapter II) may not have been written expressly for the places they occupy, Chaucer shows skill in assigning them appropriately. He gives the two tales of romance and chivalry to the Knight and his son, the Squire. The sad tale of Constance suits the Man of Law, whose profession after all in part depends on his skill at pathetic narration.[22] The tale of the little

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[22]
See Edgar C. Knowlton, "Chaucer's Man of Law," JEGP, XXIII (January, 1924), 83-93.

Christian schoolboy is becoming to the Prioress, in whom the woman is but imperfectly submerged in the nun. The story of patient Griselda is used to form the Clerk's answer to the arch-feminist on the pilgrimage, the Wife of Bath. The Monk, perhaps feeling that the base image that the Host gives of him in the links must be corrected, may recount the tragedies in an effort to show that he is a learned man who ought to be treated with respect.[23] Even more germane to their tellers are Chaucer's fabliaux and late tales. A discussion of these most mature works occupies the following two chapters.

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[23]
See Bertrand H. Bronson, *In Search of Chaucer* (University of Toronto Press, 1960), pp. 74-5.

CHAPTER V

TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN

THE FABLIAUX OF THE CANTERBURY TALES

Late in his career, when the spirit of Meun had definitely succeeded that of Lorris, Chaucer discovered the narrative art of the old French fabliaux, or at least put it to use in a group of Canterbury tales. The seven tales of the Miller, Reeve, Shipman, Friar, Summoner, Merchant, and Cook are all fabliaux. They were written at the beginning of the Canterbury period, probably in the early 1390's after the framework and before parts of later composition like The Wife of Bath's Prologue.[1]

Fabliaux were prevalent in France between the twelfth and fourteenth centuries. They are verse narratives concerned with the life and manners of the middle and lower classes. Often they deal satirically with marital situations and the pretensions of the clergy. In these respects, the fabliaux embody the same mocking and skeptical spirit as Meun's continuation of the Roman de la Rose, and, like the Roman, they are distinct from the chivalric and courtly literary modes. (The critical pictures of feminine nature given in the fabliaux may even have been inspired by a reaction against the

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[1] On the date see Works, p. 786.

extravagant cult of woman as expressed in courtly romances.)
Cynical though they are in spirit, the fabliaux are basically
realistic: in a period of false ornament, they are faithful
to nature; in a time of idealizations, they treat mundane
characters and settings.[2]

The influence of the fabliaux is undoubtedly in part
responsible for Chaucer's realism in the depiction of
people and manners in the tales named above. Furthermore,
although no precise sources for his tales have ever been
found, the main motifs of the plots are common to the
genre, and are paralleled in extant analogues.[3] Despite
his indebtedness in these respects, Chaucer immeasurably
improved upon the characterizations of the conventional fabliaux.

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[2]
    The fabliau is discussed by Walter Morris Hart,
"The Narrative Art of the Old French Fabliaux," in the
Kittredge Anniversary Papers, ed. Professors Robinson,
Sheldon, and Neilson (Boston, 1913), pp. 209-16.

[3]
    The analogues are cited in Sources and Analogues of
Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed. W. F. Bryan and
Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941). See Germaine Dempster,
"The Merchant's Tale," pp. 333-56; Walter Morris Hart,
"The Reeve's Tale," pp. 124-47; Walter Morris Hart,
"The Summoner's Tale," pp. 275-87; Earl De Witt Lyon,
"The Cook's Tale," pp. 148-54; John Webster Spargo,
"The Shipman's Tale," pp. 439-46; Archer Taylor,
"The Friar's Tale," pp. 269-74; and Stith Thompson,
"The Miller's Tale," pp. 106-23.
    Only one analogue ranks as a possible source. That
analogue, Le Meunier et les II Clers (extant in two versions
cited by Hart in pp. 126-47), lacks the realistic treatment
of character that distinguishes Chaucer's Reeve's Tale, the
original features of which will be discussed below.

In the traditional fabliaux, the plots are emphasized.
These plots, which usually turn on tricks whereby people
are made the victims of coarse practical jokes, are valued
solely for their comic effects. Characters are used as little
more than puppets, and there is seldom any logical connection
between their personalities and what happens to them according
to the plots. In his fabliaux, Chaucer subordinates the plots
to the characters. He fully describes his personages, and,
in fact, makes the action of the stories the outcome of particular
traits. The borrowed tricks upon which the plots turn are not
merely comic, but are significant as the consequences of
character. Chaucer's realism in the fabliaux is thus of a more
extensive and modern order than that in the prototypes.
Moreover, the techniques whereby he drew his characters are,
once again, those he used in previous works, and they constitute
the chief difference between his tales and analogous materials.[4]

Unlike the conventional fabliaux, each of Chaucer's tales
exhibits, usually near the beginning, one or more portraits
designed to characterize the protagonist or the principal
figures. Like the portraits of The General Prologue,
they are built up from vivid, concrete details and

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[4] This was ascertained by a thorough study of all analogues
cited in the articles named above in footnote 3.

figures of speech which combine to evoke a convincing and
immediate impression of the characters' physical and mental
traits and customary actions. These portraits are functional,
for they often point up particular qualities on which, in
his versions, the ensuing actions of the plots in part depend.

In the conventional fabliaux, the characters seldom
and sometimes never speak. Chaucer endows his personages
with fluent dialogue, in which the diction and linguistic
structures are germane to their personalities. In places,
he uses dialect. Speech so used not merely carries forward
the action, but, like the speech used in modern fiction,
illustrates character at the same time.

In addition, Chaucer heavily relies on proverbs and
sententia as means by which his characters rationalize their
bad or foolish intentions or actions, or persuade others to
some view or action basic to the plot.

We shall now illustrate how Chaucer used these techniques
in each of his fabliaux.

The Miller's Tale

The Miller's Tale utilizes stock characters, including
a jealous old husband, his young wife, and her young
admirers. Also common in analogous fabliaux is a rivalry

between the two young lovers, a seduction by one of them of
the wife during her husband's absence, and a coarse trick
played by the disappointed lover on the victorious one.

In the analogues the woman is not much described, the
lovers are scarcely differentiated from each other, the
wronged husband is absent by chance, and the trick might just
as well have been performed by one lover as by the other.
Chaucer illustrates the wife's attractiveness, suggests the
reasons why she prefers one lover more than the other,
makes these two lovers of different character, devises a
scheme whereby the successful lover motivates the husband's
absence, shows why the seemingly successful lover deserves
to be the victim of his rival's trick, and justifies the
husband's being duped.

The poet carries out the first of the above motifs by
describing Alison, the eighteen-year-old wife of a jealous
old carpenter and the heroine of the tale, in a formal
portrait (MillT, 3233-70). This portrait emphasizes her gay
disposition and her sensual appeal, qualities precisely given
by means of similes drawn from rural life, which appear in
nearly every line of the description. She is as slender as a
weazel, as playful as a kid or calf, and as skittish as a colt.
She is fairer than a young pear tree, and softer than lamb's
wool. Her brows are as black as a sloe, and her song is as
loud and lively as a swallow's. Because it stresses physical

and mainly animalistic comparisons, this description parodies the conventional portrait and the refined similes which Chaucer had used for decades to depict ideal courtly ladies. The comparisons to young animals make Alison into a different kind of paragon -- one of natural attractiveness and susceptibility. These qualities make plausible her old husband's jealousy and the intense love which she inspires in her two suitors.

The poet differentiates between Alison's two young lovers. Absolon, a parish clerk (whose portrait is given in MillT, 3312-38), is an active and rather superficial young man. He can sing serenades reaching an octave above treble; he acts in a parish play to attract Alison's attention; he nimbly imitates every dance step popular at Oxford; and he keeps himself perfectly groomed from the top of his golden head to the tips of his fashionably shod toes. He is extremely fastidious and even squeamish.

In contrast to Absolon's characterization, not much is said about his rival's appearance or recreations. In his portrait (MillT, 3190-3220), Nicholas, a student who boards with the carpenter and his wife, is limned as a man of thought. Although he is skilled in making clandestine love, at the university he learns astrology, not dance steps, and he puts his scientific knowledge to practical use in forecasting the weather. His room, which features an impressive array of books and laboratory equipment, is also described.

It is clear from the portraits that Absolon is
probably too much of a dandy to appeal to Alison, who is
bawdy and rustic. Unlike Absolon, Nicholas is very direct. He

> ...heeld hire harde by the haunche-bones,
> And seyde, "Lemman, love me al atones...."
> (MillT, 3279-80)

> And thakked hire aboute the lendes weel....
> (MillT, 3304)

Alison readily yields to his lascivious overtures.

To bring about an opportunity for a tryst, Nicholas now
exploits his astrological knowledge to get his landlord out
of the way. He convinces the old carpenter that to save his
pretty young wife from certain death during an imminent flood
which he pretends to have augured by means of astrology, he
must take his advice and follow certain instructions.
Nicholas succeeds because he is cunning and eloquent, while
the carpenter is ignorant and superstitious.

The carpenter's mentality is reflected in his speech.
He gives a garbled version of the night-spell (MillT, 3483-6),
and uses linguistic structures like this:
"I saugh to-day a cors yborn to chirche / That now, on
Monday last, I saugh hym wirche." (MillT, 3429-30).

Nicholas is well aware of his landlord's mentality.
Therefore, in outlining the preparations that he wishes
the carpenter to make, he is a true psychologist.

In order to convince the carpenter, he paints a concrete
picture of future events:

> Whan that the grete shour is goon away,
> Thanne shaltou swymme as myrie, I undertake,
> As dooth the white doke after hire drake.
> Thanne wol I clepe, 'How, Alison! how, John!
> Be myrie, for the flood wol passe anon.'
> (MillT, 3574-8)

Bearing in mind the carpenter's religious faith, Nicholas
alludes to the Biblical story of Noah (MillT, 3528-40).
He trades also upon the power that proverbs and
sententious maxims exercise over the simple mind and uses
them to persuade the old man to carry out his plan:

> Men seyn thus, 'sende the wise, and sey no thyng:'
> Thou art so wys, it needeth thee nat teche.
> Go, save oure lyf, and that I the biseche....
> (MillT,
> 3598-3600)

The carpenter is convinced, and carries out Nicholas'
instructions. He hangs three tubs from the roof by ropes.
These are intended to accommodate him, his wife and
Nicholas. According to the plan, at the first sign of the
rising flood Nicholas will shout "Water!" This will be the
signal for them to cut the ropes and so fall on the crest
of the tide and go floating away in safety. Only after he
has prepared the stage and actors in the manner that we have
described does Chaucer introduce the stock motifs of plot
which he borrowed from the genre.

On an appointed night, Nicholas, the carpenter and
Alison climb into the tubs. After the carpenter falls asleep,

Alison and Nicholas descend. While they are making love, Absolon appears at the window and demands a kiss. Alison presents her seat, which Absolon kisses. Realizing this, he goes away in anger, fetches a hot iron and calls for another kiss. This time Nicholas presents his posterior, which Absolon brands. Anguished, Nicholas cries "Water!" The carpenter awakes, and, thinking that the signal has been given, cuts his rope; he breaks his arm in the fall.

The misdirected kiss and branding are motifs of plot found in earlier fabliaux; but Chaucer handles them so that they are not merely comic, but also significant in terms of character. To medieval minds untutored in modern literary subtleties the mere spectacle of one lover branding his rival's posterior with a red-hot iron may have been comic. It is rather more significant and realistic by today's standards when this physical crudity is practiced upon Nicholas, the shrewd, eloquent man of thought, by Absolon, who is devoid of psychological insight and astrological knowledge, but smart enough, once his fastidious tastes have been offended, to take a simple and direct line of action in turning the tables on his supposedly intellectual rival. When the carpenter breaks his arm in his fall from the roof, the event, albeit comic, is a realistic commentary on the fruit of his ignorance and gullibility. The events in Chaucer's story do not merely happen by chance, but, as in modern writing, represent the outcome of the interaction between individual characters.

The Reeve's Tale

The plot concerns the seduction of a miller's wife and daughter by two students. Unlike analogous fabliaux, Chaucer's tale demonstrates why the miller deserved this dishonour.

Symkyn, the miller of Trumpington, and his wife and daughter appear in portraits at the beginning. Their appearances and manners clearly betray that they are common folk. Nevertheless, they are pretentious. The miller's wife, who is the illegitimate daughter of the town's parson, puts on airs because she was educated in a convent. Symkyn's adolescent daughter, a sturdy wench, is expected by her parents to make a noble marriage to be arranged by this very same parson. Symkyn, absurdly proud of his two "ladies," is accustomed to swagger around fully armed to protect their honour against triflers. Two other traits are mentioned. He is a notorious thief, especially of grain sent to him from nearby Cambridge college. Like many men of trade, he disdains book learning.

Two students, Aleyn and John, arrive at the mill with grain from the college. They are determined that this time no flour will be stolen. The miller embarks on a program to cheat these bookish, provincial men as much as he can. (That the students are from the north is indicated in their speech.) The mental processes

of Symkyn are made clear to the reader, who is allowed to hear his silent resolutions. Like other rogues in Chaucer's stories, Symkyn enforces his ignoble intentions with the "authority" of proverbs:

> The moore queynte crekes that they make,
> The moore wol I stele whan I take.
> In stide of flour yet wol I yeve hem bren.
> 'The gretteste clerkes been noght wisest men,'
> As whilom to the wolf thus spak the mare,
> Of al hir art I counte noght a tare."
>
> (RvT, 4051-6)

(Also see lines 4096-7.)

The miller succeeds still in stealing a part of the grain and he also lets the students' horse loose. As a result, they are obliged to spend the night with him and his family in a common bedroom.

Although he thinks himself very clever, ironically Symkyn has no priority on his kind of reasoning. When Aleyn determines to seduce the miller's daughter in revenge for the ruses her father has played upon him and his friend, it is by means of a maxim, appropriately drawn from his studies, that he rationalizes his intention. He says:

> ...John, ther is a lawe that says thus,
> That gif a man in a point be agreved,
> That in another he sal be releved.
>
> (RvT, 4180-2)

Then he creeps into the bed of the miller's daughter and seduces her while her father is asleep. It is with a proverb, too, that John after this supports his crucial decision to try his luck with the miller's wife: "I wil arise and auntre it,

by my fayth! / 'Unhardy is unseely,' thus men sayth"
(RvT, 4209-10). Accordingly, when the miller's wife happens
to leave the room, John transfers the cradle, by which her bed is
identifiable, to the foot of his own. She subsequently enters
his bed and is seduced.

Before dawn Aleyn goes to rejoin John and, hitting the
cradle in the dark, thinks that he has mistaken the bed and
goes instead to the one occupied by the miller. He awakes
him and describes his adventure. The enraged father attacks
him and is injured in the ensuing fray. The students escape.

Whether taken as just retribution upon the miller for
his false pride and dishonesty or as owing to the superior
cunning of the students, the two seductions are more than
mere pranks in the light of the emphasis, in Chaucer's account,
on the pretensions of Symkyn and his family. A further
realistic touch occurs during the denouement. Having enjoyed
an unusual night of love, the miller's wife, in the midst of
the fray between the students and her now enlightened husband,
is made affectedly to call out the garbled scraps recalled
from her convent "nortelrie": "Help! hooly croys of Bromeholm...
In manus tuas! Lord, to thee I calle!" It is a minor point;
but it indicates the pains that the poet took to transform an
account of a practical joke into a sequence of characterization.

The Friar's Tale

The main motif of the plot, a devil's taking what has been assigned to him by a curse, is common to the genre. However, far from being the hapless victim of an other-worldly visitant, the garrulous summoner in Chaucer's tale literally talks himself into being snatched off to hell. The summoner's fate is even consonant with poetic justice, for he is an exceedingly evil man.

At the beginning of the tale, Chaucer uses a portrait to characterize the summoner. The summoner takes advantage of his position to prey upon people by threatening to report them to the ecclesiastical court for misdemeanours whether they are guilty or innocent. Using persuasive arguments, he convinces them that their wisest and cheapest course is to procure his silence by paying the bribe that he asks. He is described as a thief and a bawd; a "judas" who could catch the scent of a victim better than any hunting dog. The way in which the summoner subsequently fails to scent his own victimization, and the manner in which his talent at persuasive speech seals his own fate, is a realistic commentary on character as opposed to what amounts to mere recital of plot in the analogues.

On his way to the house of a poor old woman, the evil summoner chats at length and with perfect

equanimity to a fiend who falls in with him along the road
but whose true identity he does not know. In their dialogue,
point by point they establish what they have in common
concerning their kind of business and their practices. The
fiend says:

> My lord is hard to me and daungerous,
> And myn office is ful laborious,
> And therfore by extorcions I lyve.
> For sothe, I take al that men wol me yive.
> Algate, by sleyghte or by violence,
> Fro yeer to yeer I wynne al my dispence.
> I kan no bettre telle, feithfully."
>   "Now certes," quod this Somonour, "so fare I.
> I spare nat to taken, God it woot,
> But if it be to hevy or to hoot.
>   .   .   .   .
> Stomak ne conscience ne knowe I noon....
>   (FrT, 1427-41)

Throughout their conversation the summoner seems eager to show
that he is just as wicked as the stranger; nor is he at all
daunted when he learns the true nature of his companion.
Showing a bold, meddlesome and persistent character, he
actually interrogates the devil on aspects of the infernal life:

> I wende ye were a yeman trewely.
> Ye han a mannes shap as wel as I;
> Han ye a figure thanne determinat
> In helle, ther ye been in youre estat?"
>   "Nay, certeinly," quod he, "ther have we noon;
> But whan us liketh, we kan take us oon,
> Or elles make yow seme we been shape
> Somtyme lyk a man, or lyk an ape...."
>   .   .   .   .   .
>   "Why," quod this somonour, "ryde ye thanne or goon
> In sondry shap, and nat alwey in oon?"
>   "...we," quod he, "wol us swiche formes make

> As moost able is oure preyes for to take."
>   "What maketh yow to han al this labour?"
>
> .   .   .   .   .
> ...somtyme we been Goddes instrumentz,
>
> .   .   .   .   .
> And somtyme be we suffred for to seke
> Upon a man, and doon his soule unreste...."
>
> .   .   .   .   .
>   "Yet tel me," quod the somonour, "feithfully,
> Make ye yow newe bodies thus alway
> Of elementz?"...
>
> (FrT, 1457-1506)

The devil continues patiently to answer his prospective prey;
and the summoner continues unwitting of the devil's intent.
Even more ironic, the summoner swears brotherhood with the
fiend and they agree to travel together and to share all that
they happen to win by chance or guile.

When they meet a carter, therefore, and hear him assign
his stubborn horses to the devil, the summoner urges the
fiend to accept:

> "Herkne, my brother, herkne, by thy feith!
> Herestow nat how that the cartere seith?
> Hent it anon, for he hath yeve it thee,
> Bothe hey and cart, and eek his caples thre."
>
> (FrT, 1551-4)

The devil does not claim the "gift," however, because he
knows that the carter's curse is insincere.

When they reach the house of the old woman, the summoner
offers to give a lesson to the devil:

> But for thou kanst nat, as in this contree,
> Wynne thy cost, taak heer ensample of me.
>
> (FrT, 1579-80)

The summoner sets about boldly wheedling a bribe of
money -- or, at the least, of a new pan -- out of the poor
old woman. He threatens her with prosecution at the

ecclesiastical court. His false charge of adultery finally

provokes the angry curse in which she sincerely assigns him

to the devil:

> "Thou lixt!" quod she, "by my savacioun,
> Ne was I nevere er now, wydwe ne wyf,
>
> •   •   •   •   •
> Ne nevere I nas but of my body trewe!
> Unto the devel blak and rough of hewe
> Yeve I thy body and my panne also!"
>
> (FrT, 1618-23)

The devil wants to make sure that her curse is sincere:

> "Now, Mabely, myn owene mooder deere,
> Is this youre wyl in ernest that ye seye?"
>   "The devel," quod she, "so fecche hym er he deye,
> And panne and al, but he wol hym repente!"
>
> (FrT, 1626-9)

The summoner, however, is so bent on proving his talent to

the fiend that he loses this chance of salvation:

> "Nay, olde stot, that is nat myn entente,"
> Quod this somonour, "for to repente me
> For any thyng....
> I wolde I hadde thy smok and every clooth!"
>
> (FrT, 1630-3)

The summoner's fate is sealed:

> "Now, brother," quod the devel, "be nat wrooth;
> Thy body and this panne been myne by right.
>
> (FrT, 1634-5)

Before snatching his would-be compeer, the fiend cannot

resist alluding with grisly irony to their previous conversation:

> Thou shalt with me to helle yet to-nyght,
> Where thou shalt knowen of oure privetee
> Moore than a maister of dyvynytee."
>
> (FrT, 1636-8)

Thus, particularly through dialogue, Chaucer expands the

slight, anecdotal plot of his sources and provides a central

nexus between characterization and the prescribed action.

The Shipman's Tale

The Shipman's Tale concerns the false generosity of a
monk, who gets the wife of a stingy merchant to sleep with
him in return for money which he actually borrows from her
husband. This basic "trick" on which the fabliau turns,
Chaucer greatly elaborates in terms of character.

At the outset, Chaucer stresses the wife's extravagance,
and he provides a portrait of the monk, John (ShipT, 24-52).
John is a familiar visitor in the merchant's household, where
he is always welcome because he comes bearing gifts. The
merchant and his spendthrift wife esteem him greatly on this
account; unaware that his true aim is to seduce the wife, they
make the mistake of considering him generous. The monk further
ingratiates himself with the merchant by pretending that he is
his cousin.

When the action opens, John arrives with another gift -- a
jug of wine. Wine is a common medieval symbol of amatory
pleasure. Chaucer includes the detail for dramatically ironic
effect, for the gift suits the occasion. The merchant's wife
is hard pressed by debts contracted to pay for the clothes
that her husband's penury denies her. Urgently in need of a
hundred francs, she thinks to borrow them from their seemingly
generous friend. This situation provides the opportunity that
John has been waiting for.

The wife goes about wheedling the money that she needs from the monk. The monk wants her sexual favours. Their dialogue is very realistic because it shows their immoral characters, their interaction in striving toward their mutual aims, their increasingly intimate attitude to one another, and, above all, the naturalness with which their talk converges on the bargain basic to the plot.

> This goode wyf cam walkynge pryvely
> Into the gardyn, there he walketh softe....
> .   .   .   .   .
> "O deere cosyn myn, daun John," she sayde,
> "What eyleth yow so rathe for to ryse?"
> "Nece," quod he, "it oghte ynough suffise
> Fyve houres for to slepe upon a nyght,
> But it were for an old appalled wight,
> As been thise wedded men, that lye and dare
> As in a fourme sit a wery hare,
> Were al forstraught with houndes grete and smale.
> But deere nece, why be ye so pale?
> I trowe, certes, that oure goode man
> Hath yow laboured sith the nyght bigan,
> That yow were nede to resten hastily."
> And with that word he lough ful murily,
> And of his owene thought he wax al reed.
> This faire wyf gan for to shake hir heed
> And seyde thus, "Ye, God woot al," quod she.
> "Nay, cosyn myn, it stant nat so with me....
> .   .   .   .   .
> Wherfore I thynke out of this land to wende,
> Or elles of myself to make an ende,
> So ful am I of drede and eek of care."
> This monk bigan upon this wyf to stare,
> And seyde, "Allas, my nece, God forbede
> That ye, for any sorwe or any drede,
> Fordo youreself; but telleth me youre grief.
> Paraventure I may, in youre meschief,
> Conseille or helpe; and therfore telleth me
> Al youre anoy, for it shal been secree.
> .   .   .   .   .
> "Cosyn," quod she, "if that I hadde a space,
> As I have noon, and namely in this place,
> Thanne wolde I telle a legende of my lyf,
> What I have suffred sith I was a wyf

With myn housbonde, al be he youre cosyn.
  "Nay," quod this monk, "by God and seint Martyn,
He is na moore cosyn unto me
Than is this leef that hangeth on the tree!
I clepe hym so, by Seint Denys of Fraunce,
To have the moore cause of aqueyntaunce
Of yow, which I have loved specially
Aboven alle wommen, sikerly.
This swere I yow on my professioun.
Telleth youre grief, lest that he come adoun;
And hasteth yow, and gooth youre wey anon."
  "My deere love," quod she, "O my daun John,
Ful lief were me this conseil for to hyde,
But out it moot, I may namoore abyde.
Myn housbonde is to me the worste man
That evere was sith that the world bigan.
But sith I am a wyf, it sit nat me
To tellen no wight of oure privetee,
Neither abedde, ne in noon oother place;
God shilde I sholde it tellen, for his grace!
A wyf ne shal nat seyn of hir housbonde
But al honour, as I kan understonde;
Save unto yow thus muche I tellen shal:
As helpe me God, he is noght worth at al
In no degree the value of a flye.
But yet me greveth moost his nygardye.

.   .   .   .   .
But by that ilke Lord that for us bledde,
For his honour, myself for to arraye,
A Sonday next I moste nedes paye
An hundred frankes, or ellis I am lorn.

.   .   .   .   .
Lene me this somme, or ellis moot I deye.
Daun John, I seye, lene me thise hundred frankes.

.   .   .   .   .
For at a certeyn day I wol yow paye,
And doon to yow what plesance and service
That I may doon, right as yow list devise.

.   .   .   .   .
 This gentil monk answerde in this manere:
"Now trewely, myn owene lady deere,
I have," quod he, "on yow so greet a routhe
That I yow swere...

.   .   .   .   .
I wol delyvere yow out of this care;
For I wol brynge yow an hundred frankes."

And with that word he...
...hire embraceth harde, and kiste hire ofte.
"Gooth now youre wey," quod he....
·   ·   ·   ·   ·
And forth she gooth as jolif as a pye....

(ShipT, 92-209)

The merchant, whose preoccupation with money is so intense that he thinks nothing of people, remains ignorant of his cuckoldry from beginning to end. At the moment the monk propositions his wife, he is mulling over his treasure in the counting house. When the monk approaches him for the loan he gives it but quotes a proverb to the effect that as a businessman considers his money his 'plow' (ShipT, 287-8), the loan ought to be speedily repaid. While his wife receives the money and sleeps with the monk during his absence on a business trip, the merchant, as usual reluctant to part with his money, leads an abstemious life at Bruges. The final irony is that he never does discover what transpires in his absence, nor the manner by which his own money is returned to him.

On his return the merchant asks the monk to repay the loan but John tells him that he has already given the money to his wife and can prove it if necessary. When the merchant confronts his wife with this she is embarrassed but can hardly afford to denounce the monk.

Since the wily cleric goes unpunished for his unscrupulousness, the working out of the plot is not completely consonant with poetic justice; but the dupes of the tale, the stingy merchant and his scheming wife, certainly by Chaucer's account invite the trick played upon them.

<u>The</u> <u>Summoner's</u> <u>Tale</u>

The first fifty-one lines of <u>The</u> <u>Summoner's</u> <u>Tale</u> portray
its dupe and chief figure, a dissembling friar, and especially
his custom of preaching eloquent sermons on generosity and
following them up by begging among his parishioners on behalf,
he claims, of his impoverished brother friars. The portrait
is so finely integrated with the ensuing action that it is
hardly a separable element of the narrative.

On the occasion described in the tale, the friar leaves
the church and goes to the house of a sick man, Thomas, with
three aims in mind: to extort money from the poor man, to
get a meal, and to enjoy sexual favours from Thomas' wife.
Most of the tale is taken up with a long monologue directed
at Thomas in which, hypocritically and confidently, the
friar runs through his repetoire of preachy themes variously
to reach or to disguise the foregoing aims.

Even before the friar embarks on his monologue, the
self-indulgent aspects of his character are revealed
through his actions:

> ...fro the bench he droof awey the cat,
> And leyde adoun his potente and his hat,
> And eek his scrippe, and sette hym softe adoun.
> <div align="right">(<u>SumT</u>,
1775-7)</div>

And:

> I have to day been at youre chirche at messe,
> And seyd a sermon after my symple wit....

> .   .   .   .   .
> There have I taught hem to be charitable,
> And spende hir good ther it is resonable;
> And there I saugh oure dame, -- a! where is she?"
>   "Yond in the yerd I trowe that she be,"
> Seyde this man, "and she wol come anon."
>   "Ey, maister, welcome be ye, by Seint John!"
> Seyde this wyf, "how fare ye, hertely?"
>   The frere ariseth up ful curteisly,
> And hire embraceth in his armes narwe,
> And kiste hire sweete, and chirketh as a sparwe
> With his lyppes....
>   (SumT, 1788-1805)

In his subsequent speech the friar is revealed as a

hypocrite. In approaching the realization of one of his three

aims, he tells Thomas' wife what he wants for his supper:

>   "Now, dame," quod he, "je vous dy sanz doute,
> Have I nat of a capon but the lyvere,
> And of youre softe breed nat but a shyvere,
> And after that a rosted pigges heed --
> But that I nolde no beest for me were deed --
> Thanne hadde I with yow hoomly suffisaunce.
> I am a man of litel sustenaunce;
> My spirit hath his fostryng in the Bible.
>   (SumT, 1838-45)

Then, brazenly, the glutton goes on to compare himself to

the great fasters of the Scriptures. Biblical and classical

sententia, allusion, and figures of speech, in fact, form

most of the subject matter of his persuasive talk.

He is similarly insincere when, sensing Thomas'

disapprobation of the liberties taken with his wife, he

attempts to hold the sick man's wrath in check. The friar

suggests that his host is in peril of ire, a deadly sin; and

he makes it clear that anger is a dangerous emotion for

Thomas to exercise against either himself or his wife. But

he does not say so directly. He slips instead into discreet

imagery about fell serpents, explaining that a thwarted woman

is more fell than they:

>Touchynge swich thyng, lo, what the wise seith:
>'Withinne thyn hous ne be thou no leon;
>To thy subgitz do noon oppression,
>Ne make thyne aqueyntances nat to flee.'
>And, Thomas, yet eft-soones I charge thee,
>Be war from hire that in thy bosom slepeth;
>War fro the serpent that so slily crepeth
>Under the gras, and styngeth subtilly.
>Be war, my sone, and herkne paciently,
>That twenty thousand men han lost hir lyves
>For stryvyng with hir lemmans and hir wyves.
>Now sith ye han so hooly and meke a wyf,
>What nedeth yow, Thomas, to maken stryf?
>Ther nys, ywys, no serpent so cruel,
>Whan man tret on his tayl, ne half so fel,
>As womman is, whan she hath caught an ire;
>Vengeance is thanne al that they desire.
>Ire is a synne, oon of the grete of sevene,
>Abhomynable unto the God of hevene;
>And to hymself it is destruccion.
>This every lewed viker or person
>Kan seye, how ire engendreth homycide.
>Ire is, in sooth, executour of pryde.
>   (SumT, 1988-2010)

Then he recounts in great detail three exempla from Seneca's
De Ira[5] which illustrate that anger is even more dangerous

when it is exercised against a man set in high place.

When the friar is at the point of asking for a gift, he

uses the insinuating technique of a salesman: he

repeats Thomas' name continually. More important, he uses

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[5]
SumT, 2017-2088. Seneca's exempla are cited in
Sources and Analogues, pp. 286-7.

sententious arguments to impress upon the sick man that he
should give a really generous donation:

> Al yif that covent half a quarter otes!
> Al yif that covent foure and twenty grotes!
> Al yif that frere a peny, and lat hym go!
> Nay, nay, Thomas, it may no thyng be so!
> What is a ferthyng worth parted in twelve?
> Lo, ech thyng that is oned in himselve
> Is moore strong than whan it is toscatered.
>
> (SumT, 1963-9)

Thomas finally becomes weary of being dunned by the
hypocritical friar. Helpless and bedridden though he is, he
requites him. He promises him a treasure if he will agree
to divide it in twelve amongst fellows of his order and if
he will reach for it under his buttocks. Then, into the
groping hand of the friar he lets fly a fart.

The friar's fury contrasts ironically with his former
shrewd and calculated reasoning, his warnings about ire,
and especially the sententious argument quoted above.
Amusing, too, in the light of his prior volubility, is the
abrupt greeting that he gives to a man whom he meets after
leaving the house:

> Unnethes myghte the frere speke a word,
> Til atte laste he seyde, "God yow see!"
>
> (SumT, 2168-9)

The coarse trick in this fabliau, Chaucer emphasized
less than had other writers. He preferred to develop

the friar's character in order to show why he deserved so
unwelcome a gift.[6]

The Merchant's Tale

The Merchant's Tale, like the previous tale, presents
an overpowering characterization of the central figure.
Chaucer gives added interest to the routine plot, the deception
of an old man by a young wife, by thoroughly depicting the
old man's inward motivations and outward behaviour and by
making his experience the outcome of these.

Up to the point of January's marriage to May, the tale
consists of long passages where, in conversation with his
disapproving friends, the old man gives his reasons for
marrying. As in real life, January rationalizes with
rhetorical questions, such as:

> For who kan be so buxom as a wyf?
> Who is so trewe, and eek so ententyf
> To kepe hym, syk and hool, as is his make?
>
> (MerchT, 1287-9)

And:

> How myghte a man han any adversitee
> That hath a wyf? Certes, I kan nat seye.
>
> (MerchT, 1338-9)

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[6] For instance, Le Dis de la Vescie a Prestre by
Jakes de Baisieux, cited in Sources and Analogues, pp. 275-86,
has a very similar plot. The author concentrates more on
the unwelcome gift than on the operations of character
that prompted it.

January alludes to Biblical wives who sacrificed themselves
to serve their husbands' interests, but it soon becomes evident
that he desires in a wife not only goodness but youth and
beauty. In the following passage, which subtly suggests his
lecherousness, we see the kind of imagery and proverbial language
that is characteristically used by Chaucer's personages when
they are engaged in the processes of persuasion and rationalization.

> I wol noon oold wyf han in no manere.
> She shal nat passe twenty yeer, certayn;
> Oold fissh and yong flessh wolde I have ful fayn.
> Bet is" quod he, "a pyk than a pykerel,
> And bet than old boef is the tendre veel.
> I wol no womman thritty yeer of age;
> It is but bene-straw and greet forage.
> And eek thise olde wydwes, God it woot,
> They konne so muchel craft on Wades boot,
> So muchel broken harm, whan that hem leste,
> That with hem sholde I nevere lyve in reste.
> For sondry scoles maken sotile clerkis;
> Womman of manye scoles half a clerk is.
> But certeynly, a yong thyng may men gye,
> Right as men may warm wex with handes plye.
>
> (MerchT, 1416-30)[7]

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[7]
Also see lines 1461-6. Germaine Dempster shows that the
portion of Chaucer's tale in which the sententious allusions
are found was almost certainly influenced by a passage
(cited in Sources and Analogues, pp. 333-9) from Deschamps'
Miroir de Mariage. The latter also deals with an old man
who is contemplating marriage. Far from dissuading him, the
old man's false friends attempt to convince him to marry; and
it is from these friends that the strikingly similar sententious
illustrations of Biblical wives who had their husbands' good at
heart originate. When his hope is finally aroused, the old man
in Deschamps speaks of wanting a young wife, but his speech is
not lecherous, nor does he voice any picturesque imagery about
"oold fissh and yong flessh."

Chaucer subsequently develops the characters as satirical courtly figures. The doddering old lecher is likened to a courtly lover. Like Troilus, he portrays his beloved in the eye of imagination; but, unlike Troilus, he does so with lascivious intent. May, the girl he selects to be his wife, is described by the kind of hyperbolic comparisons Chaucer used in characterizing his early courtly ladies (MerchT, 1742-8). At the marriage feast:

> Al ful of joye and blisse is the paleys,
> And ful of instrumentz and of vitaille,
> The mooste deyntevous of al Ytaille.
> Biforn hem stoode instrumentz of swich soun
> That Orpheus, ne of Thebes Amphioun,
> Ne maden nevere swich a melodye.
>
> . . . . .
> Ymeneus, that god of weddyng is,
> Saugh nevere his lyf so myrie a wedded man.
> . . . . .
> ...he that nyght in armes wolde hire streyne
> Harder than evere Parys dide Eleyne.
>
> (MerchT, 1712-54)

While in his early writing he used such hyperbole for elegance and impressiveness, Chaucer clearly intended the imagery in this passage to form an ironic contrast with the bitter and realistic pictures which he afterwards provides of the lovers' actual union:

> He lulleth hire, he kisseth hire ful ofte;
> With thikke brustles of his berd unsofte,
> Lyk to the skyn of houndfyssh, sharp as brere --
>
> (MerchT, 1823-5)

> He was al coltissh, ful of ragerye,
> And ful of jargon as a flekked pye.
> The slakke skyn aboute his nekke shaketh,
> Whil that he sang, so chaunteth he and craketh.
>
> (MerchT, 1847-50)

The garden in which January jealously guards his young wife is explicitly compared to that described in Lorris' Roman de la Rose; and her tryst by its wall with his squire, Damyan, to the trysts of Pyramus and Thisbe. In full sight of the tree where she intends to deceive her husband, May makes a vow of faithfulness to January which echoes that of Criseyde in language and subject matter. Thus we see that in his advance toward high realism in characterization, Chaucer criticizes courtly literature even more than he did in the Troilus.

Despite January's careful surveillance, his wife is unfaithful. A wife's committing adultery in a fruit tree is a traditional motif of the fabliaux. However, January's disillusionment when his squire "swyves" May in a pear tree is more striking than it would have been had the poet not included the above satiric elements and the characterization of old January as a love-sick fool. The dupe did not mould May like warm wax as he expected. Indeed, it was May who moulded wax in truth -- to get an impression of the key of the wicket, thus enabling her lover to enter the garden.

The Cook's Tale

This tiny fragment of fifty-seven lines contains a portrait of Perkyn Revelour, a feckless

apprentice who has just been fired from his master's shop for dicing, wenching, and other bad practices which are described in the portrait.

The brevity of the fragment precludes the possibility of identifying the intended fabliau with any possible source; but it is probable that, had Chaucer finished the tale, he would have subordinated plot to characterization as he did in the other fabliaux.[8]

Summary

In the tales of the Miller, Reeve, Friar, Shipman, Summoner and Merchant Chaucer develops the same kind of mundane and recognizably realistic people that he used in The General Prologue. These characters function within tricky plots in the tradition of the fabliau. While he borrowed the fundamental basis of the fabliau, unlike other writers in the genre, Chaucer gave much less importance to plot. Handling the stock, tricky stories, Chaucer made their sequences of action into sequences of characterization. He developed the characters by means of the portrait, figures of speech, proverbs, sententia, and dialogue. Thus he showed

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[8]
See Earl Lyon, "The Cook's Tale," Sources and Analogues, pp. 151-4.

their motivations, differences from one another, and above all, how the dupes among them deserved to be the victims of the tricks of the plots.

Nicholas' astrological knowledge and cunning; Alison's sensuality; the carpenter's superstitiousness and gullibility; Symkyn's absurd pretensions and inflated opinion of his cleverness; the summoner's garrulity and opportunism; the merchant's blind avarice; the friar's hypocrisy and greed; January's disastrous rationalizations: it is on these and other aspects of character that the actions of Chaucer's fabliaux depend. Chaucer's fabliaux, therefore, are more like short stories in the modern sense than they are like their own analogues, in which the events occur rather arbitrarily.

We may add that, to some extent, the fabliaux enhance the characterizations of the pilgrims. It is appropriate that the Miller should tell a fabliau as his tale, for The General Prologue and the links illustrate his shameless and lecherous nature. A fabliau is also appropriate to the Reeve, whose physical characteristics as described in The General Prologue denote sharpness of wit, irascibility and wantonness.[9] The dupe of The Miller's Tale is a carpenter, as was formerly the Reeve who is on the pilgrimage; and Symkyn,

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9
See Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1926), pp. 71-8.

the miller in The Reeve's Tale, resembles the Miller who is
on the pilgrimage. In other words, the Miller and Reeve, who
quarrel in the links, tell tales at each other's expense.
The same is true of the Friar and Summoner. The tale of
January and May is a suitable one for the Merchant, who in the
links admits that he has recently married and is disillusioned.
Correspondences such as these between the fabliaux and the
pilgrims contribute to unified characterization in respect to
The Canterbury Tales as a whole. Even more germane to the
personalities of the tellers are the tales which are examined
in the next chapter.

CHAPTER VI
TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION IN
THE LATE CANTERBURY TALES

The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale, The Pardoner's
Prologue and Tale, and The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale
are based on long monologues in which the narrators recount
their personal experiences. Described as a clerical impostor
in the portrait in The General Prologue, the Pardoner lives up
to his initial description in the long recital of frauds and
the demonstration of persuasive oratory which he gives in his
Prologue and Tale. In the Prologue to her Tale, the Wife of
Bath gives her views on marriage. As one might expect from the
wealthy, independent business woman described in The General
Prologue, the account which she gives is not one of suppression
by a husband which a meeker medieval woman might have supplied.
It is her own individual story as a domineering wife, who, in
her determination to obtain and to keep the "soveraynetee" in
marriage, has made miserable the lives of all five husbands
mentioned in The General Prologue. After her preamble, the
Wife goes on to tell a story in keeping with the substance
of the Prologue, from which she draws the implicit moral
that if women were given the upper hand, all marriages

would be happy.[1]

The Canon's Yeoman joins the party of pilgrims late, but a portrait of him is supplied at the point where he enters the narrative. In his Prologue and Tale he contributes a bitter exposé of the "science" of alchemy, which he knows as a result of an apprenticeship of seven years. He inveighs against the "science" in an effort to convince the pilgrims that although practitioners of the "elvysshe craft" seem wondrously wise, in fact they are frauds.

All these works are remarkable for Chaucer's sophisticated and mature handling of techniques of characterization. He uses the materials of rhetoric, such as the formal portrait, figures of speech, and sententia, to subserve unprecedentedly realistic effects; and he perfects his own original techniques of characterization, proverbs and pseudo-scientific data. The major part of the chapter illustrates these accomplishments.

The last part of the chapter deals with two other late tales, Sir Thopas and The Nun's Priest's Tale. Although these tales do not deal with realistic characters in the modern sense, in them Chaucer uses all the rhetorical devices with consummate mastery.

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[1] The Wife of Bath's Prologue and Tale actually constitute a nexus around which a portion of the entire narrative is integrated. The Wife initiates a discussion of marriage that constitutes the chief topic in the links, and the Clerk's tale of Griselda bears evidence (in lines 1169-71 and the "Lenvoy de Chaucer") of having been revised to form the Clerk's "answer" to the Wife of Bath.

Rhetorical Techniques of Characterization in the Prologues and
Tales of the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, and the Canon's Yeoman

In these works, the formal portrait is used only once: to
introduce the Canon and his Yeoman as, by hard riding, they
overtake the party of pilgrims at Boghtoun under Blee. We
quote the portrait for the sake of contrast to earlier ones:

> Er we hadde riden fully fyve mile,
> At Boghtoun 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 ful hye;
> He was of foom al flekked as a pye.
> A male tweyfoold on his croper lay;
> It semed that he caried lite array.
> Al light for somer rood this worthy man,
> And in myn herte wondren I bigan
> What that he was, til that I understood
> How that his cloke was sowed to his hood;
> For which, whan I hadde longe avysed me,
> I demed hym som chanoun for to be.
> His hat heeng at his bak doun by a laas,
> For he hadde riden moore than trot or paas;
> 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 forheed dropped as a stillatorie,
> Were ful of plantayne and of paritorie.
> And whan that he was come, he gan to crye,
> "God save," quod he, "this joly compaignye!"
>
> (CYProl, 555-83)

In our opinion this portrait is the most realistic ever
written by Chaucer; we feel this is so because in it the poet

handles the traditional method more freely than in any other.
As may be seen from the quotation, the Canon and his Yeoman
are represented as riding down the road. Bit by bit, they
move into closer perspective. As the distance diminishes
between them and the pilgrims, Chaucer, himself a pilgrim,
describes them and their dress in increasingly minute detail.
When the riders are practically upon him he discusses the
very sweat in which they and their horses are bathed. The
figures have moved so close that one experiences no surprise
at the greeting shouted to the pilgrims: "God save...this
joly compaignye!"

Far from being statically conceived according to the
rules of rhetorical portraiture, the characters here are
described in action. In the fabliaux Chaucer had begun to
experiment in the more flexible utilization of the rhetorical
portrait in the narrative. Here, he carries the experiment
much further. The portrait could not be more vital nor more
smoothly fitted into the narrative; it oversteps the limits
of rhetoric altogether.

Figures of speech are also skilfully applied in this tale.
The similes used in the portrait of the Canon and Yeoman
quoted above are vivid and appropriate. The same is true of
those in the other late works. Here are some examples from
the Pardoner's Prologue where he describes his style

of preaching:

> "Lordynges," quod he, "in chirches whan I preche,
> I peyne me to han an hauteyn speche,
> And rynge it out as round as gooth a belle,
> For I kan al by rote that I telle.
> . . . .
> And in Latyn I speke a wordes fewe,
> To saffron with my predicacioun,
> And for to stire hem to devocioun.
> <div align="right">(<u>PardProl</u>, 329-46)</div>

> Thanne peyne I me to strecche forth the nekke,
> And est and west upon the peple I bekke,
> As dooth a dowve sittynge on a berne.
> <div align="right">(<u>PardProl</u>, 395-7)</div>

The Pardoner's method of preaching, intentionally demagogic
and emotional, is in direct contradiction to the grave and
restrained manner that the legitimate medieval preacher was
taught to practice;[2] the similes convey his idiosyncratic
behaviour, and are very different from the artificial similes
expressing ideal attributes of personages in Chaucer's poems
up to <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u>. Such similes are particularly
striking when used in speech given to the characters themselves.
The Wife of Bath says:

> The flour is goon, ther is namoore to telle;
> The bren, as I best kan, now moste I selle
> <div align="right">(<u>WBProl</u>, 477-8)</div>

The similes and metaphors she uses often allude to concrete

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[2]
See the passage from a typical medieval tractate on
preaching cited by Coolidge Otis Chapman, "Chaucer on
Preachers and Preaching," <u>PMLA</u>, XLIV (March, 1929), 184.

or homely matters: "lat us wyves hoten barly-breed."

Another figure of speech used in the late tales is the rhetorical question. Although in his early works Chaucer employed this figure mainly for decorative purposes, in the speeches of Criseyde in the _Troilus_ and in those of January in _The Merchant's Tale_ he used it to some extent to express rationalizations on the part of the characters. Here again, in the speeches of the Wife of Bath, the Pardoner, and the Canon's Yeoman, Chaucer uses rhetorical questions. As well as assisting characterization, they give variety and interest to the long monologues.

In the Wife's monologue, where questions are so frequent as to constitute a key technique, Chaucer made more effective use of this rhetorical figure than ever before. Here are some of the many examples:

> ...I axe, why that the fifthe man
> Was noon housbonde to the Samaritan?
> How manye myghte she have in mariage?
> (_WBProl_, 21-3)

> Wher can ye seye, in any manere age,
> That hye God defended mariage
> By expres word? I pray yow, telleth me.
> Or where comanded he virginitee?
> (_WBProl_, 59-62)

> And certes, if ther were no seed ysowe,
> Virginitee, thanne wherof sholde it growe?
> (_WBProl_, 71-2)

> But sith I hadde hem hoolly in myn hond,
> And sith they hadde me yeven al hir lond,
> What sholde I taken keep hem for to plese,
> But it were for my profit and myn ese?
>
> <div align="right">(<u>WBProl</u>, 211-4)</div>

While addressed to the pilgrims, these rhetorical questions really show the Wife of Bath's examination of her own feelings. They reveal by a subtle and indirect means her troubled conscience about her marriages and treatment of her husbands. There are many other rhetorical questions in her monologue. (See lines 34, 115-7, 122-3, 129-32, and 550-7.) Although Chaucer does not make so extensive a use of this figure of speech elsewhere, rhetorical questions occur in the monologues of the Pardoner and the Canon's Yeoman. For instance, the Pardoner asks scornfully:

> What, trowe ye, that whiles I may preche,
> And wynne gold and silver for I teche,
> That I wol lyve in poverte wilfully?
>
> <div align="right">(<u>PardProl</u>, 439-41)</div>

(Also see <u>CYT</u>, 754-72 and 1000-5.)

The use of *sententia* is also a means of characterization. The Wife of Bath's <u>Prologue</u> abounds in sententious arguments from Biblical authority, which, interpreted in her own way, Alisoun uses to convince herself and her audience that her unrestrained sexual *mores*, far from being vices, are fully sanctioned by holy and learned authority.

The Wife knows her Bible, especially those passages pertinent
to marriage. At the outset, she calls upon the ascetic
St. Paul to vindicate marriage:

> Bet is to be wedded than to brynne.
>
> (WBProl, 52)

In contrast to the meaning of the saint, it soon becomes
evident that the Wife's object is to discredit virginity,
which she attempts to do by glossing references from at least
five books of the scriptures. Here are three examples; the
first is from Paul and the second from Timothy:

> But conseillyng is no comandement.
>
> (WBProl, 67)

> 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.
> God clepeth folk to hym in sondry wyse....
>
> (WBProl, 99-102)

> 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 refresshed many a man.
>
> (WBProl, 142-6)

The Wife's aptness at quotation is enough to make even the
well-read Pardoner cry out that she is a "noble prechour in
this cas" (WBProl, 165).

More numerous than the Wife's own sententious
observations are those which she reports as having been made by

her three old husbands. All of the Wife's domestic vices
are exposed through these complaints, her recollection of
which takes up a major part of the Prologue. Three examples
are as follows:

> Thow seyst we wyves wol oure vices hide
> Til we be fast, and thanne we wol hem shewe,--
> .   .   .   .   .
> 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.
> (WBProl,
> 282-92)

> Thou seydest this, that I was lyk a cat;
> For whoso wolde senge a cattes skyn,
> Thanne wolde the cat wel dwellen in his in;
> And if the cattes skyn be slyk and gay,
> She wol nat dwelle in house half a day,
> But forth she wole, er any day be dawed,
> To shewe hir skyn, and goon a-caterwawed.
> This is to seye, if I be gay, sire shrewe,
> I wol renne out, my borel for to shewe.
> (WBProl, 348-56)

> 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.
> Thou seyest, right as wormes shende a tree,
> Right so a wyf destroyeth hire housbonde;
> This knowe they that been to wyves bonde....
> (WBProl, 371-8)

In this manner, one after another of the Wife's
shortcomings are outlined in her husbands' complaints, which
were actually drawn by Chaucer -- sometimes word for word -- from
the treatises of famous misogynists, including: St. Jerome's

Epistola adversus Jovinianum, Theophrastus' Liber Aureolus
de Nuptiis, Eustache Deschamps' Miroir de Mariage,
Walter Map's Dissuasio Valerii ad Ruffinum philosophum ne
Uxorem ducat, and Jean de Meun's portion of Le Roman de la Rose.[3]
Nearly all of these sources are represented in the quotations
above: the first contains allusions to Theophrastus' Liber
and Meun's Roman; the second is taken from Deschamps' Miroir;
and the third from St. Jerome's Epistola. Other allusions to
the same sources are found in lines 255-6, 263-4, 271-2,
278-80, and 358-64 of the Prologue, and are represented as
specific complaints about the Wife made by her husbands,
particularly the first three.

The richest source of complaint was the Wife's fifth
and last husband, a student called Jankyn. Jankyn
actually owned an anthology of anti-feminist writings

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[3]
Bartlett J. Whiting, "The Wife of Bath's Prologue,"
Sources and Analogues of Chaucer's Canterbury Tales, ed.
W. F. Bryan and Germaine Dempster (Chicago, 1941), shows the
derivations of the materials used by Chaucer throughout the
Prologue and cites the pertinent passages from these sources
in pp. 208-22.
To bring damaging charges of all sorts against the female
sex had in fact become a literary fashion by Chaucer's day.
See Thomas R. Lounsbury, Studies in Chaucer, his Life and
Writings (New York, 1892), II, 364-5. G. R. Owst,
Literature and Pulpit in Medieval England (Cambridge, England,
1933), pp. 378ff., mentions as familiar themes of sermons in
the poet's time the same complaints against women as were made
by the classical and monkish misogynists.

comprising the ones named above, and he nightly regaled his spouse with choice quotations from it. By this time Alisoun (who was, after all, a rich, independent and emancipated business woman) had heard enough deprecatory estimates of herself and her sex. She tore three leaves from Jankyn's book. He boxed her ears. It was in this way that the Wife became "somdel deef" (Gen Prol, 446), and, more important, that the student, remorseful on account of his act, ceded to her the "soveraynetee" in their marriage. Thus, the sententious materials that are basic to The Wife of Bath's Prologue not only serve to characterize her but are also used to good dramatic effect in the story.

Sententious materials are also abundantly used in The Pardoner's Tale, and with similar dramatic effect. The Tale fits in well with his Prologue because it is an example of the kind of sermon he was wont to deliver to his congregations. It has been shown that its chief themes and anecdotes are paralleled in medieval sources and analogues.

Although in composing it Chaucer evidently welded together known literary materials, he did not content himself with providing a mere transcript of a medieval sermon.[4] In the preamble to his Tale, the Pardoner

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[4] See Frederick Tupper, "The Pardoner's Tale," Sources and Analogues, pp. 416-23 and 437-8.

confesses some of the frauds which he perpetrates upon a gullible populace under the pretense that his work is authorized by a papal bull; he also admits using a sprinkling of Latin phrases in his speeches for mere impressiveness. For his _Tale_, the Pardoner delivers a sermon to give the pilgrims an example of his preaching. Although it has superficial features that make it appear orthodox, it is not an organized medieval sermon. Consistently roguish, the Pardoner gives a desultory account of common themes: gluttony, cursing, gambling and avarice. On these themes, he airs a repertory of engrossing stories and bits of sententious oratory that he has collected, knowing they are the best to evoke the desired responses from an audience to put it in a mood of contrition and pious generosity. He also shows a fondness for parables -- evidence enough that he understands the psychology of primitive minds.

The Pardoner is so intent on the _tour de force_ which he makes of his sample sermon that he forgets that his present audience is not composed of villagers in a country church. He goes on to the climax -- the usual summons to his auditors to come to the chancel, make offerings to the relics, and so receive absolution. Only then does he remember that he is speaking to pilgrims on a journey; for their benefit he adds, cynically, that he has merely given an example of how he preaches. Then,

with unexpected sincerity, he also adds:

> ...Jhesu Crist, that is oure soules leche,
> ...graunte yow his pardoun to receyve,
> For that is best; I wol yow nat deceyve.
>
> <div align="right">(<u>PardT</u>, 916-8)</div>

His moment of true Christian feeling lasts, in fact, only a moment. After the above expression of piety, he turns to the Host and brazenly suggests that he should be the first to offer to his relics.

Nevertheless, the Pardoner's momentary lapse into the role which, strictly speaking, he should be assuming indicates that Chaucer has built him up as a complex figure rather than as a complete rogue. The Pardoner's sententious discourse is thus culminated in his breakdown -- in his unique exhibition of true piety.[5]

Outside of Pandarus in <u>Troilus</u> <u>and</u> <u>Criseyde</u>, Chaucer did not make as extensive a use elsewhere of sententious materials to build up characterization as in the late tales. Here, moreover, sententious materials in respect to the Wife and the Pardoner actually constitute the basic subject matter of the works.

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[5] See George Lyman Kittredge, <u>Chaucer</u> <u>and</u> <u>his</u> <u>Poetry</u> (Cambridge, Mass., 1915), pp. 215-7.

<u>Original</u> <u>Techniques</u> <u>of</u> <u>Characterization</u> <u>in</u> <u>the</u> <u>Prologues</u> <u>and</u>
<u>Tales</u> <u>of</u> <u>the</u> <u>Wife</u> <u>of</u> <u>Bath</u>, <u>the</u> <u>Pardoner</u>, <u>and</u> <u>the</u> <u>Canon's</u> <u>Yeoman</u>

Besides exploiting his rhetorical techniques of
characterization in the late tales, Chaucer also improved his
own original ones -- proverbs and pseudo-scientific lore.

In the late works Chaucer used proverbs to achieve
new effects. Not only does he employ them to demonstrate his
characters engaged in persuasion and rationalization as he
did in the speeches of Pandarus and the characters in the
fabliaux, but he also uses them to reflect actual aspects of
the characters' lives, personalities, and opinions.

Many proverbs bring out the worldly-wise character of the
Wife of Bath. As well as appealing to learned authority by
using <u>sententia</u>, she also appeals to popular authority by using
the sayings of the folk to "justify" her philandering, her
domestic tyranny and, above all, her opportunism:

> 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.
>
> (WBProl, 572-4)

And:

> With daunger oute we al oure chaffare;
> Greet prees at market maketh deere ware,
> And to greet cheep is holde at litel prys:
> This knoweth every womman that is wys.
>
> (WBProl, 521-4)

Other proverbs, too numerous to quote, occur in lines
269-70, 333-4, 389, 465-6, 487, and 491-2. By means of
them the Wife hopes to condone her way of life to her
audience and herself.

The Wife's fifth husband, the student, was well
purveyed with proverbs, and through his use of them one
gets a picture of his wife. Alisoun says:

> ...he knew of mo proverbes
> Than in this world ther growen 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;
> .   .   .   .   .
> 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.'
>
> (WBProl, 773-85)

And:

> '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!'
> 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.
>
> (WBProl, 655-61)

Proverbs are also used to characterize the Canon's
Yeoman. In the long monologue in which he chiefly parrots
the technical terms and jargon of alchemy, the Canon's
Yeoman shows by his confusion that he knows little about

this science or the laboratory in which he tends the fire
and sweeps the floor; but he is sure enough of his opinion.
In contrast to confused technical jargon, he occasionally
lapses into his own idiom and, using the kind of proverbial
language habitually assumed by vulgar people when they wish to
speak forcefully and to seem wise, he provides some impressive
denunciations of the alchemists that also convey a sense of his
own personal disillusionment. The following is a good example:

> And whan we been togidres everichoon,
> Every man semeth a Salomon.
> But al thyng which that shineth as the gold
> Nis nat gold, as that I have herd it told;
> Ne every appul that is fair at eye
> Ne is nat good, what so men clappe or crye.
> Right so, lo, fareth it amonges us:
> He that semeth the wiseste, by Jhesus!
> Is moost fool, whan it cometh to the preef;
> And he that semeth trewest is a theef.
> (CYT, 960-9)

For other similar passages in proverbial language, see
CYProl, 688-9; and CYT, 1066-7, 1407-13, and 1423-4.

Chaucer's other original technique, medieval science,
appears in his portrayal of the Wife of Bath. He has her
describe her horoscope, which is partly as follows:

> 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!
> I folwed ay myn inclinacioun
> By vertu of my constellacioun....
> (WBProl, 609-16)

Here the medieval scientific material is used in a most interesting way. Although the Wife occasionally exhibits penitence (line 614 above), she has few regrets for her life or character, even stating that they were predetermined by the position of the stars at her birth. All the good qualities which would have been hers according to her birth under Venus were warped by the love-star's malevolent conjunction with Mars, at the time of her birth, thus making her hardy and domineering as well as amorous.[6]

While Chaucer provided horoscopes of other characters (Hypermnestra, Constance and Arcite) these were used to explain tragic careers and, as we previously remarked, were an attempt at realistic motivation of character according to what we today consider unrealistic means. Chaucer's use of the horoscope in connection with the Wife of Bath is enduringly realistic because it comes not from him as narrator but is given in her own speech and, like her use of proverbs, constitutes her own rationalization of her shortcomings. That she habitually substantiates her opinions in this fashion is evident from lines 697 to 706 of the Prologue, where she explains that "clerkes" like her husband Jankyn, because they are "children of Mercurie" in an astrological sense, can never speak well of women.

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[6]
That the Wife accurately interpreted her horoscope is shown by Walter Clyde Curry, Chaucer and the Mediaeval Sciences (New York, 1926), pp. 96-110.

Medieval science plays an extensive role in
The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale. It is basic to the
characterization of the Yeoman, since the pursuit of the
craft has wrought changes in him. For example, he says to
the pilgrims:

> 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 wher my colour was bothe fressh and reed,
> Now is it wan and of a leden hewe --
>
> (CYT, 724-8)

As well, medieval science forms the whole substance of his
Tale. In the first part, he recounts the terms of alchemy,
the substances used in experiments, and the procedure of the
laboratory. On all these points he is essentially ignorant,
merely recalling by rote the "watres rubifiyng,"
"watres albificacioun," "citrinacioun," "cementyng," and
other technical jargon referring to kinds of materials and
their properties. The second part of his Tale concerns the
frauds practiced by his master, a canon of London, on a
priest; and in detailing three tricks whereby the canon
convinced his gull that he was capable of transmuting less
valuable substances into gold, the Canon's Yeoman shows
that although he is ignorant of alchemical theory, he is
completely familiar with practical tricks of the trade.

A further aspect of Chaucer's handling of monologue
in the late tales concerns his use of recollected speech,
which, for the first time in any of his monologues, he

employs as a technique of characterization.

In her <u>Prologue</u>, the Wife quotes to the pilgrims her husbands' remarks to her in the past and what she said to her husbands. Here are some of her nagging comments:

'Sire olde kaynard, is this thyn array?
Why is my neighebores wyf so gay?
She is honoured over al ther she gooth;
I sitte at hoom, I have no thrifty clooth.
What dostow at my neighebores hous?
Is she so fair? artow so amorous?
What rowne ye with oure mayde? <u>Benedicite</u>!
<div align="right">(<u>WBProl</u>, 235-41)</div>

This and other passages of reported speech give realism, immediacy and variety to the Wife's long monologue. (See lines 14-19, 242-380, and 800-21.)

Chaucer also utilized reported speech in the Canon's Yeoman's monologue. The Yeoman gains as an effective raconteur when he quotes snatches of conversation overheard in a medieval laboratory after an alchemical experiment has failed:

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 oure fir ne was nat maad of beech,
That is the cause, and oother noon, so thee'ch!"
<div align="right">(<u>CYT</u>,
<u>921</u>-9)</div>

Actually, this is only part of a long passage in the same vein that extends to line 955.

In the Pardoner's monologue, too, Chaucer uses the device of recollected speech. In a long passage, lines 352 to 388, he recounts what he says to his congregations about the efficacy of his relics as cure-alls. He afterwards admits that this sales-talk wins him a hundred marks a year, more money than the legitimate parish parson earns.

Aside from the devices through which he gives variety and interest to the three monologues in the late tales, Chaucer also records the sudden changes in direction and the very currents of thought that make these speeches realistic representations of the uninhibited verbal meanderings of a true person. The Wife of Bath's _Prologue_ embodies the poet's most masterful handling of monologue in this sense. Alisoun relates her personal reminiscences in a casual, unpremeditated fashion. She habitually loses her train of thought and embarks upon digressions from which she eventually recalls herself. (ll. 563, 585, 666, and 711). Her object is to tell how that she gained mastery even over her last and most wilful husband, Jankyn. By the time she does so, she has described her life with

previous husbands. Her final triumph over the clerk is thus a great deal more meaningful in the light of her digressions.

In the monologues basic to the three late works discussed so far in this chapter, the speakers are extensively and convincingly characterized and seemingly self-propelled. Far from abandoning previously used techniques to secure this advance in realism, Chaucer exploits all of his rhetorical and original means. Unlike most earlier creations, the figures in these works actually seem to characterize themselves by means of these devices, which are used to underline their individual traits, mental processes, rationalizations, and other features of character. It may be added that the techniques (rhetorical questions, proverbs, sententia, portrait, figures of speech, medieval science and others) are not found in such sources or analogues as exist; whatever ideas Chaucer drew from other literature, the method of characterizing was essentially his own.[7]

7

Cf. citations in Sources and Analogues, pp. 208-22, 409-11, 416-23, 437-8, and 685-98.
While in his treatment of the Pardoner and the Wife of Bath Chaucer used sententious materials, his application of them to the characters is original. As far as The Canon's Yeoman's Prologue and Tale is concerned, while the exposure of alchemy is a literary convention at least as old as Avicenna, it appears only once in fiction up to Chaucer's time. Neither the extant non-fictional analogues nor the fictional account in Sercambi's Novella XXI constitutes a source for Chaucer's characterization.

Chaucer does not intervene as the narrator. He gives the pilgrims who tell the tales the reins, as it were. This contributes greatly to the immediacy and verisimilitude of their accounts, and shows that in the last years of his literary career the poet anticipated the tendency of modern writers to keep a distance between themselves and their characters in the interests of fictional realism.

Sir Thopas and The Nun's Priest's Tale

How far Chaucer had come in the manipulation of his techniques is shown in Sir Thopas and The Nun's Priest's Tale, in which he uses rhetorical means with consummate mastery, and at times with satiric intent.

In Sir Thopas, a tale he himself tells as a pilgrim, Chaucer provides an effective parody of medieval romances, and particularly of their method for describing knights.

Thopas, the hero of Chaucer's tale, is presented as a paragon. The hyperbolical description and the stock comparisons which the poet uses are thoroughly conventional, and constitute a mode which he seriously used in depicting many figures up to and including those in Troilus and Criseyde; but he goes on to assign to Thopas qualities in direct contradiction to the ideals. In contrast to his own earlier creations, and actually touching parodistically on the

heroes of many known Middle English romances,[8] he makes
this knight into a bourgeois, an effeminate and infantile
character.

Instead of pursuing occupations befitting a knight,
Thopas is fond of a yeoman's sports, such as archery and
wrestling. His garb is made of unsuitably fancy materials --
except for the hose of "Brugges," which would be more
suitable on a tradesman. He has a long beard (an antiquated
fashion), a face as white as fine white bread, and
"lippes rede as rose." (These details are given in the
style of the rhetorical portrait. See Thop, 724-41.)
As the tale develops, one discovers that Thopas has a taste
for plebeian and childish sweets such as licorice and
gingerbread. And, while the conventional hero exhibits
prowess and daring, Thopas soon becomes exhausted after a
short ride over some soft grass. Lastly, far from seeking
an ideal courtly lady as his mate, Thopas considers that no
earthly woman is fit for him and so goes off in search of
an elf queen.

This delightful parody, which has no forebears in any
literature, domestic or foreign,[9] shows Chaucer at the
height of his critical powers. Nevertheless, he was well
aware of the literary preferences of a medieval audience. The

[8]
See Laura Hibbard Loomis, "Sir Thopas," Sources and
Analogues, pp. 486-559.

[9]
Loomis, "Sir Thopas," p. 486.

pilgrims, who all had agreed that The Knight's Tale was a "noble storie...worthy for to drawen to memorie" (MillProl, 3111-2), are excessively bored by the tale. Their spokesman, the Host, actually cuts Chaucer off before he has finished.

The plot of The Nun's Priest's Tale is a traditional one. It concerns a rooster whose dream of being captured by an enemy comes true when he is seized by a fox. Unlike the writers of analogous versions, Chaucer took great pains to humanize the characters, and to subordinate the plot to brilliant rhetorical elaborations.[10]

Chauntecleer, the rooster, is described by rhetorical portraiture and heraldic figures of speech:

> His coomb was redder than the fyn coral,
> And batailled as it were a castel wal;
> His byle was blak, and as the jeet it shoon;
> Lyk asure were his legges and his toon;
> His nayles whitter than the lylye flour,
> And lyk the burned gold was his colour.
> (NPT, 2859-64)

And:

> He looketh as it were a grym leoun....
> (NPT, 3179)

10
James R. Hulbert, "The Nun's Priest's Tale," Sources and Analogues, cites two analogues having the same basic plot. He gives a French version, Le Roman de Renart, in pp. 646-58, and a German version, Reinhart Fuchs, in pp. 658-62.

This hyperbolic description and its colourful similes are of
the kind regularly employed by medieval writers to depict
the formidable appearances of peerless heroes -- and Chaucer
himself wrote strikingly similar portraits in those of
Lygurge and Emetreus in The Knight's Tale (ll. 2128-78). The
poet is clearly a parodist of rhetoric here. He makes fun
of the head-to-toe description stipulated by Vinsauf's method
for effectio by describing Chauntecleer from comb to claws.[11]
At the same time, he exploits the rhetorical device and its
attention to detail to build up a bright, varicoloured cock of
great realism.

Pertelote, the hen, is described in the manner used by
Chaucer to depict his early courtly heroines:

Curteys she was, discreet, and debonaire,
And compaignable, and bar hyrself...faire....
(NPT, 2871-2)

Her characterization as a courtly figure is adumbrated when
she outlines her ideal of a mate and mentions traits
specified by the courts of love:

We alle desiren, if it myghte bee,
To han housbondes hardy, wise, and free,
And secree, and no nygard, ne no fool,
Ne hym that is agast of every tool,
Ne noon avauntour, by that God above!
(NPT, 2913-7)

[11]
See Chaucer, The Nun's Priest's Tale, ed. Nevill Coghill
and Christopher Tolkien (London, 1959), p. 46.

The relationship between Pertelote and Chauntecleer is usually harmonious. (They are so devoted a couple that they sing in "sweete accord, 'My lief is faren in londe!'") But when Chauntecleer tells Pertelote about his dream of being captured by an animal, and insists that it is prophetic, she chides him:

> How dorste ye seyn, for shame, unto youre love
> That any thyng myghte make yow aferd?
> .   .   .   .   .
> Nothyng, God woot, but vanitee in sweven is.
>
> (NPT, 2918-22)
>
> Lo Catoun, which that was so wys a man,
> Seyde he nat thus, 'Ne do no fors of dremes?'
>
> (NPT, 2940-1)

She then explains that his dream is symptomatic of the derangement of his bodily humours. She claims that there is an excess of choler in his system which, unless checked by the herbs and other natural medicines which she suggests, will lead to serious illness. "Pekke hem up right as they growe and ete hem yn," she says. By making Pertelote voice medical, "scientific" opinion, Chaucer shows that she is a practical and unimaginative character.

In contrast, Chauntecleer is a learned rooster whose dignity has been injured. He defies Pertelote's medicines. He insists that his dream was not one of natural cause, but an "avisioun" -- the kind of dream that is granted to great men

and prophets:

> ...as touchyng daun Catoun,
> That hath of wysdom swich a greet renoun,
> Though that he bad no dremes for to drede,
> By God, men may in olde bookes rede
> Of many a man moore of auctorite
> Than evere Caton was, so moot I thee,
> That al the revers seyn of this sentence,
> And han wel founden by experience
> That dremes been significaciouns....
>
> (NPT, 2971-9)

A master of sententia, the rooster then alludes to materials in support of the prophetic significance of dreams. He cites Biblical and classical dreams, and recounts exempla in which they came true.[12] Speaking at length, he proves to Pertelote that he should be on his guard. Conceited over his display of knowledge, he afterwards struts in his yard.

Now Chaucer introduces Chauntecleer's enemy, apostrophizing him and his iniquity in the grand style:

> A col-fox, ful of sly iniquitee,
> That in the grove hadde woned yeres three,
> By heigh ymaginacioun forncast,
> The same nyght thurghout the hegges brast
> Into the yerd ther Chauntecleer the faire
> Was wont, and eek his wyves, to repaire;
> And in a bed of wortes stille he lay,
> Til it was passed undren of the day,
> Waitynge his tyme on Chauntecleer to falle,
> As gladly doon thise homycides alle
> That in await liggen to mordre men.
> O false mordrour, lurkynge in thy den!
> O newe Scariot, newe Genylon,
> False dissymulour, o Greek Synon,
> That broghtest Troye al outrely to sorwe!
> O Chauntecleer, acursed be that morwe
> That thou into that yerd flaugh fro the bemes!
>
> (NPT, 3215-31)

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[12]
NPT, 4174ff. Valerius Maximus is cited as the source in Hulbert, "The Nun's Priest's Tale," pp. 662-3.

(Compare this with the apostrophe on the wickedness of
Constance's mother-in-law in The Man of Law's Tale.)

In describing how the fox manages by his flattery and
tricks to get Chauntecleer into his jaws, Chaucer recounts the
traditional climax of the story. He could not forbear
adding, with an open reference to Vinsauf's rhetoric, that

> ...on a Friday fil al this meschaunce.
> O Gaufred, deere maister soverayn,
> Why ne hadde I now thy sentence and thy loore
> The Friday for to chide, as diden ye?[13]

And, before allowing Chauntecleer, by means of persuasive
argument, to extricate himself from his unfortunate position,
he describes a chase of the animals after the fox, using
mock-heroic similes to convey the effect that all this
commotion had on the hens:

> Certes, swich cry ne lamentacion
> Was nevere of ladyes maad whan Ylion
> Was wonne...
> As maden alle the hennes in the clos,
> Whan they had seyn of Chauntecleer the sighte.
> But sovereynly dame Pertelote shrighte,
> Ful louder than dide Hasdrubales wyf,
> Whan that hir housbonde hadde lost his lyf,
> And that the Romayns hadde brend Cartage.
>
> (NPT, 3355-65)

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[13]
NPT, 3341-51. For the example of lamentation, see
Geoffroi de Vinsauf, Poetria Nova, in Edmond Faral,
Les Arts Poétiques du xiie et du xiiie Siècle (Paris, 1924),
p. 208.

The foregoing are the main rhetorical elaborations that Chaucer applied to the trivial fable of his sources. There is an element of parody in the poet's revival of the modes which indicates clearly enough that when he wrote The Nun's Priest's Tale (as well as when he wrote Sir Thopas) he was amused by medieval rhetoric and by his use of it in his own early works.[14] At the same time, in this tale he uses all the rhetorical devices with consummate mastery, even referring to Geoffroi de Vinsauf. Thus, Chaucer never to the end turned away from the old rhetorical devices. He merely turned them to good account.

14
Critics agree that The Nun's Priest's Tale and Sir Thopas were composed expressly for The Canterbury Tales and certainly very late in Chaucer's career. (On the dates see Works, pp. 842 and 857-8.) It seems hard to accept, as having been written at anywhere near the same time, The Legend of Good Women, The Knight's Tale, The Man of Law's Tale, and the other works whose techniques of characterization these tales actually ridicule.

CONCLUSION

We have seen that Chaucer's works show his progressive interest in realistic characterization. This appears in his increasingly original adaptation of borrowed plots and literary forms, and in his stylistic means of portraying characters. In his latter works, his characters dominate the narrative, rather than being incidental to the main design. Instead of types, they are complex individuals. Such characterization was unprecedented; Chaucer's innovations constitute his main contribution to English literature.

Yet, as we have shown, the poet's powers of characterization developed largely through his exploitation of conventional techniques -- techniques which were sanctioned by medieval rhetoricians for the adornment and amplification of narrative. Chaucer gradually transformed these devices, in reference to realistic experience and psychology, to serve not as narrative ornaments, but as integral parts in the formation of fictional characters. Thus, unlike his predecessors and contemporaries, he anticipated some of the modern basic requirements of realism by a free and imaginative handling of the stylistic devices of his day.

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ABBREVIATIONS USED IN DOCUMENTATION

I. CHAUCER'S WORKS

Anel	Anelida and Arcite
BD	The Book of the Duchess
CkT	The Cook's Tale
ClT	The Clerk's Tale
CYT	The Canon's Yeoman's Tale
FranklT	The Franklin's Tale
FrT	The Friar's Tale
Gen Prol	The General Prologue
HF	The House of Fame
KnT	The Knight's Tale
LGW	The Legend of Good Women
MancT	The Manciple's Tale
Mel	The Tale of Melibee
MerchT	The Merchant's Tale
MillT	The Miller's Tale
MkT	The Monk's Tale
MLT	The Man of Law's Tale
NPT	The Nun's Priest's Tale
PardT	The Pardoner's Tale
ParsT	The Parson's Tale

PF	The Parliament of Fowls
PhysT	The Physician's Tale
PrT	The Prioress's Tale
RvT	The Reeve's Tale
SecNT	The Second Nun's Tale
ShipT	The Shipman's Tale
SqT	The Squire's Tale
SumT	The Summoner's Tale
Thop	Sir Thopas
Tr	Troilus and Criseyde

II. PERIODICALS

ELH	Journal of English Literary History
JEGP	Journal of English and Germanic Philology
MLN	Modern Language Notes
MLR	Modern Language Review
MP	Modern Philology
PMLA	Publications of the Modern Language Association of America
PQ	Philological Quarterly
SP	Studies in Philology